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Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Southern Africa: The Case of the Universities of the Witwatersrand, Zimbabwe and Botswana

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A thesis submitted to the School of Education of the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Johannesburg, 2008

ABSTRACT

Quality assurance is increasingly becoming an important aspect of higher education institutions in developing countries, as expressed in the development of relevant policies, structures and systems at national and institutional levels. This thesis critically examines the nature of quality assurance policies and practices in selected universities in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), as well as the factors that shape these policies. Through a close examination of these policies and practices, the thesis explains why some universities realise better quality than others, even though they fall within the same geographical region and share relatively similar historical legacies.

Although this study was largely qualitative, it did not preclude quantitative dimensions. Integrating the two approaches made it possible not only to triangulate data, but also to engage in multidimensional analysis of some of the phenomena under investigation.

While debates in the literature locate quality assurance within internal and external discourses, this does not sufficiently explain the tensions that were observed amongst the various stakeholders within institutions, especially between management and academic staff. The manner in which institutional policies were developed, the role academic staff played in the process, and the reporting lines associated with institutional quality assurance arrangements, are reflected in staff perceptions on whether or not they regarded the policies as internal to the academic community and the extent to which they own the policies. The main contribution of this thesis to debates on quality assurance is its revelation of the complexities that arise in institutional policy making as a result of the highly differentiated nature of the academy. This aspect points at the need for institutions to pay particular care in adopting most appropriate strategies that privilege the organic development of policies within institutions.

On the whole, institutions were mainly preoccupied with developing quality assurance policies and systems that are comparable to international standards, hence the heavy reliance on external/international expertise in doing so. Whilst this is not necessarily a

bad thing, the quality assurance systems that were developed did not take into account the contextual peculiarities of the studied institutions. A direct consequence of this was the development of policies and mechanisms that are more concerned with standardisation of procedures than with enhancement of academic practice. Such quality assurance systems have not resulted in the self-improvement of institutions. The establishment of quality assurance policies and the putting in place of structures and procedures are necessary but not sufficient conditions for enhancing academic practice in universities.

Keywords:

quality assurance accountability accreditation institutional collegiality

internal and external evaluation policy process and implementation

quality management higher education case studies

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own original work except where otherwise acknowledged. The thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

_____

Ephraim Mhlanga

10th day of December, 2008

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AAU	Association of African Universities
ACDE	African Council for Distance Education
ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
APDC	Academic Planning and Development Committee [South Africa]
APDO	Academic Planning and Development Office [South Africa]
APO	Academic Planning Office [South Africa]
AQMP	Academic Quality Management Policy [Botswana]
ASPESA	Australian and South Pacific External Studies Association
AU	African Union
BPC	Botswana Power Corporation
CAD	Centre for Academic Development [Botswana]
CESM	Classification of Educational Subject Matter [South Africa]
CEST	Rankings Centre for Science and Technology Studies
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CHEPS	Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies
CHER	Consortium of Higher Education Researchers
CHET	Centre for Higher Education Transformation [South Africa]
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CPI	Consumer Price Index
CPIX	Consumer Price Index excluding mortgage rate changes
DfID	Department for International Development [United Kingdom]
DoE	Department of Education [South Africa]
DUT	Durban University of Technology
DVC	Deputy Vice -Chancellor
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance
EU	European Union
EQA	External Quality Assurance
FRAC	Financial Resources Allocation Committee [Wits]
FRC	Faculty Research Committee [Wits]
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRA	Graduate Research Assistant
GTA	Graduate Teaching Assistant
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee [South Africa]
HDI	Historically Disadvantaged Institution
HPI	Historically Privileged Institution
IAU	International Association of Universities
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
JCE	Johannesburg College of Education
LASO	Leadership, Academic and Student Ownership and Readiness [model]
NAAC	National Assessment and Accreditation Council
NCHE	National Council on Higher Education [South Africa]
NMCB	Nursing and Midwifery Council of Botswana
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NRF	National Research Foundation [South Africa]

NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme [South Africa]
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development
QA	Quality Assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
RAU	Rand Afrikaans University
REA	Research Assessment Exercise
SAARDHE	South African Association for Research and Development in Higher Education
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADCC	Southern African Development Co-ordination Committee
SADCQF	Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework
SAQA.	South African Qualifications Authority
SARUA	Southern African Regional Universities Association
SAUVCA	South African Universities Vice-Chancellors Association
SECAT	Student Evaluation of Courses and Teaching [Botswana]
SET	Senior Executive Team [Wits]
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SPSC	Strategic Plan Sub-Committee [Zimbabwe]
TCCA	Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation [SADC]
TEC	Tertiary Education Council [Botswana]
UB	University of Botswana
UCT	University of Cape Town
UK	United Kingdom
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal [formerly University of Natal]
UOFS	University of the Free State
URC	University Research Committee [Wits]
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNISA	University of South Africa
USA	United States of America
UZ	University of Zimbabwe
WHO	World Health Organisation
WHC	Wits Health Consortium
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand
WTO	World Trade Organization
ZCHE	Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education

Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

For some time now, higher education institutions in developed countries have had quality assurance systems and arrangements to improve the quality of their teaching, research and direct community service activities. In recent years, quality assurance has also gained favour in universities in developing countries.[1] Such developments have been motivated by the challenges developing universities face, many of which relate to changes that are taking place on the higher education market the world over, and to which these institutions have to adjust.

Higher education in most developing countries today is characterised by expansion, resource scarcity, increased competition, accountability to more stakeholders and the growing complexity of knowledge. At the same time, most developing countries have adopted policies that are in favour of mass higher education as a means of redressing past imbalances and providing national economies with the high-level skilled manpower required to enhance economic development. By 2000, India had 274 universities and 12 600 colleges enrolling a total of 8 million students, an increase in tertiary enrolment of 26 per cent from 1995.[2] In Zimbabwe, the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) increased enrolments from 2 240 in 1980 to 12 000 by 2005.[3] Enrolments at the University of Botswana (UB) rose sharply from 5 056 in 1994 to 15 725 by 2004.[4] At the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), student enrolments soared from 8 000 in the 1970s to over 24 000 by 2005.[5] Such expansionist policies have not only resulted in significant increases in enrolments at existing institutions,

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[1] D. Lim, (1999), Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Developing Countries. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, Vol. 24, No. 4, pp. 379-380.

[2] Stella, A. (2002), *External Quality Assurance in Indian Higher Education: A Case Study of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)*, Paris, IIEP-UNESCO.

[3] University of Zimbabwe. http://www.uz.ac.zw/information/uz (Retrieved on 20 August 2006)

[4] University of Botswana: Facts and Figures. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Botswana. (Retrieved on 23 August 2006).

[5] University of the Witwatersrand (2006), Audit Report, Johannesburg, Wits, p. 29.

they have also seen the birth of many new universities and technical colleges, both public and private. At the same time, increased enrolments have also been characterised by significant changes in student demographics, as more and more students from disadvantaged communities participate in university education. As Mok points out with regard to similar trends in Taiwan, "The rapid increase of university students, together with the expansion of private colleges and universities in Taiwan, has been cause for social concern".[6] The World Bank notes that much of this expansion has "…been unbridled, unplanned and often chaotic. The results – deterioration in average quality, continuing interregional, inter-country, and intra-country inequalities, and increased for-profit provision of higher education could all have serious consequences".[7]

Due to increased student numbers and diminishing government subsidies, most public universities have been characterised by a reduction in per student expenditure and general spreading of available resources more thinly among various key processes like student support services, research, library facilities, laboratory equipment and personnel. This trend has been accompanied by the emergence of transnational providers on the higher education market and the lobbying by some developed nations to include higher education under the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) arrangements, a development that implies liberalisation of the higher education system. Proponents of the liberalisation discourse view higher education as a major industry that could yield potentially good returns on private investments, just like any other service.[8] This quest for profits is one of the major concerns most African governments have about opening their higher education systems to transnational providers. There is a strong feeling that quality may be sacrificed at the expense of profit making. Kader Asmal, former Minister of Education in South Africa, expressed such concerns. He stood his ground by turning down Norway's request to open up South Africa's higher education system to foreign

[6] Mok, K. (2000:654) Reflecting globalisation effects on local policy: higher education reform in Taiwan. *In Journal of Education Policy,* Vol.15 (6) pp.637-660

[7] World Bank (2000:27) *Higher Education in Developing Countries:* Peril and Promise, Washington DC

[8] Badat, S. (2003:1) The General Agreement on Trade in Services and South African Higher Education: What Should South Africa Do? In *Kagisano Issue No.3,* Autumn 2003, CHE, Pretoria.

providers in accordance with the GATS.[9] According to the same source, the Minister's refusal signalled South Africa's unwillingness to bow to international pressure and allow unlimited access to foreign providers. Minister Asmal maintained that treating education as a trade service would compromise quality at South Africa's public institutions and derail the country's complex transformation process at universities and technikons.[10]

While some Southern African countries are attempting to prevent globalisation forces from distorting their higher education systems and render them inappropriate in terms of responding to local needs, there is clearly a limit to this resistance. Trends in higher education suggest that institutions cannot ignore globalisation's effect on knowledge, whatever philosophical perspective they subscribe to. The commodification of knowledge and the changing nature of the international labour force will definitely influence not only curriculum reforms but also the dynamics relating to how curriculum is transmitted, quality assurance included. University delivery systems have to be informed by the fact that the world's workforce is becoming increasingly geographically fluid across national, regional and international borders. In this context, knowledge has emerged as an economic commodity. This has placed pressure on national higher education systems to ensure they are placed competitively in the dynamic international marketplace. At the same time, local stakeholders like governments, industry, professional bodies, students and parents demand accountability on the part of university institutions. All these trends pose challenges for efficiency and quality delivery by higher education institutions, and thus lead to an emphasis on quality assurance.

It is evident that today's university is confronted by various pressures and tensions resulting from both internal and external pressures. Many scholars have expressed concern about the quality of education provided by universities and the protection of consumers of that education.[11] There is general concern that new developments like

[9] *Business Day* (Johannesburg) October 7, 2003

[10] Ibid

[11] Pillay, P. et al (2003) *GATS and Higher Education in SADC*, Rondebosch, Compress.

Stella, A. (2002) *External Quality Assurance in Indian Higher Education: A case study of The National Assessment and Accreditation Council* (NAAC); IIEP-UNESCO; Paris

reduced public funding and rapidly increasing university enrolments may lead to lower academic standards.[12]

In response to the aforementioned challenges and public concerns regarding quality, institutions and governments have emphasised more stringent quality assurance policies and arrangements in universities. The importance placed on quality assurance is demonstrated by the move in the developed countries towards reputable, internationally recognised higher education quality assurance authorities – for example, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the U.K., the Association of Accrediting Agencies in Canada, the Comite National d'Evaluation in France, the Consejo Superior de Education in Chile, the Consejo Nacional de Acreditacion in Columbia, and the National Assessment and Accreditation Council in India.

In line with these trends in the developed world, African countries have taken steps to establish similar national and regional quality assurance systems in order to ensure international credibility of the programmes offered in their universities, thus making their higher education systems competitive on the global market. At its Ninth General Conference in 1997, the Association of African Universities (AAU) recommended that quality assurance should be part of its 1997–2000 programme of activities. In line with this objective, the Association undertook to assist member universities in setting up national quality assurance systems which would be followed by regional schemes.[13] Within Southern Africa, there is an apparent shift of emphasis from the quantitative expansion that characterised most higher education systems in the past few decades towards qualitative provision that offers skills and qualifications that are comparable and usable across countries, an important element of regional integration that will be revisited in Chapter 5.

[12] Zemsky 1997 in Mok, K. (2000) "Reflecting globalization effects on local policy: higher education reform in Taiwan" in *Journal of Educational Policy, Vol.15 No.6; pp.637-600*

[13] Jonathan, L.T. (2000) "Quality Assurance and evaluation in African Universities: developing a sustainable quality culture in a challenging environment" in *SAJHE/SATHO* Vol. 14 No.2 (2000) pp.45- 49

In South Africa, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) is a statutory body tasked with the responsibility of constructing and implementing a national quality assurance system in the country's higher education system. This body is the overseer of quality assurance standards in the South African higher education system, and ensures that the system achieves its goals and purposes as spelled out in the national Department of Education's White Paper 3.[14] Similar developments are taking place in a number of other countries within the region. In Mozambique, for instance, a National Quality Assurance and Accreditation body is about to be formed. In Namibia and Zimbabwe, national councils of higher education have already been formed that will, among other things, take care of quality assurance in those countries' higher education systems. In Botswana, the Tertiary Education Council (TEC) assumes the role of quality assuring university activities as more universities join the national higher education system. Thus, while in the past policies in most countries within the region emphasised physical access, there is an apparent shift in policy towards epistemic access as well as towards protecting students from poor quality offerings.

Regional and international labour and student mobility trends are also encouraging states and institutions to move towards harmonisation of qualifications. Article 7 of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) protocol specifies attempts by member states to "…work towards harmonisation, equivalence and external standardisation of university entrance requirements".[15] The SADC states also undertook to "…increasingly make use of external examiners from the Region as this shall --- lead to the development of comparable standards in higher education in the region".[16] The SADC protocol shows plans by member countries to institute some common regional standards in terms of university education, a move that has direct implications for quality assurance. Such an initiative would obviously need to be accompanied by some regional quality assurance mechanism if standards are to be comparable across nations and if the desired credit transfer system is to be possible.

[14] White Paper 3, a key policy document on Higher Education in South Africa spells out the goals and purposes of the SA higher education system and quality assurance is identified as one of the principles that should guide the transformation of higher education, together with equity and redress, democratisation, development, effectiveness and efficiency, academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability.

[15] SADC Protocol, p.9

[16] Op cit, p10

Concerted efforts similar to those of the European Union countries may be necessary in order to raise the quality of institutional delivery to levels acceptable within the region and beyond.

SADC's regional and international efforts tend to be preoccupied with standardising practice and putting in place structures, policies and systems that enhance quality assurance in institutions. Within SADC, this is done as an integral part of the regional integration project which is seen as a strategy for forging development. Preoccupation with such standardisation of higher education practice is, however, at the expense of focusing on the pertinent contextual factors that shape such quality assurance policies and practices. What is apparent in the move by the SADC countries, just like in other country groupings in other parts of the world (e.g. the European Community Course Credit Transfer System), is the preoccupation with standardisation of university operations across countries and the putting in place of external quality assurance systems to enhance such standardisation. It is not clear how differences between and among signatory countries are to be accommodated in these regional agreements, and what leads institutions to adopt the different kinds of quality assurance approaches they use. Issues of context are critical as they shape institutional performance, and in them also lies the uniqueness of institutions. Apparently no research has been undertaken to establish factors that inform quality assurance systems in the different universities within the region. Neither has empirical evidence been gathered on why quality assurance systems in some institutions work better than in others.

In view of the attendant quality assurance challenges, concerns and efforts being made by institutions, it is worthwhile interrogating the discourse of quality assurance, especially as it relates to the specific context of Southern African universities. This study is an attempt to engage with this type of discourse by focusing on quality assurance policies and practices in selected university institutions in Southern Africa. Firstly, it seeks to identify the nature of quality assurance policies and practices in the selected institutions and the contextual factors that mediate quality assurance arrangements. In doing so, it examines the nature of the relationships that exist between the quality assurance measures that institutions have adopted and the national as well as global pressures exerted on the same institutions. Secondly, the study seeks to explore opportunities for the improvement of such quality assurance systems,

within the specific universities studied but also in other regional institutions with similar contexts. It is hoped that this study will shed light on the quest for the best opportunities and conditions for enhancing the quality of university education in the region.

1.2 How the idea evolved from my experience

My interest in pursuing quality assurance issues in SADC countries was motivated by several concerns, all of which originated from first-hand experience in working in a university environment. First, I wanted to contribute towards the development of empirically-based insights into sound quality assurance systems in higher education in the region, particularly in the universities that I used as case studies. Throughout my years of teaching in universities, it occurred to me that research in the area of quality assurance in higher education in the SADC countries is very scanty and, as a result, institutions borrow policies and practices from the developed world. In many instances, such policies failed to enhance quality delivery by these institutions because they lacked contextual relevance. Thus, there seems to be hardly any research-based information to draw from in terms of formulating policies that guide quality assurance models and procedures applicable to the unique contexts of institutions while at the same time they are cognisant of global trends.

The second concern was the need to identify examples of good practice that can inform quality assurance practices and policies in the region's embryonic universities. Investments in increased participation in university education by most countries within the region may not yield significant returns unless the offerings are competitive globally. The need to contribute towards enhancing such competitiveness by engaging in the search for a strategy for contextualising quality assurance systems and policies in the regional institutions was one of the motivating factors in undertaking this study.

Thirdly, my experience in working in some of the universities within the region where expansion in both enrolments and programme offerings have been given greatest priority has raised concerns in me regarding the quality of delivery in those institutions, and has generated my interest in carrying out a study on quality assurance. As a lecturer, it has always been disturbing to note that the progress and

success of institutions as reported in review reports, in institutional strategic plans and on important occasions like graduation ceremonies is based on mere expansion of enrolments and throughput rates without taking into account the quality of the graduates. Neither do institutions have explicit ways of establishing whether or not individual transformation takes place as a result of the educational process, apart from formal assessment practices. With the exception of a few institutions, research and publications are not given any priority in terms of funding, time and training of academic staff. This is in spite of the fact that, traditionally, universities are supposed to be knowledge-generating institutions. These concerns raised many questions for me regarding the quality assurance of university activities, not least of which was how universities in a developing context like the SADC region address issues of quality under conditions of expansion on the one hand and the challenges posed by myriad attendant constraints on the other. Such constraints include diminishing public funding, the brain drain, resource shortages, poor working conditions for staff, political interference with university activities, the challenge of achieving social equity, and changing student demographics.

Lastly, my desire to pursue studies in quality assurance was further motivated by exposure to efforts in other regions aimed at enhancing the quality of university operations in a collaborative way. During my university service as a lecturer, I had the privilege of attending conferences run by the European Centre for Higher Education (Centre European Pour Education Superior), on developing quality assurance systems in universities within the European Union countries. Two lessons significant to the Southern African region can be drawn from these conferences. The first is the difficulty that is associated with developing common methodologies in assuring quality in universities in the various member countries. The second is that, in spite of such difficulties, member institutions benchmark their standards in very competitive ways, at institutional as well as at academic discipline level. This experience suggested the importance of contextual factors in developing relevant quality assurance systems for institutions, even in a region where there is a high degree of homogeneity among countries in terms of development. At the same time, it shows the benefits collaboration can yield to institutional quality enhancement, a strategy that I believe would be applicable in the Southern African region. It was very encouraging to see the amount of concerted effort and levels of investment that

universities in the European Union (EU) were making towards enhancing the quality of their education. It struck me that little was being done in our developing universities within the region to improve the quality of institutional delivery, even though the institutions are far behind those in the EU in terms of developing capacity for academic excellence.

My interest in pursuing quality assurance initiatives in universities in the Southern African region arose partly as a result of the comparative lack of adequate investment by institutions (individually and collectively) in order to match expansion of university systems with appropriate levels of quality. Diminishing government subvention to higher education means individual recipients of university education (or their parents and guardians) now contribute more towards their education. Individuals who have become more and more socially conscious demand value for their money. Together with other stakeholders like employers, non-governmental and other funding organisations, beneficiaries of university education call for accountability on the part of university education providers. The latter, therefore, have to strive to demonstrate that the service they provide is of sufficient quality to warrant the cost they charge the client. In a fast-changing global environment where labour markets are changing so rapidly, the demands on university institutions become equally dynamic. There is therefore a need to adopt research-based inquiry in the search for quality assurance best practices that suit institutions in specific developmental and social contexts. This study contributes towards our understanding of quality assurance systems that are best suited to university institutions within the particular context of Southern Africa.

With the spectacular technological changes taking place in the market – telecommunications, use of the Internet, use of television and the visual satellite, use of the computer – not only have providers of university education mushroomed in all the continents of the world (both conventional and distance teaching universities), but most of them have also gone international. The Southern African region is no exception to this development, which has brought about tight competition between universities worldwide. Survival in the marketplace is no longer a question of chance but rather a product of deliberate plans and strategies adopted by institutions to ensure provision of relevant and quality service. The enhancement of quality, therefore, is the single most important factor determining the ability of an institution to attract clients,

and to face competition as an international provider of higher education. On the other hand, there is a dire need for Southern African countries to protect their students who enrol with such external institutions by ensuring that they get quality education.

1.3 Focus of the study

This study is located in the area of governance and management of higher education, an area that is undergoing phenomenal change globally. More precisely, the study focuses on quality assurance policies, practices and systems in selected universities in the SADC region. Analysis of current practices on quality assurance in different countries reveals a great deal of difference in both methodology and emphasis. Variations can also be noted in the nature of the quality assurance processes (mandatory or voluntary), unit of assessment (institutional or programme), outcome and policy on disclosure of the assessment outcome (confidential or public).[17] Analysis of institutional quality assurance documents reveals quite striking variations in terms of the criteria that are used to audit institutions. This study explores the various quality assurance policies, practices, structures and methodologies used by three different universities within the SADC region to enhance quality, and examines how effective these strategies are.

1.4 Aim of the study

This study is a critical analysis of the quality assurance policies and practices in selected universities within the SADC region – the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa, the University of Zimbabwe, and the University of Botswana. It explores the nature of the policies in terms of how they were developed, the parties that were involved in the policy process, the implications of such processes for policy implementation, and institutional contextual factors influencing quality assurance practices on the ground.

This thesis has two main aims. The first aim of the study is to establish the type of quality assurance systems in place in the case institutions, how they were developed

[17] Stella, A. (2002) *External Quality Assurance in Indian Higher Education: A case study of The National Assessment and Accreditation Council* (NAAC); IIEP-UNESCO; Paris

and the factors that informed the development of the systems. It also explicates the patterns of relationships that exist between institutional quality assurance systems, national quality assurance policy and stakeholder expectations, and how these are influenced by global and regional pressures. This analytical dimension is premised on the assumption that in these contextual imperatives lie much hope and opportunities for developing best practices in developing universities. While developing universities need not re-invent the wheel, it is necessary that they match their quality assurance practices to their unique contexts if such efforts are to pay significant dividends.

Unlike previous works, that have mainly concentrated on the assumption that quality delivery ensues once certain quality assurance systems have been put in place, this study goes beyond such mere identification and description of systems and processes to critically analyse how key contextual factors mediate the effective implementation of such systems. The study looks at the often taken-for-granted subtleties that lie at the interface of quality assurance policies and compelling, contextual variables like communication channels, ownership of initiatives by academic staff, availability of critical resources, institutional culture and legacies.

The second aim of the study, therefore, is to identify factors that influence the implementation of quality assurance systems in the studied institutions. By doing so, the study hopes to establish factors that promote as well as inhibit the effectiveness of quality assurance systems. The study also hopes to propose quality assurance systems and processes that are more effective in the particular universities within the SADC context, notwithstanding international trends in the area of quality assurance. Quality assurance is treated as an integral part of institutional governance, and the study is therefore based on the premise that fine management practices are a prerequisite to the achievement of quality in tertiary education.

1.5 Research questions

The specific question that guides this study is: **What is the nature of quality assurance policies and practices in selected universities in SADC countries, and what are the factors that shape these policies?**

In addressing this question, it is important that the dissertation considers the following sub-questions:

a) What are the national and institutional quality assurance policies that inform practice in the institutions under review, and what are their underlying assumptions?
b) How do the social, economic and political contextual factors of each institution enhance and constrain effective implementation of quality assurance policies?
c) How have regionalisation forces affected quality assurance policies, practices and values in the studied institutions?
d) What perceptions of quality do the various stakeholders in the institutions hold, and how do these influence quality delivery?
e) In what ways can existing quality assurance practices be improved to enhance sustainable quality?

1.6 Thesis statement

The argument pursued in this study posits two related claims. Firstly, the establishment of quality assurance policies and systems in the three cases was not necessarily followed by significant improvements in institutional performance. These policies and systems are being negotiated and re-negotiated among the main stakeholders within individual institutions. How these negotiations play themselves out depends on a variety of factors (e.g. institutional relationships with external stakeholders, institutional legacies, clarity and suitability of the policies), and primarily on the nature of power relations among the main actors within institutions. For example, processes of quality assurance are very often tainted by tensions between university management and academic staff. Tensions also are experienced between the universities and external stakeholders such as statutory quality assurance bodies, professional bodies and various state agencies. Academic staff complains about instances where quality assurance policies are passed on to them by management in a bureaucratic and managerial style, without any consultation.

Secondly, under such circumstances there is apparent lack of ownership and accountability among academic staff regarding the actual practice of quality assurance. Such practices are not in keeping with the stated quality assurance policy directives. This discrepancy varies in extent across the universities, and arises from the apparent failure to match the quality assurance policies to the specific needs and demands of the relevant institutional contexts. An aggravating factor is the tendency to rely too much on external resources in the development of quality assurance policies, particularly external expertise with limited contextual understanding of institutional peculiarities. The consequence is the privileging of policies and mechanisms that are more concerned with standardisation of procedures than with enhancement of academic practice, without adequately addressing the contextual factors influencing effective implementation of the policies. In some of the case institutions, this has resulted in quality assurance policies not adding much value to practice in terms of self-improvement and enhancing the overall quality of delivery.

Overall, the study points to fundamental inadequacies in the approach to and current practices of quality assurance in the region. Nonetheless, quality assurance is given high priority in all the three institutions by both management and faculty members. Current contestation is already soliciting more constructive responses and more informed decisions for institutional administration in some institutions (e.g. the Universities of the Witwatersrand and Botswana), as the key loopholes are identified. However, a comprehensive research strategy may be required to back up the process and encourage the use of data and evidence-informed decision making on matters concerning quality assurance.

1.7 Structure of the thesis and chapter outline

This thesis consists of nine chapters. Chapter 2, *The Contested Terrain of Quality Assurance: A Theoretical Review*, comprises a literature review. It deals mainly with global trends in the debate on quality assurance in higher education and explores their implications for understanding the quality assurance initiatives in the three case studies. Such trends include accountability vis-à-vis institutional autonomy, preference of internal as opposed to external quality assurance systems, and peer evaluations as opposed to external audits. Four sets of literature are reviewed in this

chapter. These include literature dealing with: (i) main conceptualisations of quality and quality assurance; (ii) the interplay of globalisation, internationalisation and regionalisation on quality assurance; (iii) state–market tensions in quality assurance; and (iv) discourses of accountability and how they relate to quality assurance. The chapter shows how much of the debate has revolved around whether the quality assurance approach is internal or external to the institution and has paid little attention to internal dynamics in the quality assurance processes, more specifically the power relations that mediate the process. It argues that quality assurance in universities cannot be separated from power tensions between and among the various stakeholders in higher education, within institutions themselves, and between institutions and their external stakeholders.

Chapter 3, *Exploring the Quality Dimensions of Developing Institutions*, deals with the methodological aspects of the study. It outlines the epistemological ground on which the approach to the study was based. It describes and justifies the design that was used, the data collection methods that were employed, and why they were considered appropriate for the study. The chapter also brings out the challenges that were faced during the study and the learning experiences therein derived. The chapter shows that the overall design and the methods of collecting data used were the best-suited for this kind of study, which relied primarily on qualitative data.

Chapter 4, *Context and Institutional Legacies: The cases of the universities of the Witwatersrand, Zimbabwe and Botswana*, explores the relationship between the institutional social, economic and political contexts, and the quality assurance policies and practices within those institutions. In doing so the chapter explores how those factors may constrain as well as enhance effective implementation of quality assurance systems in the case institutions. The chapter argues that, in the studied institutions, quality assurance policies fail to take full cognisance of the legacies and peculiar contexts of the universities in which they are implemented. As a result, there is tension between the policy expectations and the contextual imperatives on the ground. It further argues that, in some cases, policy development processes were not consultative enough to maximise policy buy-in and policy ownership by the implementers on the ground. As Chapter 7 later argues, this resulted in tensions developing between the various stakeholders within institutions on the best strategies

to adopt in order to address the quality needs of institutions. The chapter shows how the two key problems – failure to draw from the relevant contexts and lack of adequate consultation with academic staff – pose potential threats to effective policy implementation. From the analyses of the key factors influencing implementation of quality assurance policies in the three institutions, the chapter concludes that effective quality enhancement can only take place under a favourable macro environment. Development of sound quality assurance policies alone is not enough to bring about institutional quality delivery.

Chapter 5, *Regionalisation and its impact on Quality Assurance*, deals with how globalisation and internationalisation factors manifest themselves through regionalisation, and how this, in turn, affects quality assurance. The argument pursued in this chapter is that although each of the studied cases is a project of the nation state that tries to protect its cultural identity and propel national development, it is profoundly shaped by forces whose origin is located beyond its national boundaries. In this chapter, I discuss the influence of globalisation-induced market discourses on higher education, and further argue that while there are many benefits to be derived by such developing institutions from globalisation and internationalisation, there are also many disadvantages these institutions face by virtue of their relatively lower levels of development which render them less competitive on the planetary higher education market. The chapter proceeds to show, through research data, how some of the globalisation and internationalisation forces influence quality assurance practices in the institutions.

While Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the local and global factors that shape quality assurance policies and practices, Chapter 6, *State-institution Relationships and Implications for Quality Assurance*, focuses specifically on the state as the most influential stakeholder in university transformation. The chapter analyses the role of the state in enhancing quality delivery by institutions, and shows how state-university relationships can enhance as well as constrain institutional performance. It argues that different modes of state-institution co-ordination prevail in the three universities, and that these have exerted different forms of influence on the overall performance of institutions and on how institutions assure the quality of their core functions. It is further argued that although the state has a key role to play in enhancing quality in

each of the three institutions, where state political control of universities has prevailed, it has led to managerial forms of quality assurance that are associated with accountability rather than self-improvement. An attempt is made to show how the kinds of state-institution relationships that exist in the three universities are influenced by the nature of the state. The chapter discusses the importance of striking a balance between state steering on the one hand and institutional autonomy on the other.

Chapter 7, *Making Policy for Quality: Opportunities, Challenges and Constraints***,** is an analysis of the policy development processes that were followed by the studied universities in order to bring about their current quality assurance policies. The aim of the chapter is to show how policy processes affect quality assurance practices. The chapter highlights some of the key parties that were involved in the policy processes, the main motivating factors behind the quality assurance policies, the objectives for the development of such policies in the institutions, and structures that were put in place to facilitate implementation of such policies. The main argument of the chapter is that, at institutional level, quality assurance policies are perceived from two different perspectives – as internal and mainly improvement-oriented by university management, and as externally driven and managerial by the academic collegiate at academic unit levels. Thus issues of power emerge as significant factors playing themselves out in the way that the development and implementation of policy is perceived by the different actors in the three case institutions. There seems to have been too much preoccupation with the development of policies, the establishment of quality assurance structures, and monitoring of policy implementation, but without addressing the relevant contextual factors that constrain effective implementation of the policies. Thus, while the policies are very sound as text, in practice there are many constraints relating to staffing, student numbers, resource availability and, most importantly, staff motivation that remain unaddressed. These pressing factors impact negatively on effective implementation of policy, and hence militate against quality enhancement in the institutions.

Chapter 8, *Quality Assurance Policy as Practice***,** deals with the structures and processes that were put in place in order to give effect to the policies discussed in Chapter 7. It also gives an account of the actual quality assurance practices in the three institutions. It deals mainly with how institutions assure quality in the following

key academic areas: (i) teaching and learning; (ii) programme development; (iii) student assessment; and (iv) research and publication, including funding and research supervision. The chapter argues that wide gaps exist between policy text and the actual quality assurance practices on the ground in all the three institutions, and that these gaps also vary from institution to institution. While in two of the universities there is great dissonance between the written policies and the actual practices on the ground, quality assurance policy in the third university is so effectively implemented that the gap between policy and practice is hardly discernible.

Chapter 9, the *Conclusion*, ties up the thesis and makes recommendations based on the salient issues emerging from the studied case institutions.

Chapter 2

THE CONTESTED TERRAIN OF QUALITY ASSURANCE: A THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature on quality assurance in higher education is silent about the political, economic and social factors that shape quality assurance systems in university institutions. As a result, quality assurance is treated from a somewhat simplistic perspective, where studies focus mainly on developing policies and putting in place structures that facilitate the implementation of such policies. With the exception of a few,[18] most studies portray quality assurance as either external or internal, with the former being associated with much-resented bureaucratic and managerialistic constraints while the latter is considered positive on the grounds that it is less bureaucratic and enjoys buy-in from implementers on the ground. Such literature does little to problematise the nature of the so-called "internal" approaches to quality assurance because it takes collegiality to be a homogeneous rather than a highly differentiated and loosely coupled entity. Internal quality assurance systems are portrayed as being controlled by the academy, as having reporting systems that are fully internal and as being less accountability-driven; hence the approach is considered as self-improvement.[19] External quality assurance systems, on the other

[18] Barnett, R. (1994) Power, Enlightenment and Quality Evaluation. In *European Journal of Education, Vol.29 (2) pp.165-179*

Luckett, K. (2005) A Critical Policy Analysis of the Proposed National Quality Assurance System for South African Higher Education. In Smout, M. (ed) *The Decade Ahead: Challenges for Quality Assurance in South African Higher Education*, SAUVCA, Pretoria

Harvey, (1996) "External Quality Monitoring in the Market Place:" A paper presented at the 18th Annual EAIR Forum: Higher Education in the market place; strategies of success and survival, Budapest; Hungary.

[19] Fourie, M. (2000) "A systems approach to quality assurance and self-evaluation" in *SAJHE/ SATHO, Vol. 14 No. 2 (2000) pp. 50 - 55*

Barnett, R. (1994) Power, Enlightenment and Quality Evaluation. In *European Journal of Education, Vol.29 (2) pp.165-179*

hand, are regarded as mandatory, accountability-driven and with little self-improvement value.[20]

This chapter deals with key dimensions raised in the literature about current trends in quality assurance in higher education. The following key themes are followed in reviewing these key dimensions: (i) the main conceptualisations of quality and quality assurance; (ii) the impact of globalisation and internationalisation on quality assurance; (iii) state–market tensions in quality assurance; and (iv) discourses of accountability and how they relate to quality assurance.

It is argued in this chapter that the literature on quality assurance shows that, in most contexts, quality assurance is associated with accountability rather than with institutional improvement. The chapter further argues that quality assurance in higher education is a practice that is associated with power tensions between and among the various stakeholders of an institution. The chapter points to the importance of problematising the notion of collegiality that is associated with internal forms of quality assurance. It also reframes the rationale that equates internal quality assurance approaches with non-bureaucratic, non-accountability and self-improvement systems that enjoy maximum buy-in at implementation level. It draws from the accountability discourses to reframe the internal-external debates that run through the literature into a power relations domain. The chapter concludes by outlining the theoretical framework that is used in the study, which is based on the notion of power. This framework is adapted from Barnett and Luckett's work, which employs the same notion of power relationships as key to quality assurance practices in higher education institutions.[21]

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[20] Fourie, M. (2000) "A systems approach to quality assurance and self-evaluation" in *SAJHE/ SATHO, Vol. 14 No. 2 (200*0) pp. 50 - 55

Stella, A. (2002) *External Quality Assurance in Indian Higher Education: A case study of The National Assessment and Accreditation Council* (NAAC); IIEP-UNESCO; Paris

Van Vught, F.A. (1993) Towards a general model of quality assessment in higher education: Paper presented at the biennial conference of International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). Montreal, Canada, 24 – 28 May.

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[21] Barnett, R. (1994) Power, Enlightenment and Quality Evaluation. In *European Journal of Education, Vol.29 (2) pp.165-179*

The review provides insight into the kinds of quality assurance policies and practices generally used in university institutions in different parts of the world, as well as the contextual factors that shape those policies and practices. The idea is to try to establish how well the various higher education systems respond to the needs, demands and peculiarities of their ever-dynamic local contexts while remaining cognisant of the complex demands posed by globalisation. In this review, the notion of a socially-embedded university[22] is explored in order to show how university institutions are redefining their role in the knowledge society of today. By pointing out some of the factors that contribute towards the successful implementation of quality assurance measures in some contexts, this literature review chapter provides some guidance on possible ways of addressing the tensions that are associated with different forms of quality assurance within the developing context.

2.2 Conceptualisation of quality and quality assurance

2.2.1 The importance of definition

Any discourse on quality assurance should start by clarifying the terms "quality" and "quality assurance". Such conceptual clarification is necessary because it enables readers to understand the focus of the discourse, since different people hold different conceptions of the two terms. This is particularly so with university institutions where there are various stakeholders with different interests, values and expectations regarding quality university education. As Barnett argues, university institutions carry particular social and cultural identities.[23] The debate on quality can therefore be seen as a battleground where these identities are brought to the surface and pitched against each other. The way an institution perceives quality is likely to strongly influence the quality assurance policies and strategies it will adopt. Barnett contends:

Luckett, K. (2005) A Critical Policy Analysis of the Proposed National Quality Assurance System for South African Higher Education. In Smout, M. (ed) *The Decade Ahead: Challenges for Quality Assurance in South African Higher Education*, SAUVCA, Pretoria

[22] Ramirez, F.O. (2004) The rationalization of universities. In Marie-Laure, D. and Shalin-Anderson, K. (eds) *Transnational Regulation*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

[23] Barnett, R. (1994:171) Power, Enlightenment and Quality Evaluation. In *European Journal of Education, Vol.29 (2) pp.165-179*

> Consequently, our methods of evaluating quality spring from more deep-seated beliefs as to what counts as quality. But, and more significantly, these beliefs over what counts as quality themselves derive from more fundamental assumptions as to the ideal nature of higher education.[24]

As more and more people throughout the world participate in higher education, issues of quality have begun to occupy a more central position. Even more significant has been the change in the way people perceive the quality of university education in general, and the role of a university in particular. Generally, the key stakeholders in most higher education systems are the state, the market and the academy. These can hardly strike consensus on what purposes university institutions should serve and how they should operate. What really constitutes quality and who should define it are highly contested issues in higher education. Analysis of the quality assurance systems in a given system should start by seeking to understand what it is that is to be assured. Therefore, a brief review of the various conceptions prevalent in the literature is necessary in any discourse on the subject of quality assurance.

Perhaps the most comprehensive definition of quality is provided by Harvey and Green.[25] The two authors give the following five conceptualisations of quality:

- quality as exceptional (excellence);
- quality as perfection;
- quality as fitness for purpose;
- quality as value for money;
- quality as transformational.

These conceptualisations are discussed below.

2.2.2 Quality as excellence

In this conceptualisation, quality is perceived as something distinctive, something special, which cannot be attained by many. The notion of centres of excellence in

[24] Barnett, R. (1994) ibid

[25] Harvey, L. and Green, D. (1993:11) Defining Quality. In *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, Vol.18 (1) pp 9-34.*

higher education probably derives from this conception. Analyses of mission statements for most universities seem to suggest that many universities draw from the notion of excellence in benchmarking their performance. Quality assurance policies for the University of Botswana, the University of Zimbabwe and the University of the Witwatersrand, for instance, are underpinned by institutional vision and mission statements that are framed around the value of excellence.

2.2.3 Quality as perfection

As *perfection*, quality relates closely to the notion of "zero defect" commonly employed in industrial settings, where physical products of a production chain have to meet the exact pre-specifications of the desired product, in its perfect form, without any defects.[26] From an educational point of view, it seems this definition may be quite problematic, for two main reasons. Firstly, the product of an educational process is multi-faceted, usually possessing some unforeseeable and unpredicted but desirable attributes. Secondly, it is impossible to define a "perfect" or "zero defect" graduate of an educational process. This is primarily because, from an epistemological point of view, no knowledge is perfectly adequate, no matter how superior it may be.

2.2.4 Quality as fitness for purpose and as value for money

Fitness for purpose is generally the quality conception of stakeholders external to the university community, who normally put a heavy premium on the instrumental function of higher education. The market, for instance, looks at the ability of institutions to produce graduates who are immediately functional in the world of work. Graduates have to fit into the workplace without compromising on efficiency and without prejudicing the profit benefits of an enterprise. In Luckett's view, quality assurance approaches that are informed by rationality external to the educational institution and that regard students as clients, citizens or potential voters subscribe to

[26] Harvey, L. and Green, D. (1993:15) Defining Quality. In *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, Vol.18 (1) pp 9-34*

this understanding of quality as fitness for purpose.[27] This conception of quality is often linked to governments that are concerned with aligning the output of higher education institutions with broad national goals and for using universities as an apparatus to address broader social problems. In this sense, the fitness for purpose conception of quality is closely linked to the *value for money* conception, hence the accountability nature of the approach to quality assurance. Institutions that subscribe to this notion of quality extensively involve professional bodies and the employers of university graduates to specify their requirements and to accredit their programmes.

The fitness for purpose definition of quality is a developmental approach to quality, and this aspect is particularly significant to higher education. As customer specifications change with time, so do the aims to be achieved by universities. Bradbery contends that the product remains a quality product by maintaining its value to the customer.[28] The assumption here is that the quality of university delivery is not something that is static; rather it is necessarily dynamic as it is responsive to changes in the work environment.

2.2.5 Quality as transformation

Quality as *transformation* connotes pedagogical implications, the extent of transformation that occurs in the learner as a consequence of the learning process. Quality in this case is defined in terms of the "value added" in the learner, and learner assessment seeks to establish the amount of such value added. The amount of value added is not tangible and its quantification is problematic, yet this is what the academy uses to determine value.

2.2.6 Manifestations of conceptions of quality

While these various perceptions of quality are treated separately in the literature, it is important to note that in real practice several notions of the concept manifest

[27] Luckett, K. (2005:23) A Critical Policy Analysis of the Proposed National Quality Assurance System for South African Higher Education. In Smout, M. (ed) *The Decade Ahead: Challenges for Quality Assurance in South African Higher Education*, SAUVCA, Pretoria

[28] Bradbery, P. (1991) The Process is the Content. In Atkinson, R. and McBeath, C. (eds.) *Quality in Distance Education: ASPESA Forum 1991,* , Bathurst, (AUS), 387-397

themselves in the quality assurance policies and practices of any given institution. In South Africa, for instance, "…the Higher Education Quality Committee's understanding of quality encompasses fitness for purpose, value for money, and individual and social transformation, within an overarching fitness of purpose framework".[29] This overarching national perception of quality obviously influences the approach of the University of the Witwatersrand to quality assurance, at least in terms of policy. The institution's quality assurance policy reads:

> University documents[30] show that the University regards quality as maintaining the standing we claim we have whilst attaining the goals we set ('fitness for purpose'[31]) and where possible exceeding our standing (excellence[32]). The claims we make, and our desire for excellence, are not limited to the academic realm; service excellence is espoused by our support staff. Quality also concerns making the best use of resources (efficiency/ 'value for money') and being accountable to individuals and the communities which we affect, be they individual students or staff ('transformation'), local communities, the nation ('fitness of purpose') or international research communities. Quality thus lies in attaining, maintaining and improving our excellence in learning, teaching and research (both [*sic*] of which include community engagement), and in the functions which support the core functions of the University.[33]

This example illustrates how particular perceptions of quality influence the kinds of quality assurance policies that institutions develop and where emphasis is placed when it comes to implementation of those policies. This is in keeping with the trend shown in the literature, where quality assurance practices tend to draw mainly from value for money (efficiency) and excellence rationales. Thus, the trend shown in the literature is that of quality assurance practices that privilege self-improvement (in order to enhance institutional excellence) but operating within an accountability

[29] CHE, (2004:5) *Higher Education Quality Committee: Framework for Institutional Audits*, CHE, Pretoria

[30] Wits mission statement; institutional values in the strategic plan

[31] 'Fitness for purpose', 'value for money', 'transformation' and 'fitness of purpose' are all contained in the definition of quality of the Higher Education Quality Committee.

[32] Excellence is a term we use perhaps too lightly; what it means for us should be something that we debate and consider intellectually. In the context of this document the term is used to mean the attainment or pursuit of academically desirable standards – of being very good at what we consciously choose to do.

[33] CHE, (2004:5) *Higher Education Quality Committee: Framework for Institutional Audits*, CHE, Pretoria

framework.[34] An important point to note is that while the different conceptions of quality discussed above are widely shared among the studied institutions, the emphasis given to each of them is contextual.

In terms of practice, the different conceptions of quality dealt with in the literature may only be in terms of the relative emphasis laid on some conceptions. In this study, quality performance relates to what each university has set itself to achieve, which is normally enshrined in the mission statement of the institution. What institutions seek to achieve is informed by and is also within the interest of the wider (academic) society. Thus firstly, quality is perceived in terms of societal expectations – that is, the expectations of employers, like professional bodies and industry. A blend of the customer satisfaction and the fitness for purpose conceptions of quality seem to form a significant dimension of the conception of quality for most institutions. The obvious implication of this is the involvement of external stakeholders like professional organisations in quality assuring academic programmes offered by universities.

2.3 The interplay of globalisation, internationalisation, the state and market forces

Most studies on quality assurance systems tend to be preoccupied with examining systems and structures that are operative in particular contexts, but do not go further to critically analyse how those systems and structures interface with the day-to-day functions of various people in organisations in order to bring about quality delivery. Equally missing in quality assurance studies is clear articulation of both exogenous (e.g. regional and international quality assurance agencies, professional bodies and the corporate world in general) and endogenous factors (e.g. faculty priorities, resource availability and institutional culture) that shape quality assurance systems and policies in university institutions. This study recognises the significance of globalisation in higher education, and places importance on the interplay of global and local factors in shaping quality assurance policies. Before attempting to disentangle the complex

[34] Kristensen, 1997 cited in Harvey, L. (2002) Evaluation for what? In *Teaching in higher education, Vol. 7 (3) pp.245-261*

Harvey, L (1996) Quality is not free! Quality monitoring alone will not improve quality. Lecture presented at the 18th Annual EAIR Forum on Higher Education in the Market Place: strategies of survival and success held at Budapest University, Hungary, 25-28th August

phenomenon of globalisation and showing how it relates to higher education developments, I start by showing what the process itself involves.

2.3.1 The discourse of globalisation

Globalisation means different things to different people. The term refers to "…the stretching of social, political and economic activities across [national] frontiers".[35] More relevant to education, globalisation refers to the increasing flow of technology, knowledge, people, values and ideas across borders.[36] Three distinct schools of thought can be discerned in debates on globalisation. The first argument is the hyperglobalist thesis, whose central argument is that globalisation is "associated with a sense of political fatalism and chronic insecurity in that the sheer scale of contemporary social and economic change appears to outstrip the capacity of national governments or citizens to control, contest or resist that change".[37]

The second thesis is advanced by the sceptics who draw largely from statistical evidence of world flows of trade, investment and labour from the nineteenth century. On the basis of historical evidence, they argue that globalisation is a myth; what prevails are simply heightened levels of internationalisation (i.e. interactions between national economies).[38] The theory further argues that national authorities are not passive victims of internationalisation; on the contrary, they are its architects. This perspective refutes the notion that internationalisation is bringing about profound restructuring of global economic and social relations. National authorities, therefore, still have space to forge ahead with national and local priorities in their process of development. Internationalisation of capital may "not merely restrict policy choices, but expand them as well".[39]

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[35] Held, D. et al, (1999:15) *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*, Stanford, Stanford University Press

[36] Knight and de Wit, 1997 in Woodhouse, D. (2001:1) Globalisation: Implications for Education and for Quality: A paper presented to the AAIR Conference in Rockhampton, Australia on 3 September 2001

[37] Held, D. et al, (1999:1) *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*, Stanford, Stanford University Press

[38] Hirst and Thompson, 1996 in Held, D. et al (1999) *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*, Stanford, Stanford University Press

[39] Weiss, 1998: 184 in Held, D. et al (1999:5).

The third theory on globalisation is advanced by the transformationalist thesis, which argues that globalisation is a central force behind the rapid social, political and economic changes that are reshaping modern societies and the world order.[40] The core of the transformationalist argument is that contemporary processes of globalisation are historically unprecedented, so that governments and societies across the globe have to adjust to a new world order where there is no longer a clear distinction between international and domestic, external and internal affairs.[41] This international-local dichotomy is an important aspect to pursue in so far as quality assurance is concerned, since whether quality can be pegged to local or international benchmarks is something that is highly contested in debates on quality assurance in university education. The thesis therefore acknowledges the significant effects of globalisation as a transformative force which is responsible for a "massive shake-out" of societies, economies and local institutions of governance, but refutes the convergence theory propounded by the hyperglobalists.

In this chapter, globalisation as a process is viewed as that which outside forces and organisations impose on countries or institutions.[42] The significance of such outside forces is that they usher in a single dominant paradigm, from nation to nation and from system to system. The resultant aim is to engender some notable degree of homogeneity of societies, of systems, of values, policies and practices. As Maasen and Cloete argue, globalisation engenders international reform ideologies that fundamentally challenge the notion of institutional self-steering in higher education. They write:

> According to the underlying ideas and assumptions of reform thinking, universities and colleges should be externally controlled, their activities should be formally evaluated, they should be held accountable for their performance, they should be steered by market forces and not by governmental or state mechanisms, they should be run by professional leaders and managers instead of by academic *primus-inter-pares* ('first among

[40] Giddens, 1990; Scholte, 1993; Castells, 1996 in Held, D. et al (1999)

[41] Rosenau, 1990; Cammilleri and Falk, 1992; Ruggie, 1993; Linklater and MacMillan, 1995; Sassen, 1996 in Held, D. et al (1999).

[42] Burn, A. (2000: 3) The Requirements of Internationalization of Higher Education: Eleventh General Conference of the International Association of Universities: Durban, South Africa, August 2000.

> equals'), and they should be included as service industries in regional and global trade agreements.[43]

Nations accept and apply these globally popular reform ideas and the assumptions on which they are based, and consequently underplay the significance of specific national and institutional characteristics, cultures, histories and interests[44]. In terms of quality assurance, institutions place priority on aligning their practices with international trends at the expense of exploring new initiatives that are mainly informed by their unique contextual imperatives. Such homogeneity suppresses alternative cultural approaches and policies that characterise the individuality of a given nation or system. It is my view that homogeneity is too simplistic an approach to promote sustainable development of individual systems that are based on the legacies, contexts, values and cultural ideals that give unique identities to those individual systems. Since globalisation is associated with dominance of a privileged paradigm and is "hostile to nation states",[45] it is a process that obviously privileges the developed nations (and the institutions in the developed world) since they are better placed to establish dominance over the less developed systems. The prevalence of transnational providers of higher education in developing countries is a typical example of such dominance in the education arena.

The discourses of globalisation are significant in the analysis of higher education reform policies and processes in general and of quality assurance in particular. They provide insight into the interplay between local state (or institutional) authority and global (or international and regional) quality assurance agencies in the shaping of quality assurance policies and practices in higher education institutions. Viewing quality assurance initiatives of different institutions through the globalisation lens, for instance, draws one's attention to the role played by local as compared to external consultants in the quality assurance policy processes, and the influence such external forces have on the ultimate quality assurance policies of institutions. It also sheds

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[43] Maasen, P. and Cloete, N. (2002:16-17) Global reform trends in higher education: In Cloete, N. et al (eds*) Transformation in Higher Education: Global Pressures and Local Realities in South Africa*, Juta Company (Pvt) Ltd. Landsdowne

[44] Ibid.

[45] Bitzer, E. (2002:23) South African legislation on limiting private and foreign higher education: protecting the public or ignoring globalization? *In South African Journal of Higher Education, Vol. 16 (1) pp.22 – 28*

light on what informed the quality assurance policy expectations and the criteria used to evaluate institutions and programmes offered by the institutions. Such analyses help reveal the relative importance of the two categories of forces in articulating quality assurance issues relating to a given higher education system, from a conceptual as well as from a practical point of view.

The literature shows that globalisation influences higher education mainly through reducing the effect of distance in terms of the increased flow of ideas, academic staff and value systems upon which quality assurance policies, in particular, and higher education reform policies, generally, are based. The net effect of this flow is that nation states and institutions have to reposition themselves in reaction to it. In the process of such repositioning, local initiatives weaken in terms of shaping policy and practice. The process, therefore, affects all aspects of social life in any given society no less than it does specific quality assurance systems of institutions. Its effects, however, are mediated by the context of an institution and therefore vary considerably from institution to institution.

2.3.2 Internationalisation and quality assurance

A related but different process that is relevant to quality assurance in higher education is internationalisation, a process that generally refers to what institutions (or nations) carry out for within their own systems and "pre-supposes the existence of nation states".[46] Unlike globalisation, internationalisation should preserve diversity while at the same time it facilitates understanding and appreciation of other cultures. Individual institutional initiatives still prevail, but derive enrichment from international perspectives and are sensitive and responsive to them. In so doing, an institution does not lag behind international trends and remains competitive on the market.

A distinguishing feature between internationalisation and globalisation is that the former does not lead systems towards convergence, as is the case with the latter. As

[46] Bitzer, E. (2002:23) South African legislation on limiting private and foreign higher education: protecting the public or ignoring globalization? *In South African Journal of Higher Education, Vol. 16 (1) pp.22 – 28*

Bitzer contends, internationalisation is most strongly expressed through the "worlds" of diplomacy and culture, while globalisation is found in the "worlds" of mass consumerism and global capitalism.[47] As will be shown later in Chapter 5, I maintain in this thesis that internationalisation and quality university performance cannot be separated. How internationalised an institution is, and the extent of its ability to expose both students and staff to international experiences, are integral aspects of institutional good practice.

It is evident from both practice and the literature that the discourse of internationalisation of higher education is interwoven with quality assurance. Although it may be argued that there is little evidence of the relationship between internationalisation and quality, it is evident that national policies for the internationalisation of higher education generally display the quality objective, "…and so do many institutional policy documents on internationalization".[48] The cross-fertilisation of ideas enhanced through international co-operation and exchange of students and staff provides space for mutual learning, for comparison and synthesis of approaches and practices. Again, as Van der Wende argues, it is at the individual as well as the institutional and even system level that such international co-operation and exchange contribute significantly to the quality of processes and outcomes of university institutions.[49] From this viewpoint, therefore, it makes sense to talk of internationalisation of quality assurance. In higher education, the impact of internationalisation is felt in the blurring of national and regional boundaries due to student and staff mobility as well as in increasing institutional expansion. Transnational higher education providers are becoming more and more marked in the arena of higher education. These developments have an obvious impact on the need to standardise qualifications across national institutions in order to enhance credit transfer and qualification recognition. The same genre of internationalisation perspectives also impacts on staff and curriculum innovations. Internationalisation has

[47] Bitzer, E. (2002:23) South African legislation on limiting private and foreign higher education: protecting the public or ignoring globalization? *In South African Journal of Higher Education, Vol. 16 (1) pp.22 – 28*

[48] Van der Wende, (n. d.: 1) Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the Link to Internationalisation (1) Paper to be published by the OECD in a publication with the title: " Quality and the International Dimension in Higher Education Institutions" (forthcoming)

[49] Van der Wende, (n.d. 1) Op cit

ushered in new trends in the labour market where national boundaries have become very porous, and this necessitates some degree of regularisation of qualification frameworks. This is particularly true within the Southern African region, where this study is located, because of the wide variety of universities in terms of their quality and the high rate of cross-national mobility of the labour force within the region.

It is evident in the literature that quality assurance systems and processes operate within socio-political contexts, and that the latter heavily influence the nature of practice in the former. The underlying philosophies of efforts to build political solidarity by states through regional groupings like the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the European Union (EU) also impact on all other social facets of the member states, including education. Quality assurance, therefore, is bound to become a regional as well as an international, rather than just a national, concern. The benchmarking and the quality assurance mechanisms to guarantee achievement of those benchmarks are obviously informed by the norms and values of these political groupings, which themselves draw from international good practice. An example of such regional influence is the Association of African Universities' (AAU) initiatives aimed at assisting member state universities to put in place quality assurance systems in their institutions.[50] Jonathan notes that, at its 1997 Annual General Meeting, the regional organisation undertook to establish a regional quality assurance system for its member universities. While it is possible for the various member institutions to have their own unique dimensions in their quality assurance systems, the generic structure of such systems and mechanisms and their underlying assumptions are likely to be influenced to a very large extent by the regional agency.

Another classic example of the influence of regionalisation forces on higher education in general and quality assurance in particular is that of the European countries. In 1998 the Ministers of Education of Italy, Britain, Germany and France met at Sorbonne University in Paris to find ways of strengthening their commonalities "into

[50] Jonathan, L. T. (2000) "Quality Assurance and evaluation in African Universities: developing a sustainable quality culture in a challenging environment." In *South African Journal of Higher Education Vol. 14 No.2* (2000) pp.45- 49

a multilateral effort of academic cooperation".[51] After holding three-day consultation discussions with other stakeholders like European academic leaders, union representatives, student delegations and prominent scientists, they signed the Sorbonne Declaration calling for a "common architecture of degrees in their four countries".[52] As Barblan points out, this process remained open to other European nations willing to join. This literature shows that a year later, thirty European countries convened in Bologna, Italy, to deliberate on the subject of complementary reform in their national academic practices. The thirty countries signed the Bologna Declaration, in which they agreed to the creation of a common European space of higher education by 2010.[53] It is inevitable that such regional groupings always settle for community action in their efforts to influence and improve the quality of education in the member states. Hence my stance that internationalisation has direct linkage to quality enhancement, and that quality assurance in most institutions is not just a national but also a regional (and even international) issue.

These examples of the European declarations and the AAU initiatives are typical of how regional and international bodies can influence signatory nations to steer educational change into common developments and to set up converging paths as far as evaluation and quality assessment are concerned. Such developments serve to illustrate the formidable forces of regionalisation and even internationalisation that can be exerted on nations in the name of solidarity and compliance. These groupings in turn affiliate and align with international agencies like the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). Thus local and regional agencies play a very influential role in mediating international perspectives of quality assurance in member institutions. As Lenn argues, "… traditional nationalistic modes of quality assurance, including institutional and programmatic accreditation, will inevitably give way to global forms of public protection and

[51] Barblan, A. (2001:3) International Quality Assurance: Paper presented at the CHEA 2001 Annual Conference in New Orleans, LA, 23 January

[52] Barblan, (2001:3) International Quality Assurance: Paper presented at the CHEA 2001 Annual Conference in New Orleans, LA, 23 January

[53] Barblan, (2001)) International Quality Assurance: Paper presented at the CHEA 2001 Annual Conference in New Orleans, LA, 23 January

educational quality".[54] This phenomenon is in keeping with the hyperglobalist theoretical argument that globalisation has the effect of overshadowing national identity and boundaries by imposing more powerful regional and national ethics and values.[55] If the logic of the hyperglobalist theory holds true, then the argument follows that all the other aspects of higher education, including curriculum reforms, accreditation procedures, evaluation processes and quality assurance do not remain insensitive to such forces; rather their nature and type are inevitably informed and shaped by these regional and international forces. While this may be so, and to varying extents in different institutions, it is also true that myriad other factors, such as state priorities and expectations of university functions as well as university culture, mediate whatever influence such globalisation factors have on the various processes of institutions. This chapter subscribes to the thesis that while individual institutions may be sensitive to some international practices in the process of shaping their policies on quality assurance, they still have a great deal of space to take their idiosyncratic needs and contextual factors into account. As Lim notes with regards to universities in developing countries, the quality assurance policies and practices borrowed from the developed countries must be modified to suit the conditions prevailing in developing countries, by being simple in design, modest in expectations, and realistic in requirements.[56]

It is within the context of globalisation and internationalisation highlighted above, and the resultant blurring of national identity and control, that the literature points to the strong influence the discourses exert on how institutions perceive knowledge, how they structure and transmit it, and the quality assurance systems that they strive to put in place for them to be competitive enough on the global higher education market.[57]

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[54] Lenn, 1996 in Strydom, A. H. et al (1996) *Quality Assurance in South Africa Higher Education: National and International Perspectives*, University of the Orange Free State, Bloemfontein

[55] Held, D. et al (1999).

[56] Lim, D. (1999:379) Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Developing Countries. In *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, Vol.24 (4) pp.379-390*

[57] Alterbach, P. and Ulrich, T. (2001) Internationalisation and Exchanges in a Globalised University. In *Journal of Studies in International Education, Vol. 5 (1*) pp.5-25

Enders, J. (2002) Higher education, Internationalisation and the Nation-State: Recent Developments and Challenges to Governance Theory. A paper prepared for the CHER Conference held in Vienna, Austria, 5-7 September 2002.

2.3.3 State-market forces and quality assurance

Reform in general and quality assurance systems in particular do not operate in isolation; rather they operate within and are responsive to a whole range of factors, values and orientations that inform the gamut of higher education reforms in a given context. Changes in higher education today seem to be affected by forces originating from three main sources – the state, the market (in society) and the culture of the higher education institution itself. As Maasen and Cloete put it, the role of a higher education institution today reflects the constellation of interests voiced by different interest groups.[58] This is particularly so given the increasing number of university stakeholders, often with competing interests in university affairs. The tension that exists between the varying interests of the state, the market and the institution itself has a bearing on the quality assurance systems that eventually prevail.

Depending on the context, the state provides much of the funding required by university institutions. As is more elaborately shown in Chapter 6 of this thesis, the state has the responsibility of negotiating public interests in and expectations of higher education institutions. Governments, therefore, demand efficiency, quality and accountability on the part of university institutions. Various forms of state steering mechanisms are revealed in the literature, and these affect institutions quite differently in terms of institutional autonomy and reforms pursued in the higher education system in general. The regulatory effect of the state varies from strict state control through interference, right up to arm's length steering or a supervisory role. As illustrated in Chapter 6 through the pre-1987 Taiwanese case, strict state control strips institutions of their academic freedom and autonomy to exercise their freedom of enquiry. Academic members of staff can neither express themselves freely as public intellectuals nor can they research and publish without being subjected to some censorship. Strict state control modes of co-ordination constrain the academic

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Arnold, D. (2001) Globalisation of Higher Education: What it means for India. Paper presented at roundtable on Internationalization of Higher Education in India Association of Indian Universities held in Karnataka, 26-28 February 2001.

[58] Maasen, P. and Cloete, N. (2002) Global reform trends in higher education: In Cloete, et al (eds) *Transformation in Higher Education: Global Pressures and Local Realities in South Africa*, Juta Company (Pvt) Ltd. Landsdowne

operations of universities and militate against the attainment of excellence. Arm's length steering involves the state steering the higher education system from behind, often by use of some incentive system. In such instances, institutions exercise some degree of autonomy and academic freedom, albeit within broad policy frameworks laid down by the state. In such cases institutions have a lot of space to develop their own systems to quality assure their practice. The role of the state is supervisory.

Market-related values uphold non-academic corporate management styles, commodification of education, profit maximisation and institutional efficiency which is believed to be brought about through tight competition between private and public providers of higher education.[59] The influence of the invasion of higher education by this market ideology is apparent in the adoption of intensive marketing strategies by universities. Higher education institutions that used to serve the public good now operate like corporate businesses in order to maximise income generation. From a market point of view, standards of excellence and issues of quality are approached from the perspective of labour market demands. Institutions compete for clients, strive to enrol as many students as possible, develop a variety of full-time and part-time courses, and strive to do more with less. All these practices have direct bearing on institutional quality delivery.

The major claim made in the literature regarding the encroachment of market discourses in higher education is that they undermine the public good of higher education by shifting the attention of universities from pertinent social issues of access, equity and quality towards profit maximisation, managerialism and efficiency. Market ideologies push for commercial interests that protect profits and not people, and they privilege corporate styles of management that concentrate decision- making power in the hands of managers and not academics.[60] Market ideologies encourage policies that promote economic efficiency through liberalisation and deregulation of national markets. In the process, as Rui argues, the market fails to safeguard the needs of those without money as it responds only with sensory equipment that can detect

[59] Maasen, P. and Cloete, N. (2002) Global reform trends in higher education: In Cloete, N. et al (eds.)*Transformation in Higher Education: Global Pressures and Local Realities in South Africa*, Juta Company (Pvt) Ltd. Landsdowne

[60] Yang, R. (2003) Globalisation and higher education development: A critical analysis. In *International Review of Education, Vol.49 (3-4) pp.270-286*

money and profits.[61] Because universities are run more and more like corporate enterprises, the market discourse influences an instrumental approach to quality assurance in higher education institutions. This approach begins by establishing a mission for the institution, followed by functions that have to be carried out to achieve this mission, with the objectives of each function being set out.[62] A quality assurance system is then introduced in order to ensure the quality of the programmes. While there is nothing wrong with working towards the achievement of organisational missions and objectives, Lim's argument is that this instrumental approach is too technicist to be meaningful in an educational organisation. Pursuit of such missions and objectives is done in such a managerialistic manner that deep-seated epistemic values of an institution are compromised. Besides, by adopting such an instrumental approach, the quality assurance activities of an institution seek to achieve the pre-stated aims and objectives of an institution and by so doing a somewhat narrow view of quality assurance is pursued.

It is worthwhile to note that the encroachment of market ideologies into higher education has resulted in academic units in universities operating as profit centres. Their success is very much judged in terms of their ability to generate funds for the institution. This practice has obvious implications for the type of programmes that academic units offer and the numbers they choose to enrol in order to meet certain financial targets. Thus, institutions become more preoccupied with quantity than with quality in their programme offerings.

Traditionally, universities have protected their role of knowledge generation and dissemination, a cherished academic autonomy and their ivory tower status. In this sense, universities are unique organisations by virtue of the unique nature of their work – to teach students and to advance human learning through production and dissemination of knowledge. The act of inquiry is central and pervasive for all institutions of higher education. Its realisation requires a necessary degree of autonomy, freedom and social responsibility, which must be granted to the intellectual

[61] Rui, Op cit p.272

[62] Lim, D. (1999:379) Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Developing Countries. In *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, Vol.24 (4) pp.379-390*

community involved.[63] Reforms and quality should be driven first and foremost by academic values, not by an economic rationale.

From the foregoing discussion on the influence of the state and the market, it is apparent that different institutions position themselves differently within this triangle of relationships. Perceptions of quality also vary from one institution to another, depending on the positioning of the institution within this complex field of relationships. The traditional features of the university outlined above are negotiated and renegotiated until eventually they assume the forms or nuances within which quality is embedded. In fact, the whole notion of quality is dynamic within an institution. To understand the quality assurance systems operating in any given context, therefore, calls for an understanding of the way an institution relates to the other two dimensions of state control and market influence at any given time. Where state control is so tight that it thwarts institutional academic autonomy, quality assurance systems tend to be externally driven, mandatory and based on outward accountability; institutional improvement is a secondary dimension. Market-oriented institutions perceive quality not from an academic point of view, but primarily from a fitness-for-purpose and customer satisfaction point of view. Institutional good practice is viewed in terms of meeting the skills and specialised knowledge called for by the job market. Quality assurance systems also tend to be accountability driven and the role of professional bodies is significant in both accreditation of programmes and curriculum reforms. In contexts where the state plays the role of arm's length steering and institutions have strong institutional cultures based on sound scholarship and research practices, universities exercise much autonomy in reform processes. The system of education is undergirded by a non-instrumentalist philosophy. Quality assurance is driven by academic concerns while peer reviews and improvement-oriented initiatives are characteristic features.

Debates on modes of co-ordination are significant because they show the varying conditions in which higher education institutions operate and how those contextual conditions influence the quality assurance systems that are developed by the

[63] Pullias and Wilbur, (1984:5) *Principles and Values for College and University Administration: Toward the Improvement of the Learning Environment*. New York, Philosophical Library.

institutions. The literature on quality assurance shows that there is no one model that can best suit all institutions in different countries; contextual factors are very critical when developing quality assurance systems and policies. The central issue is developing a quality assurance system that is effective in terms of improving institutional performance.

2.4 The stakeholder university and accountability

2.4.1 The nature of the stakeholder university

This section of the chapter explores the general theory of accountability and shows that quality assurance is a form of accountability. It shows that some forms of accountability are more effective in enhancing quality than others. It tries to show how the socially-embedded stakeholder university positions itself in relation to multi-stakeholder interests that may not only be different but also conflicting. Such relationships between the university and its stakeholders can both enhance as well as constrain quality assurance processes in an institution. The literature presents the relationship between a university and external stakeholders like the state as having great potential to usher in accountability-led quality assurance systems. This happens where the relationship is associated with stringent external reporting requirements on the part of the university.

External quality assurance systems are generally associated with accountability as their major preoccupation, while internal or self-evaluation systems aim at gradual improvement and enhancement of performance.[64] As the modern university moves more and more from an entrepreneurial institution towards what Jongbloed and Goedebuure call a stakeholder university,[65] greater accountability is called for on the part of the institution. A stakeholder university is an institution that identifies and

[64] Barnett, R. (1994) Power, Enlightenment and Quality Evaluation. In *European Journal of Education, Vol.29 (2) pp.165-179*

Luckett K. (2005) A Critical Policy Analysis of the Proposed National Quality Assurance System for South African Higher Education. In Smout, M. (ed) *The Decade Ahead: Challenges for Quality Assurance in South African Higher Education*, SAUVCA, Pretoria

[65] Jongbloed, B. and Goedegebuure, L. (2001) From the entrepreneurial university to the stakeholder university: A paper presented at the CHEPS International Conference of Universities and the Regional Development in the Knowledge Society, Bacelona, 12 – 14 November 2001.

establishes relationships with strategic partners like funding agencies, government, the business sector, research councils, foundations, charities and professional bodies. Ramirez prefers to call this type of university a socially-embedded as opposed to a buffered university.[66] It is also inevitable that the agendas and interests of these various constituencies are reflected in the business of the networked university. As Jongbloed and Goedegebuure note, "… a stakeholder university would intensify this [stakeholder involvement] by identifying its key constituencies and involve them more, also pro-actively in prioritizing its core activities."[67] Such universities have to be well-networked in the turbulent and unpredictable economies that have become so globalised. Being networked is in fact a deliberate strategy institutions adopt in order to survive in an environment where government subsidy is continually diminishing. Thus, "…relationships with employers, employers' organizations, and professional bodies will have to be mapped in order to find out which are the crucial ones and how much weight the university should attach to the various relationships."[68]

It is worth noting that the more a university succeeds in becoming a stakeholder institution, the more it is called upon to be accountable to an increasing number of external constituencies. The nature of such accountability is complicated since the institution has to take into account the different stakeholders' interests whenever it makes strategic choices and decisions.[69] Analysis of the theory of accountability shows that quality assurance is in fact one form of accountability. This assertion is premised on the fact that quality assurance always involves some kind of reporting lines. The difference lies in whether one is accountable to oneself, as a professional practitioner, guided by and conscious of one's professional ethics, or to some external authority within the institution or outside it. Modes of accountability, as well as the

[66] Ramirez, F.O. (2004) The rationalization of universities. In Marie-Laure, D. & Shalin-Anderson, K. (eds.) *Transnational Regulation*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press,

[67] Jongbloed and Goedegebuure, (2001:9) From the entrepreneurial university to the stakeholder university*:* A paper presented at the CHEPS International Conference of Universities and the Regional Development in the Knowledge Society, Bacelona, 12 – 14 November

[68] Jongbloed,B. and Goedegebuure, L. (2001:18) From the entrepreneurial university to the stakeholder university*:* A paper presented at the CHEPS International Conference of Universities and the Regional Development in the Knowledge Society, Bacelona, 12 – 14 November 2001

[69] Jongbloed,B. and Goedegebuure, L. (2001:10) From the entrepreneurial university to the stakeholder university: A paper presented at the CHEPS International Conference of Universities and the Regional Development in the Knowledge Society, Bacelona, 12 – 14 November 2001

consequences of such accountability, necessarily become varied in the networked, stakeholder university. A brief theoretical analysis of typologies of accountability common in corporate business set-ups helps clarify the nature and types of accountability that characterise the networked university.

2.4.2 Typologies of accountability

Corbett identifies four typologies of accountability – upward accountability, downward accountability, outward accountability and inward accountability.[70]

Upward accountability has legal and constitutional obligations. Managerial accountability by institutions directly to government or to agencies empowered by government to monitor quality assurance in institutions is typical of this type of accountability. The body to which an institution is obliged to be accountable is in turn accountable to and acts on behalf of society. It mediates the interests of society in the institution of the university and therefore has the legal mandate to see to it that acceptable measures of quality are maintained. Examples of agencies established through statutes are the General Medical Council and the Architects Registration Council in the United Kingdom (UK) and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). The 1991 White Paper issued by the UK's Department of Education and Science illustrates the rationale behind upward accountability in the UK:

> There is need for proper accountability for the substantial public funds invested in higher education. As part of this, students and employers need improved information about quality if the full benefit of increased competition is to be obtained … the Government considers that new arrangements for quality assurance in higher education will be required.[71]

Typically, upward accountability is political accountability. Vidovich and Slee describe it aptly as involving "… those who act on behalf of the electorate being

[70] Corbett (1992) cited in Vidovich and Slee (2001) Bringing universities to account? Exploring some global and local policy options: *Journal of Education Policy, Vol.16 (5) pp.431- 453*

[71] Department of Education and Science 1991:24 in Vidovich, R. and Slee, L. (2001: 437) Bringing universities to account? Exploring some global and local policy options: *In Journal of Education Policy, Vol.16 (5) pp.431- 453*

called to account for their stewardship".[72] Political accountability is generally associated with managerial accountability by institutions to government, and it has inherent shortcomings in so far as institutional improvement is concerned. It is primarily preoccupied with methodological issues employed by institutions and not with the actual teaching-learning processes that take place in the lecture room. It is not an institution-based initiative and staff does not have a sense of ownership of the quality assurance policies they implement. They feel that being required to respond to outside authority on the quality of their service undermines their professional credibility. A major weakness of upward accountability lies in the demand for too much paperwork on the part of staff in order to satisfy government requirements. Staff regard the paperwork just as a way of complying rather than as a self-improvement initiative. In Harvey's view, "External monitoring tends to be perceived, by teaching staff, as reinforcing managerialism and as compromising mutual trust".[73]

The second of Corbett's accountability typologies is downward accountability. It is based on a manager–subordinate relationship, where the manager has to be accountable to subordinates. The working relationships are democratic in that they facilitate employee participation in shaping quality assurance policies and practices in the organisation. Consensus is the hallmark for institutional progress. The manager's role is primarily to manage and to monitor systems put in place as a way of ensuring that they yield the desired results.

Outward accountability is Corbett's third type. In this type of accountability, the institution consults with, reports to and is responsive to the voices and interests of both clients and various stakeholders. In a networked university, personnel at various strategic levels of responsibility like presidents, deans, professors, research directors and quality assurance co-ordinators are in constant interaction with the relevant external constituencies and bring the outside values into the business life of the university. In Ball's terms, outward accountability approximates market

[72] Vidovich, L. and Slee, R. (2001: 432) Bringing universities to account? Exploring some global and local policy options: *Journal of Education Policy, Vol.16 (5) pp.431- 453*

[73] Harvey's (2002:246) Evaluation for what? In *Teaching in Higher Education, Vol.7 (3) 2002 pp 245-261*

accountability, where the institution has to fulfil customer contracts.[74] It is outward accountability that distinguishes the stakeholder university from the conventional traditional university that survives on public funding and is largely concerned with upward accountability. As universities enjoy less and less public funding, it is apparent that upward accountability (which is basically managerial accountability to government) gradually diminishes and creates more space for outward accountability, which becomes more and more complex as an increasing number of stakeholders participate in the business of institutions.

Corbett's fourth type is inward accountability, and it involves the personal conscience of institutional insiders in guiding their actions. Thus, staff actions are shaped and guided by their ethical consciousness to ensure that they conform to acceptable professional standards. In terms of quality assurance, such professional morals act as the watchdog protecting the interests of the client against poor service. This type of accountability, admittedly, calls for a very high degree of professional expertise and responsibility on the part of those who exercise it. It also has implications for staff and institutional autonomy. In terms of quality assurance, inward accountability is sometimes taken rather too far in terms of the autonomy to be exercised by academics. According to some of the literature, the approach entails leaving much responsibility to the individual academic, who is assumed to be always professional.[75] The individual's high degree of devotion towards the client and his/her professional expertise are the overriding professional ethic invoking the deep-seated conscience for internal accountability. As Enslin, Pendlebury, and Tjiattas argue, "… there is a supportable presumption that professionals are inner-directed, that they are motivated to do their work competently".[76] This assumption is also based on yet another premise, that professionals form a "company of equals or a republic of scholars who employ non-formal methods of regulation. Opinion, tradition, peer influence, powers of professional associations have significant influence on the conduct of

[74] Ball et al 1997 in Vidovich, L. and Slee, R. (2001:443). Bringing universities to account? Exploring some global and local policy options: *Journal of Education Policy, Vol.16 (5) pp.431- 453*

[75] Enslin, P., Pendlebury, S and Tjiattas, M. (2003) Knaves, knights and fools in the academy: bureaucratic control, social justice and academic work. In *Journal of Education, No. 31, pp.75-91*

[76] Enslin, P., Pendlebury, S and Tjiattas, M. (2003; 82) Knaves, knights and fools in the academy: bureaucratic control, social justice and academic work in *Journal of Education, No. 31, pp.75-91*

professionals".[77] In their view, "professional norms rather than bureaucratic rules govern their conduct".[78]

The problem with this approach to quality assurance is the very assumption on which it is based. While it is true that professionals may be guided by professional ethics, practice shows that this is not always the case, and no system can leave such important business as quality assurance to the whims of individual academics. Besides, quality assurance should have some degree of objectivity for it to gain public legitimacy. Quality assurance premised purely on such unregulated internal accountability is difficult to implement and justify.

Ball, Vincent, and Radnor give a parallel typology of accountability to Corbett's upward, downward, outward and inward accountability.[79] According to Ball *et al.*, accountability assumes two main forms – political and market. Political accountability involves institutions being accountable through elected representatives as well as through increasing direct links with the electorate.[80] In either case, quality assurance is an obligation that an institution has to meet for the benefit and to the satisfaction of the electorate. To this extent, the institution is a contrived social instrument meant to serve the purposes and needs of the electorate, and this assumption can indeed be problematic in some cases. Given that the electorate is not a homogeneous but a highly complex and differentiated entity, its needs and expectations of the university can be much contested, especially in contexts where there are social divisions. Such social schisms along ideological, racial and religious lines are very common in most societies. Thus, Ball *et al.*'s political accountability is the equivalent of Corbett's upward accountability.

Market accountability clearly equates Corbett's outward accountability and it primarily privileges customer satisfaction, with fitness for purpose as the dominant

[77] Enslin, P. et al (2003:83)

[78] Enslin, P. et al (2003:83)

[79] Ball et al (1997) Into confusion; LEAs, accountability and democracy. In *Journal of Education Policy, 12(3), 147-164*

[80] Vidovich, L. and Slee, R. (2001:432) Bringing universities to account? Exploring some global and local policy options: In *Journal of Education Policy, Vol.16 (5) pp.431- 453*

perception of quality. This discourse of market accountability was borrowed from the private sector and assumes that the application of private sector management techniques in higher education will increase efficiency and effectiveness.[81] Quality and quality assurance are viewed in terms of meeting the requirements and expectations of the client, as judged by the demands of the market.[82] The values and expectations of the market are mirrored in the policies and curriculum trends of an institution. The discourse of the market shapes both reform policies and benchmarking of standards. Quality assurance practices are also continually aligned with the dynamics of the market.

From the two accountability typologies offered by Corbett and Ball *et al.*, four distinct types of accountability emerge – professional, democratic, managerial and market accountability.[83] Professional accountability involves accountability to peers and can best be associated with peer review mechanisms, where institutional staff opt to be reviewed by their professional peers from the same institution as well as from other institutions. Democratic accountability is accorded to the community served by the institution, including the electorate. Managerial accountability simply refers to a university's reporting obligation to government and, to some extent, carries elements of political accountability. Finally, market accountability is an institution's response to the different voices of the clients it serves.

The main argument advanced by Corbett, Ball *et al.* and Vidovich and Slee is that, in any given institution, there are different lines of accountability that internal stakeholders have to observe and follow. The same argument also assumes that internal forms of accountability are preferable to employees of an organisation than external forms because they enhance institutional improvement better than outward and upward forms. The major shortcoming of these accountability discourses in terms

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[81] Salter, B. and Tapper, T. (2000) The politics of governance in higher education: the case of quality assurance. In *Political studies Vol. 48 pp.66-87*

82 See: Walsh, K. (1995*) Public service and market mechanisms. Competition, contracting and the new public management*. Basingstoke, Macmillan.

Sosteric, M., Gismondi, M. and Ratkovic, G. (1998) The University, Accountability, and Market Discipline in the late 1990s. In *Electronic Journal of Sociology, CAAP*,

[83] Vidovich, L. and Slee, R. (2001:432) Bringing universities to account? Exploring some global and local policy options: In *Journal of Education Policy, Vol.16 (5) pp.431- 453*

of providing understanding of what transpires in universities lies in the assumptions on which they are premised. Firstly, the assumption that if employees are accountable to external stakeholders their professional autonomy is eroded and they cannot bring about self-improvement does not seem to be accurate. Secondly, the argument treats accountability in a rather simplistic way, where employees in an organisation have only one line of accountability. In reality, it is often the case that people in an organisation have several lines of accountability. Thus, one's actions may be influenced by upward, outward and inward accountability. This is particularly true of quality assurance, where an academic has to be sensitive to the needs of students, to the expectations of the national agency, to the requirements of the head of the academic unit and also to one's inner professional ethics.

The literature on accountability gives insights into the power dynamics that shape quality assurance approaches in the case institutions. The different typologies of accountability discussed above are collapsed into two broad types that inform quality assurance policies and practices in university institutions – external and internal. While the two types of quality assurance are treated separately in the literature,[84] it is my view that a good quality assurance system should be based on a well- balanced blend of the two types. It is the contention of this chapter that upward (which is political or managerial) accountability and outward (or market) accountability give rise to external approaches to quality assurance which are mainly informed by forms of power other than epistemic. In this case, quality assurance is external in so far as policies and practices are developed, or heavily influenced from outside the institution and without any meaningful participation of institutional academic staff. In terms of accountability, the institution is answerable to an outside constituency[85] and is usually faced with a stringent reporting system that involves a great deal of paperwork on the part of the reporting academic community. Policies so externally developed have either the potential for rejection or are implemented in watered-down form by academic staff, as they normally do not have a sense of ownership and control of the

[84] See: Harvey, L. (2002) Evaluation for what? In *Teaching in higher education, Vol.7 (3) pp.245-261*

Harvey, L. (1996) External quality monitoring in the market place. A paper presented at the 18th annual EAIR forum "Higher education in the market place: strategies of survival and success" held in Budapest, Hungary, 25 – 28 August 1996.

[85] Barnett, R. (1994) Power, Enlightenment and quality evaluation. In *European Journal of Education, Vol. 29 (2) pp.165 -179*

initiatives. This approach to quality assurance is top-down; the motivating factor is nested outside the university and self-improvement is not the main preoccupation.

Inward or professional accountability gives rise to internal quality assurance, where quality assurance initiatives originate from within the institution, though not necessarily within the academic community. There is an internal motivation for self-improvement by the institution in order to attain self-set standards of scholarship. Where such an approach is developed and driven by management, accountability is inward[86] in so far as the institution is concerned but remains upward from the point of view of individual academics at the grassroots.

Inward accountability also entails a large measure of democratic accountability, as it should involve wide consultation and participation of the various elements within the academic community. The development of quality assurance policies, the setting of standards of performance, the laying down of performance benchmarks at both individual and institutional levels are all-inclusive processes in which everybody within the institution makes a significant input. If the quality assurance policy is developed organically, involving the academic community and framed around epistemic values, it has a greater chance of gaining support from staff. Academic staff cease to perceive the approach as being managerialistic and an unnecessary intrusion into their practice.

Functionally, the distinction between outward accountability and inward accountability is rather blurred and imaginary. The stakeholder university, while responsive to outward stakeholder expectations, should not necessarily have to be dictated to by stakeholders in terms of the quality assurance policies and processes it adopts. Indeed, the staff may be driven more by inward accountability, that is, an intrinsic professional sense of self-responsibility to meet perceived client expectations, not necessarily in order to maintain a strategic business foothold but mainly to observe a professional ethic.[87] Such a university is aware of and sensitive to the needs and expectations of its stakeholders and draws on its professional expertise

[86] Ibid

[87] Ibid.

to bring the institution to acceptable levels of scholarship. Quality assurance practices are meant to enhance gradual and systematic improvement towards the achievement of that goal, which is first and foremost pedagogical but ultimately aimed at meeting the needs and expectations of the stakeholders.

The discourses of accountability reviewed in the foregoing paragraphs bring to the fore two key issues that link accountability to quality assurance, namely external and internal approaches.

2.4.3 External or internal accountability

Externally-driven quality assurance is underpinned by quality assurance policies that are anchored in upward and managerial accountability values, particularly in terms of the reporting lines institutions have to observe, which are often mandatory and not optional. Institutions perceive quality from a value for money and fitness for purpose standpoint. Performance benchmarks are also pegged from the same position. On the other hand, internally-driven self-improvement quality assurance is characterised by self-enlightening evaluation, is informed by a sense of professionalism, addresses the teaching-learning interface of an institution, and bases its policies primarily on inward-professional accountability. This type of quality assurance necessarily prioritises "… a transformative approach to quality".[88]

There is tension between managerial accountability and professional accountability where the reporting lines are primarily internal to the institution. The former type of approach works on the assumption that external monitoring of quality will ultimately result in system improvement. As Harvey argues, such an underlying assumption may be wrong for the following reasons.[89] Firstly, faced with a top-down quality assurance and monitoring approach that demands upward accountability, academics may comply but only in such a way as to minimise disruption to existing practices. Secondly, where such accountability requires strategic plans and mission statements,

[88] Harvey, (1996:12) "External Quality Monitoring in the Market Place:" A paper presented at the 18th Annual EAIR Forum: Higher Education in the market place; strategies of success and survival, Budapest; Hungary.

[89] Harvey, (1996: 15)

as is usually the case in managerial accountability to governments, there may be an initial impetus towards quality improvement. The effect is very short-lived, however, and fails to yield sustainable quality improvement. Institutions implement quality assurance policies as routine rather than as a strategy for achieving excellence. There is a tendency by most institutions to become preoccupied with the development of "smart" policy documents like strategic plans and mission statements, which are not matched by equally "smart" implementation programmes. Policy implementation is often constrained by lack of political will and deployment of inadequate resources. Thirdly, it is apparent that academic staff generally associate upward accountability approaches with managerialism and interfering bureaucratic processes rather than with collegial efforts that are self-improvement-driven, that are sustainable and that benefit both students and staff. An inherent shortcoming of upward-accountability-led quality assurance mechanisms is that they have a strong likelihood of leading to what Harvey refers to as a "compliance culture"[90] in the long run.

External monitoring, in legitimating the status quo, "... fails to ask significant questions about the reality of the learning experience for students… [External] evaluators appear to be preoccupied with the method of evaluation, rather than with the substance".[91] They also carry with them the interests and values of the external authority who commissions them and to whom they are accountable. For this reason, many scholars on quality assurance subscribe to the view that any quality assurance mechanism that is external to a higher education institution cannot address the centrality of students' experiences.[92] External quality monitoring can only complement internal quality monitoring efforts; it can never stand alone and will never be able to replace valuable internal quality monitoring.The reality of external quality evaluation is that real evaluation of the nature of higher education is subsumed

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[90] Harvey, L. (1996:12) "External Quality Monitoring in the Market Place:" A paper presented at the 18th Annual EAIR Forum: Higher Education in the market place; strategies of success and survival, Budapest; Hungary, 25-28th August

[91] Harvey, L. (2002:245) Evaluation for what? In *Teaching in Higher Education, Vol.7 (3) 2002 pp 245-261*

[92] See Tam, (2001) Quality assurance policies in higher education in Hong Kong: In *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management;* Vol.21 (2) pp.215-222

Harvey, L. (2002) Evaluation for what? In *Teaching in Higher Education, Vol.7 (3) pp 245-261*

Barnett, (1994) Power, Enlightenment and Quality Evaluation. In *European Journal of Education, Vol.29 (2) pp.165-179*

by political imperatives and, despite the comprehensiveness of the purposes, significant questions are side-stepped.[93] Annan notes with regard to the effects of such approaches, "Not only do they [academics] face the added burden of responding to external scrutiny, there is also a feeling of being manipulated, of not being trusted or valued by managers and outside agencies".[94]

Institutional audits undertaken by national quality assurance agencies like the Quality Audit Division of the Higher Education Quality Council in Britain and primarily targeted at the extent and adequacy of quality assurance procedures within university institutions,[95] are cited here as a clear example of upward, managerial accountability. The effectiveness of such external quality assurance efforts in enhancing sustainable quality delivery remains questionable given that no attempt is made to assess either the teaching-learning process or the actual quality of the institutions. Woodhouse argues the same regarding the effectiveness of external quality assurance agencies in general: "… the auditor becomes a professional in this checking activity, rather than a specialist in the area being checked. When this occurs, it can quickly become the auditee's own self-monitoring system that is audited, not the real practices".[96] While the audits may very well show that institutions have sound quality assurance systems and policies in place, there is no indication of how the systems and policies are operationalised in order to yield desired standards of excellence. To this extent, it can be argued that external quality audits remain mere blueprints against which real institutional quality cannot be judged.

Studies on how academics perceive and interpret mandatory quality assurance and quality monitoring mechanisms are very scanty, particularly in the SADC context. Experience in the developed world can, however give clues on how academic staff

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[93] Harvey, L. (2002) Evaluation for what? in *Teaching in Higher Education, Vol.7 (3) 2002 pp 245-261*

[94] Annan, 1993 in Harvey, L. (1996:13) "External Quality Monitoring in the Market Place:" A paper presented at the 18th Annual EAIR Forum: Higher Education in the market place; strategies of success and survival, Budapest; Hungary.

[95] Harvey, L. (1996) "External Quality Monitoring in the Market Place:" A paper presented at the 18th Annual EAIR Forum: Higher Education in the market place; strategies of success and survival, Budapest; Hungary

[96] Woodhouse, D. (2002:22) External Quality Assurance: National and International aspects. In *South African Journal of Higher Education*, Vol.14 (2), pp. 20-27

generally feel about government accountability practices. An example of staff attitudes towards managerial accountability in the UK is captured by Vidovich and Slee: "… people just get plain irritated at having to fill in a whole lot of forms. A lot of disillusion among staff and not very good morale…. Most of the stuff that has been implemented is managerialism and not a quality system".[97]Any quality assurance system that is managerialistic, that is based on a strict reporting system and that has undue demand for paperwork is likely to be shunned by academic staff.

What is generally apparent from the literature, though, is that both systems are desirable in one context and in fact should work to complement rather than to counter each other. As Van Vught argues, quality assurance systems that only emphasise collegial peer review without reference to the needs of outside stakeholders like professional organisations, employers and other training organisations risk isolating higher education institutions from the rest of the world.[98] On the other hand, quality assurance systems that are limited to providing accountability to the state may not be taken seriously by the academic experts of the institutions.

While the argument above suggests a balance between these two broad systems, it is argued in this chapter that any quality assurance system in an institution aims first and foremost at improving the performance of the institution, that is enhancing quality delivery. To this extent, an analysis of the relative pay-offs of the different systems in respect of such quality performance is necessary before any system can decide which way to tilt the scale. Lategan argues that the general trend is that the overall responsibility of assessing quality is placed on the individual unit or sub-unit providing the education service.[99] Lategan's view suggests that real quality assurance can best be achieved by the very people who are at the cutting edge of institutional service delivery – lecturers who teach and assess students, academics who generate and disseminate knowledge through research. Thus, even internally developed quality assurance policies can be viewed negatively by academics if the latter do not actively

[97] Vidovich, R. and Slee, L. (2001:403) Bringing universities to account? Exploring some global and local policy options: In *Journal of Education Policy, Vol.16 (5) pp.431- 453*

[98] Van Vught, F. A. (1993) Towards a general model of quality assessment in higher education: Paper presented at the biennial conference of International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). Montreal, Canada, 24 – 28 May.

[99] Lategan (1999)

participate in the policy development process. Policy initiatives that are developed through a balanced combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches gain ownership from staff and stand more chance of success.

Although it is argued here that both external and internal quality assurance systems have advantages and disadvantages, Lategan's notion of self-improvement systems, premised on inward-professional accountability as the key towards institutional improvement, seems to offer a more attractive approach to quality assurance in higher education institutions. This is primarily because of two reasons – firstly that professional organisations cherish control over the conditions of their work (professional autonomy), and secondly that they also want control over the definition of the work they do (academic freedom). Based on these two premises, it is argued that centrally-controlled quality assurance systems, whether by the state or by institutional management, are managerialistic and bureaucratic and are not necessarily an effective way to enhance quality. This is particularly so if the systems are too prescriptive and rigid and stifle creativity and flexibility by individual institutions. More often than not, such mandated quality assurance systems lack support from institutional academic staff, who want to protect their autonomy and freedom of practice.

The general assumptions that underpin issues of academic freedom and ownership of initiatives in organisations are usually used as "social givens" in the explanation of phenomena. The empirical basis of such social givens with regard to quality assurance issues, particularly in the so-called peripheral universities[100] where quality assurance is allegedly "at a very early stage of acceptance",[101] is an issue that requires interrogation. In Altbach's view, "a combination of psychological dependence and the lack of necessary facilities" characterises peripheral universities.[102] My study is based on the assumption that most Southern African universities generally fall within the

[100] Altbach 1981 in Stetar (2000) Tensions between globalisation and nationalism in higher education: implications for quality assurance efforts." In *South African Journal of Higher Education Vol. 14 (2) pp.28-33*

[101] Jonathan (2000: 46)

[102] Altbach 1981: 603 in Stetar (2000: 30) Tensions between globalisation and nationalism in higher education: implications for quality assurance efforts." In *South African Journal of Higher Education Vol. 14 (2) pp.28-33*

peripheral area. It therefore assumes that quality assurance processes have not yet reached the advanced stage similar processes have reached in the developed institutions. There is a need for the development of contextually relevant and effective quality assurance systems that are in harmony with the available resources, institutional culture, the political scene and the prevailing institutional governance styles. What may be required from external agencies are broad policy frameworks within which the different institutions may exercise some flexibility and academic freedom as they develop their quality assurance systems. Very little research has been done in these institutions to ascertain exactly what works and what does not work in terms of quality assurance systems, be they mandatory or self-initiated. This study therefore analyses conditions that affect how institutions position themselves in relation to market forces on the one hand and the state on the other hand. How they respond to such environment-specific forces influences not only their perception of quality but also how they seek to enhance that quality. Given their sizes, historical legacies, stages of development, strategic priorities, political climate and the way these institutions position themselves in relation to the state and to the various significant stakeholders, what are the best options for effective quality assurance initiatives in university institutions within the Southern African context?

2.5 Trends in quality assurance

There is an apparent thrust by many universities in terms of quality assuring the academic programmes offered and the delivery processes of these programmes. Thus quality assurance activities involving the development of explicit quality assurance policies, the establishment of quality assurance structures (in the form of quality assurance offices or units and personnel) and the regular evaluation of institutional performance are common features of higher education systems in most parts of the world, Southern Africa included. These developments are taking place at institutional as well as at national level. Key features of such new developments at national level involve the establishment of national quality assurance agencies that monitor and promote quality in tertiary institutions through national regulating policy and regular site visits of institutions. There is strict control of the size, shape and structure of the higher education system by governments, with accreditation of institutions and their specific academic programmes playing a very significant role in controlling not only

the institutions but also the professional autonomy of academic staff in those institutions. Thus, an emerging trend in quality assurance in higher education in the Southern African region is the tendency for institutions to be accountable to external stakeholders for their performance. It is also apparent that within the framework of accountability, quality assurance in university institutions is perverted by state interests. As argued in Chapter 6 of this thesis, the prevalence of this bureaucratic interference in university business by the emerging "evaluative state"[103] has the potential to reduce quality assurance to outward accountability by university institutions.

2.6 The Southern African context

Trends in higher education tend more and more towards opening up the higher education market to a wider range of providers, increased provider competition and less institutional support and protection by the state. If this trend is true, it follows that the most successful institutions are those that approach quality assurance not so much as an externally-driven phenomenon (outward accountability) but as an internal initiative, developed and evolved by staff as professionals conscious of their professional obligations to their clients in particular and to the wider society in general. This typology of quality assurance is arguably self-improvement and equates to Vidovich and Slee's professional accountability. In most Southern African universities, characteristic practices include development of institutional quality assurance policies and practices by institutions, within the broad frameworks laid down by the state or some national quality assurance agency. These policies are manifest in the institutions' mission statements and in the university and faculties' quality assurance structures and procedures.[104] The experience of South Africa, explained below, shows how the development of quality assurance systems has been intricately interwoven with and heavily influenced by the historical legacies of the institutions in Southern Africa.

[103] Neave, G. (1998)

[104] Lim, D. (1999) Quality assurance in higher education in developing countries. In *Assessment and Evaluation in higher education, Vol.24 (4) pp.379-390.*

The South African higher education system is a case of interest in terms of quality assurance policy and practice. Higher education is generally characterised by an uneven quality assurance landscape with a range of unintegrated initiatives at national, provincial and institutional levels.[105] This scenario can be explained mainly in terms of the historical past of the country. The apartheid system of education gave rise to a wide variety of universities in terms of resource provision, student profiles, staffing and support for research. All these contextual factors were significant in constituting the historical antecedents that explain the current varied levels of scholarship in the different institutions in the country. In this context, it is clear that historically black university have had quality standards and quality assurance measures that were not only different from but also inferior to their historically white counterparts. In the absence of a unitary system of higher education, the quality assurance policies of these institutions were obviously not co-ordinated, nor were the contexts of the institutions similar.

In historically privileged institutions, a culture of excellence has always prevailed, albeit in the absence of any external form of accountability or even explicit institutional policies. Given the high level of professional expertise and infrastructural resources concentrated in these institutions, it can be argued that excellence was, among other factors, driven by inward (professional) accountability. The physical and human environment of these institutions was conducive to such high levels of scholarship by staff. Quality assurance developed and became an integral part of an institutional culture of good practice, associated with high student throughput, internationally reputable research output, access to resources, and the attraction of both international faculty and students. This happened in the absence of objective policies regulated by a central agency. The situation in the historically disadvantaged institutions was, however, very different. As Godden notes, "by contrast the historically black universities remained as they began, peripheral institutions with poor ratings on all these indices".[106] In a sense, these institutions also observed their

[105] DoE (1997)Education White Paper 3: *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* DoE, Pretoria

[106] Godden, J. (1992:36) A perspective from within the African National Congress on quality and equality in South African higher education. In *Quality and Equality in higher education, proceedings of the 1992 SAARDHE Congress(Bitzer,E. ed.) pp.35-85*

own form of quality assurance, which was different from that of their advantaged counterparts, because of the constraints of their contexts. Thus, there was a glaring gap in terms of the standards of excellence between the two types of institutions.

The challenge of post-apartheid higher education reform policy is to advance the historically disadvantaged universities without endangering the capacities and achievements of the historically white institutions. In Godden's terms, "… this means that resources should not be redistributed to the black universities in a way and to a degree which would impair the maintenance and development of the historically white universities".[107] In terms of quality assurance, the post-apartheid unitary system of higher education entails developing a common policy and a common understanding of quality for all the universities, based on values of equity, access and relevance. The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), a permanent committee of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), is charged with the responsibility of promoting quality assurance in the country's higher education institutions. As the national overseer and facilitator of quality assurance in higher education, the HEQC operates within the broad legislative and policy context that shapes and regulates the provision of higher education in South Africa.[108] In its efforts to promote quality, the legislative committee operates on the basis of an agreed framework underpinned by:

- formulation of criteria and procedures in consultation with higher education institutions;
- a formative notion of quality assurance, focused on improvement and development rather than punitive sanctions; and
- a mix of institutional self-evaluation and external independent assessment.[109]

In this arrangement, quality assurance is not only an institutional matter,

> … but an essential ingredient of an emerging new relationship between the government and Higher Education in which the former steers the overall mission and the goals of the Higher Education system through sets of

[107] Godden, J. (1992: 37)

[108] CHE, (2001:11) *Higher Education Quality Committee Founding Document*, CHE, Pretoria.

[109] Lategan, (1998: 65).

> incentives and more regular evaluation of institutions and programmes, rather than through detailed regulation and legislation.[110]

Such an overarching national policy should necessarily be concerned with addressing issues of quality in the institutions but at the same time allowing a high degree of flexibility in order to accommodate institutions that are at different levels of development, located in different social contexts and possibly with different missions. Despite the differences among the institutions, national policy should require them to develop their own comprehensive, transparent and well-co-ordinated quality assurance systems which are consistent with their mission statements and which should be known by the HEQC. It is on the basis of such institutional policies and procedures that occasional audits are made by the HEQC. What is significant about this system, at least in theory, is that the broad national framework allows institutions to take into account their unique situations in terms of their levels of development, their missions, their capacity and the available resources in the process of developing their own quality assurance practices and procedures. This argument maintains that the South African approach to quality assurance still remains what Lim refers to as instrumentalist.[111] Such an approach involves establishing a mission for the institution, followed by developing a quality assurance system with specific functions and objectives. The institutional quality arrangements are then evaluated and validated by an external agent. Because of the undue emphasis placed on external audits and the reporting requirements to a national agency, the South African quality assurance system remains basically external and managerial.

It is apparent that the major role of the HEQC is to audit and validate the quality assurance policies and procedures developed by institutions, and not to audit quality itself. As Pretorius notes, the auditing does not seek to measure the actual outcomes of the quality assurance arrangements of the institutions, but to validate the effectiveness of these arrangements.[112] This process remains largely bureaucratic and managerial, and may fall far short of addressing real quality delivery by institutions. Institutions

[110] NCHE 1996b: 107-108 in Lategan (1998:64).

[111] Lim, D. (1999) Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Developing Countries. In *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, Vol.24 (4) pp.379-390*

[112] Pretorius (2003: 131) Quality enhancement in higher education in South Africa: why a paradigm shift is necessary. In *South African Journal for Higher Education (SAJHE), Vol. 17(3) pp.129-136*

may be preoccupied with meeting the requirements in terms of putting in place the requisite policies and procedures but only at the expense of implementing measures and processes that may bring about real quality.

Drawing from the typologies of accountability discussed earlier, it is evident that South African higher education is in a state of flux in terms of quality assurance policies. Faced with the transformation discourse dominating overall national development policies, universities have had no option but to reposition themselves accordingly in terms of enrolment and staffing policies. In so far as it is a requirement for institutions to report on their staffing and student demographics, which are expected to move towards equity goals,[113] meeting institutional quality goals can be compromised by this accountability requirement. While there is even greater need for the historically advantaged universities to maintain quality service so as to remain internationally competitive, the large number of students now enrolled, and admittedly less capable of coping with the demands of high-level scholarship, places constraints on what the institutions can achieve in terms of quality performance. This is particularly so given the broad national conception of quality that embraces high student throughput rates. It seems clear that this factor poses a major challenge to all the institutions in terms of benchmarking standards of student performance and the development of institutional quality assurance policies.

The South African university is becoming an increasingly hybrid organisation, with both public and private elements featuring in the institution. On the one hand, in terms of developing quality assurance policies and practices, the institution faces pressure from the state through its steering mechanism and arguably from a value for money and fitness for purpose perception of quality. On the other hand, it also has to listen to the different voices of the increasing number of stakeholders whose main discourse is that of the marketplace, and they do not necessarily share common perceptions of quality. Thus, the challenges of a socially-embedded university manifest most profoundly at the interface of quality assurance. The various stakeholders have varied perceptions of quality and how it should be assured in a university. Their expectations of university education are not only different but may also be conflicting. Pressure

[113] Wits HEQC Self-Evaluation Report, (2006)

from all these dimensions constitutes significant external accountability that affects both the way quality is perceived and how institutions proceed to put in place their quality assurance procedures. To the extent that quality assurance processes are conducted under the auspices of some national agent, the quality assurance system is based on external accountability and, as Pretorius notes, runs the risk of being reductionistic.[114] There is a sense in which it can be argued that the evolving South African model of quality assurance in higher education is tending more towards an externally and compliance driven one than an internal and self-improvement model.

This chapter subscribes to the idea of a quality assurance system which is developed and monitored within the institution by academic staff, which is devoid of external accountability, and which is premised on self-improvement.[115] In this typology, the institution itself should be the locus of quality assurance policy development because it consists of academic expertise that cherishes academic freedom and autonomy. These are professionals whose view of quality has a transformation dimension and relates to the amount of value added to the student. The "professional-artistry paradigm" of quality assurance privileges institutional self-improvement.[116] This paradigm takes a contextualised approach to quality enhancement and places a heavy premium on the professional expertise and professional ethic of academic staff as the major motivating factors for institutional quality improvement. Such a quality assurance system is much more sustainable and enjoys ownership by the significant stakeholders operating at the cutting edge of the university system.

It sounds paradoxical, though, to advance an argument that places the whole responsibility for quality assurance on internal staff in a context where the university is socially embedded. Clearly, as state funding and control of universities decrease, the latter will increasingly enter into alliances and stronger relationships with more and more stakeholders in order to survive, and this has the potential to further

[114] Pretorius (2003:130) Quality enhancement in higher education in South Africa: why a paradigm shift is necessary: In *South African Journal for Higher Education (SAJHE), Vol. 17(3) pp.129-136*

[115] Letuka, L.J. (2000) The establishment of a quality assurance system for further and higher education and training in the Free State Region on self-evaluation. In *South African Journal of Higher Education, Vol. 14 (2) pp.112 –117*

[116] Einslin, P., Pendlebury, S. and Tjiattas, M. (2003) Knaves, knights and fools in the academy: bureaucratic control, social justice and academic work. In *Journal of Education, No. 31, pp.75-91*

entrench market-oriented external accountability. Such accountability also leaves institutions more and more prone to the influence of globalisation forces as the university stretches its stakeholder networks beyond the national boundaries, mainly in the form of partnerships and alliances. There is tension, therefore, between outward-market accountability from the world external to the university community and the professional-inward accountability cherished by academic staff in universities. Outward-market discourses are more inclined to fitness for purpose perceptions of quality and emphasise current market needs. University academics value the transformation perception of quality and seek to equip individuals with generic skills and knowledge that allow adaptation to any working demands. This tension makes it very difficult to develop a clear, coherent national policy on quality assurance in university institutions in South Africa. Drawing from the resource dependency theory, one could argue that the socially-embedded, stakeholder university still has room for overcoming the constraining effects of extra-organisational influence and privileging its own priorities in the process of decision making.

Discussion of the resource dependency theory as propounded by Pfeffer and Salancik is outside the scope of this thesis.[117] For the purpose of clarifying the argument of this chapter, only a few salient aspects of the theory with a bearing on the stakeholder university will be highlighted here. A major phenomenon of a socially-embedded, stakeholder university is that it engages in many exchanges and transactions with other groups and organisations. The exchange "may involve monetary, information, physical resources or social legitimacy".[118] This exchange process results in inevitable dependency by the university on external stakeholders who are sources of critical resources and who may have quite conflicting demands and expectations of the university. Thus, dependence on many stakeholders with conflicting demands is both constraining and limiting on the part of the university. Resource dependency theory argues that an organisation's vulnerability to extra-organisational influence is determined by the extent to which the organisation's critical exchanges (or resources) are controlled by relatively few organisations. The more sources of critical resources

[117] Pfeffer, J. and Salancik, G. R. (1978) *The external control of organizations: A resource dependency perspective*, Harper and Row, New York

[118] Pfeffer, J. and Salancik, G. R. (1978:43) *The external control of organizations: A resource dependency perspective*, Harper and Row, New York

for the focal institution, the less power any single one of those sources has to control and to manipulate the institution. As much as the presence of the various stakeholders may be felt in the university, their ultimate influence in the organisation's decision making will be minimal, hence their reduced control. Thus, by broadening its stakeholder base, a socially-embedded university can still be able to have space to craft its own policies, practices and culture of good practice with minimum constraining influence from outside. It is therefore neither ironical nor is it a misplaced argument that institutional staff can and should take full responsibility for quality assurance in a stakeholder university.

A significant point to note in debates on quality assurance in the South African higher education context is the challenge posed by the wide range of institutions in terms of meeting the overall national higher education reform goals. There are bound to be both inter- and intra-institutional differences in the way relationships with the market are defined, and this in turn has obvious implications on how quality assurance issues are perceived and handled. This complexity probably explains why quality assurance issues have remained so unco-ordinated and implicit in the universities. It is the submission of this argument that, given the varied nature of higher education institutions in South Africa, the adoption of a common quality assurance framework is not only problematic but indeed may also be undesirable. What seems critical, though, is the need for every institution to remain conscious of and to be fully committed to the overarching goals of national transformation and development, guided by some inward-professional accountability as they develop and institutionalise their quality assurance systems.

2.7 Theoretical framework

The main question pursued in this study is: **What is the nature of quality assurance policies and practices in selected universities in SADC countries, and what are the factors that shape these policies?** Important theoretical insights have emerged from the literature, with significant analytical implications for this study. The first concerns the internal-external dichotomy established in quality assurance debates. It appears that, analytically, the more emphasis placed on external features, the greater are the implications of the quality assurance system on issues of accountability; similarly, the more emphasis on internal features of the quality assurance system, the

higher is its significance for self-development. This is of considerable importance for understanding the logic underpinning quality assurance systems in so far as issues of institutional and programme quality improvement are concerned. Related to this is also the complex nature of what defines the internality and externality of a given quality assurance model. While attention has been given to the definition of these with reference to the institutional location of the mechanisms of quality assurance, the driving forces and the lines of accountability, which tend to establish an essentially artificial dichotomy, issues of ownership and stakeholder participation tend to be neglected. Having been excluded from the development of these systems, internal stakeholders have come to regard institutional or internal quality assurance systems as being "external" and as such ineffective for addressing self-development concerns.

The study also considers two additional assumptions. The first assumption is that, apart from being heavily influenced by global and international factors, contextual factors play a very central role in shaping quality assurance systems in particular and the general performance of the case institutions used in this study. Being socially embedded institutions, the studied universities are highly sensitive to the workings of their political economy. The second assumption is that while there are generic factors influencing the performance of the three institutions – such as globalisation, internationalisation and regionalisation forces; the demand for efficiency and effectiveness; institutional responsiveness; accountability discourses; and state–institution relationships – it is apparent that institutions respond to these compelling factors differently, depending on their historical legacies, their cultures and their specific economic and social environments. Thus, apart from similarities that exist among the three institutions in terms of policy and approach, there are also profound differences in the actual quality assurance practices. The contextual specificities of a given institution mediate the overall influence of global factors to give rise to quality assurance systems that are unique to each university.

There is an intricate relationship that exists between the studied institutions and their social, economic and political contexts. The environments within which the universities operate impact heavily on the effectiveness of quality assurance policy implementation and quality delivery by the universities. Institutional performance in general and quality assurance practices in particular can only be enhanced if political

and economic factors in the broader society provide a conducive environment. There is need to create an enabling environment if quality delivery is to be enhanced in university institutions within the region. While to a large extent these institutions are considered to be international, just like most universities elsewhere, their success in achieving academic excellence that makes them competitive enough on the continent and globally is heavily influenced by their contextual imperatives. This is what makes quality assurance a context-specific phenomenon in any university, although aspects of it may be informed by generic practices and trends in the global higher education market. Analysis of quality assurance practices of the case universities entails understanding the peculiar contextual factors of the individual institutions.

In addition, quality assurance systems can also be explained with reference to the purposes they serve in higher education. As Barnett has indicated, different quality assurance systems serve different purposes.[119] On the one hand they may serve the purpose of enhancing self-improvement, whilst on the other they may act as state-surveillance mechanisms and serve accountability purposes. Of significance to the analysis pursued in this dissertation is also the notion of power suggested by Luckett.[120] In her view, quality assurance systems are replete with power tensions and the "… dialogue structure is contoured by unequal power relationships".[121] In this regard, key questions that need to be asked in analysing any quality assurance system are: Who is in control of the evaluation? Who initiates it and who owns it? Is the ownership internal or external to the academic community"?[122] This study will use the notions of purpose and power tensions in analysing the quality assurance approaches used at the University of the Witwatersrand, the University of Botswana and the University of Zimbabwe, and the forces that shape them. Using these two notions as

[119] Barnett, R. (1994)

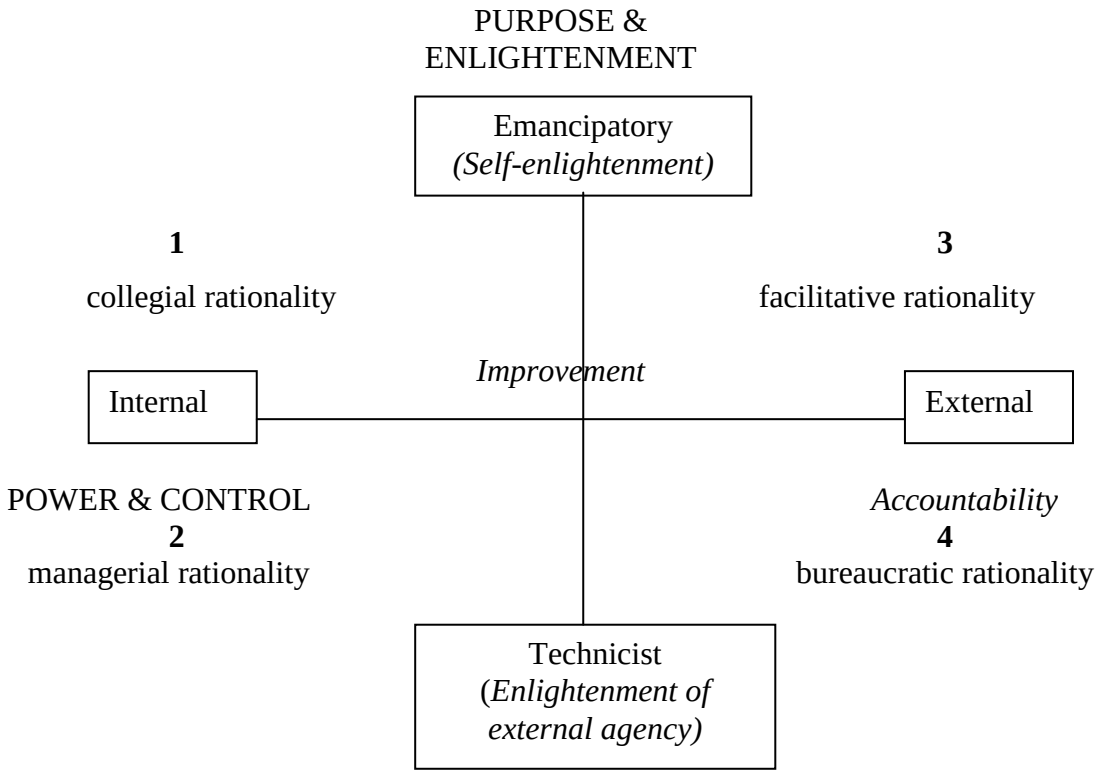
[120] Luckett, K. (2005:20) A critical policy analysis of the proposed national quality assurance system for South African higher education. In Smout, M. (ed) *The Decade Ahead: Challenges for Quality Assurance in South African Higher Education*. Pretoria: SAUVCA.

[121] Barnett, (1994:168) Power, Enlightenment and Quality Evaluation. In *European Journal of Education, Vol.29 (2) pp.165-179*

[122] Luckett, K. (2005:20) A critical policy analysis of the proposed national quality assurance system for South African higher education. In Smout, M. (ed) *The Decade Ahead: Challenges for Quality Assurance in South African Higher Education*. Pretoria: SAUVCA.

analytical lenses, an attempt will be made to show whether the systems are self-enlightening or accountability-driven.

In summary, the study considers two main analytical dimensions with reference to which the nature of any quality assurance system can be explained. The first of these dimensions is **the purpose** of a quality assurance system – whether it is self-enlightening in order to enhance self-improvement, or whether it enlightens external stakeholders so they understand better what happens in the institution. The second dimension has to do with **power dynamics** in the quality assurance system – whether the locus of power is internal to the institution, or whether it is located outside the institution. Such power is often defined by the reporting lines in the quality assurance system: is the university required to report its quality assurance arrangements to an outside agency or are the reporting lines internal? These reporting lines reflect who is in control of the whole quality assurance system, and to who the university is accountable in terms of its quality assurance arrangements. Power dynamics and control mechanisms often show who the key driver of the quality assurance system is. Figure 2.1 summarises the key features of the theoretical framework discussed in this section.



(Adapted from Luckett, 2005 and Barnett, 1994.)

Figure 2.1
Theoretical framework for analysing approaches to quality assurance

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the general trends in quality assurance in higher education, and established that debates on the subject place much emphasis on the external-internal nature of quality assurance system as the major determinant for effectiveness in enhancing institutional improvement. The literature also links external approaches with accountability rationales of quality assurance, while internal systems are seen to be collegial and self-enlightening. Thus, the locus of power in quality assurance systems is a key factor influencing how it is viewed in an institution, and how it is implemented by academic staff. The notion of power is used as an analytical tool to understand quality assurance systems in the three case universities.

The next chapter focuses on the methodology that I used to undertake the study.

Chapter 3

EXPLORING THE QUALITY DIMENSIONS OF DEVELOPING INSTITUTIONS

3.1 Introduction

Life is so full of choices, but some choices are better than others. To get to an intended destination, a traveller could choose to drive, cycle, walk or fly, depending on the distance to be travelled, the terrain and the available means. Thus, for everything we do we have to make choices and the best choice is always that which guarantees the achievement of planned goals.

This chapter gives the epistemological basis on which the entire study was premised. It explains the strategy that was employed in this study and argues that the design of the study, methods of data collection and data analysis techniques used were the most appropriate for addressing the question posed at the beginning of the study. The chapter explains the research design employed in the study and why it was considered appropriate, the rationale for selecting the cases used in the study, the data collection methods, measures that were taken in order to increase both the validity and reliability of the results, and how the data was analysed. It tries to show the authenticity of the data by describing in detail all the steps the researcher followed in the execution of the field study and the steps that were taken to increase validity and reliability of the results. Besides dealing with the methodological aspects of the study, one of the main messages the chapter portrays is that there is no "blueprint" methodology that applies to all studies of a similar nature; indeed each study has its own unique experiences and its own theory. The learning experiences derived from a study are therefore unique, especially in terms of the effectiveness of particular approaches, methodologies and instruments used.

3.2 The epistemological orientation of the study

The approach to this study was premised on my perceptions of the virtues of reality and truth and how they can be pursued. These perceptions have been influenced by extensive examination of the literature on the inductive approach to knowledge building, an epistemology which falls within the broad logic of grounded theory. In the inductive approach to inquiry, researchers observe first rather than make a hypothesis; they seek to discover patterns from those observations, and then develop propositions or theories from the data. The propositions are tentative and for one time and case,[123] rather than permanent universal applications. This is primarily because of the contextual nature of social phenomena and the multiple ways in which reality is constructed by individuals. Through engaging with literature, I have come to subscribe to Maykut and Morehouse's notion of reality as socio-psychological constructions that form a complex interconnected whole.[124] Thus, to understand such social reality requires an understanding of the context in which that reality is constructed, for the context constitutes a lens through which social senses perceive reality. In this study, I sought to understand quality assurance issues within the constituted world of the actors, as a collective and as individuals. Divergent opinions of individual subjects were as valuable as convergent group opinions. Of significance in the study was to establish why people held the opinions they did regarding the quality assurance policies and arrangements in their institutions.

My position on truth and reality, my belief on how the researcher should relate to that which should be known, and my conviction about the kind of data that should inform the knower's perception of reality influenced my development of a particular epistemology. Although I studied natural sciences at high school and at undergraduate level, and although I have worked in the dominant paradigm as a university lecturer, I have come to adopt an epistemology that is tilted more towards the alternate than the dominant paradigm; this study has utilised qualitative data more than quantitative. Thus, engaging with literature on ways of pursuing knowledge in general and on the

[123] Maykut and Morehouse, (1994:12) Beginning Qualitative Research: A Philosophical and Practical Guide; London, Falmer Press

[124] Ibid.

qualitative approach to knowledge in particular has generated in me an interest in qualitative methodologies of study.

3.3 The approach to the study

Although this study was mainly qualitative, some quantitative techniques of data collection and analysis were also used as a way of triangulating my data. According to Strauss and Corbin, qualitative study is "… any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification".[125] Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. For researchers, this means studying phenomena in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or integrate, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.[126] In my study I viewed qualitative study not just as lack of counting, but also as a perception of the world. It is a worldview that is under girded by certain postulates about the nature of truth and how it can be known. Such postulates provide "… bedrock on which to conduct research.… These postulates shape the way researchers approach problems, the methods they use to collect and analyze data, as well as the type of problems they choose to investigate".[127] The mere fact that our day-to-day activities are not separated from numbers and from counting warrants that there be room for including a quantitative dimension in qualitative studies. While I subscribe strongly to the postulates and basic tenets of the qualitative paradigm, I also believe that complementing qualitative with some quantitative data strengthens the results of a study as it makes sense to quantify the enumerable aspects of qualitative life. In fact, complementing qualitative studies with a quantitative dimension is not just a question of choice; often the social phenomena under investigation are predisposed to quantitative analysis as well. Thus, integrating the two approaches in a single study

[125] Strauss,A. and Corbin, J (1990:17) Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques. Newbury Park, Sage Publications.

[126] Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1998: 3) Entering the field of qualitative research. In Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (eds.) Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry (pp.1- 34). Thousand Oaks, SAGE Publications

[127] Maykut and Morehouse, (1994:10) Beginning Qualitative Research: A Philosophical and Practical Guide; London, Falmer Press

enables the researcher not only to triangulate data, but also to engage in multi-dimensional analysis of phenomena under investigation.

The qualitative approach (or alternate paradigm) was preferred for this study because of the nature of the inquiry that was being undertaken. The researcher meant to source people's ideas and opinions on the quality assurance policies and practices in their institutions. Quality and quality assurance systems, as they apply to an educational organisation, are perceived very differently by different people. In this study, I sought to understand the situation in the studied institutions as it is constructed by the participants, the product of how people interpret their world. I perceived quality assurance systems as social constructions which are premised on certain social values and which are necessarily affected by a multiplicity of factors within a given context. It was necessary to determine how the different players in each studied university "constructed their meaning" regarding quality assurance arrangements in place in their institutions. Thus, numbers alone would not take me to the bottom of participants' hearts for me to be able to arrive at "… an empathic understanding of the feelings, motives and thoughts behind actors' actions".[128] Understanding of such quality assurance systems entailed understanding the relevant socio-political environments of the studied institutions and this could be best done through talking with the communities of the institutions.

In the qualitative paradigm, forms of relationships between and among social phenomena are believed to be holographic (i.e. multi-dimensional) and not simply linear as is the case in the dominant paradigm.[129] It is important for the researcher to understand how the various factors in the field interplay and how the different stakeholders interact and interrelate in order to bring about particular patterns and processes. I could only achieve this by physically getting out to the field of study and interacting with people who shape pertinent quality assurance issues, listen to their interpretation of their practice and make sense of what prevails in their world in terms of quality assurance. To alter and distort one part of the holographic image is in fact to change the entire image. This means that to understand an aspect of higher education

[128] Bogden and Taylor, 1975 in Maykurt and Morehouse, (1994: 18), op. cit.

[129] Maykut and Morehouse, (1994), op.cit.

within a given context, one has to take into account a whole range of other dimensions to which that particular aspect relates – management style, resource base, communication channels, manpower levels, power relationships and staff motivation factors. Thus, in this study, I worked on the premise that reality in terms of the phenomenon under inquiry is multiple; it is perceived and interpreted differently by people in different contexts, and to some extent even by different people holding different positions and wielding different forms of power within an organisation. It is continually reconstructed, reshaped and reinterpreted by the dynamic social order of university communities. In seeking to understand how different stakeholders in an institution perceive quality university education, the researcher was handling a phenomenon of multiple realities based on different value systems. This has implications on the quality assurance approaches that are perceived to be appropriate enough to uphold that quality. Understanding institutions' quality assurance systems, therefore, entailed an understanding of actors' interpretations of the role of university education and how it should be assured of quality. My inquiry was strongly premised on the assumption that quality assurance in the selected universities is a context-specific phenomenon, that it cannot be separated from the context in which it occurs and can only be understood in context; hence my choice of the qualitative (or illuminative) approach.

3.4 The case study approach

3.4.1 Nature and strengths of the approach

This study utilised the case study approach because of the contextual nature of the phenomenon that I was investigating. As Yin put it, "… the major rationale for using this [case study design] is when your investigation must cover both a particular phenomenon and the context within which the phenomenon is occurring".[130] To allow for cross-comparison of contexts and to capture a wide enough spectrum of factors influencing quality assurance within the chosen region, I used a particular case study design commonly referred to in literature as a multi-case study approach.[131] This

[130] Yin, R. (1994:31) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (2nd ed.) London, SAGE

[131] See: Yin, R. (1994), op. cit. Maykut, P. and Morehouse, R. (1994), op. cit.

study explored the types of quality assurance systems in place in the case institutions and tried to establish how they were developed and how they operate in their particular contexts in order to bring about quality delivery. Thus each case institution is hypothesised to contain important variables deriving from its unique context that shape the quality assurance systems used in that institution. The boundaries between such quality assurance systems and the context are not clearly evident; the phenomenon that was under investigation is interwoven with the context in which it is operating because, in a sense, it is heavily influenced by the legacy of an institution. Since the researcher had particular interest in understanding the dynamics shaping quality assurance systems within the Southern African region in particular, the use of case institutions in different country contexts was considered the most appropriate approach to the study.

The strength of using the case study approach lay in its ability to allow in-depth analysis of the complex relationship that prevails between the quality assurance systems in place and how actors perceived them. The case study approach also allowed me to gain an appreciation of how different contexts influence quality assurance practices in institutions within the Southern African region. Thus, the case study approach gave me the opportunity to link particular forms of quality assurance practice to particular contextual factors and to institutional identities.

3.4.2 Selection of cases for study

In quantitative research the dominant sampling strategy is probability sampling, which depends on the selection of a random and representative sample in order to allow generalisations. In qualitative research, however, the main sampling technique is purposive sampling. Purposive sampling seeks information-rich cases which can be studied in depth.[132] The researcher deliberately selects cases that can provide rich information on a particular aspect or aspects, and this enhances deep understanding of issues being investigated.

Patton, M.Q. (1990) *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (2nd ed.) Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Babbie, E. (1992) *The practice of social research*, California, Wardsworth publishing company.

[132] Patton, M.Q. (1990), op. cit.

In this study, I selected three institutions from the Southern African region – the University of Botswana (UB), the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) and the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). Selection of these institutions was primarily purposive rather than random, and was based on the varied nature of the institutions in terms of their contexts and their assumed levels of development.[133] Hopkin refers to such contextual differences as "frame factors" and advances the hypothesis that institutions can be categorised on the basis of such frame factors.[134] Hopkin's frame factors include the population size of a country (which has subtle effects on supply of personnel), the size of the institution, the size of the national market, and the expectations of government and the society (which have implications for policy and practice in higher education institutions).[135] In terms of conceptualising, developing and implementing quality assurance measures, I also believe that other frame factors like quantity and quality of personnel in an institution do play a very significant role in shaping both quality assurance policy and practice. The way an institution relates to other significant external stakeholders like the state, professional bodies and the global higher education market also influences quality assurance policy and practice in an institution.

On the basis of frame factors, Hopkin attempts a classification of universities.[136] He identifies three categories of universities, namely mature, evolving and embryonic.[137] Based on this rationale, he proceeds to classify the University of Botswana as an embryonic institution, and historically advantaged South African universities like Wits, the University of the Orange Free State (UOFS), the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the University of Natal as evolving institutions. The University of Zimbabwe was classified by the researcher as being basically on the embryonic-

[133] Hopkin, A.G. (2003) "Frame Factors and Quality Assurance Agency in an 'Embryonic' Higher Education System": A paper presented at the Biennial Conference of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education (INQAAHE) in Dublin, 14 - 17 April 20003.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Hopkin, A.G. (2003), op. cit.

[137] Hopkin, A.G. (2003:3), op. cit.

evolving edge of the continuum, given the frame factors outlined by Hopkins, and a similar typology used by Lim.[138]

This study takes frame factors as a much broader spectrum of influential forces that are both internal and external to an institution. Thus, the three cases were perceived as being different in terms of the levels of development they have reached in instituting integrated quality assurance systems, institutional size, resource availability and their general socio-political environments. They were also perceived to have different identities that mainly derive from their unique historical legacies. It was assumed that the local societal needs and expectations of these institutions are different and this has a significant influence on how the institutions ultimately position themselves within their own economies and within the global higher education market. These variations formed the basis for the purposive sampling of the cases that were studied. It was hoped that these varied cases would provide rich information on the widest possible range of factors that impinge on quality assurance policies and practices within the Southern African developing context. As Maykut and Morehouse argue, purposive sampling also increases the likelihood that the variability common in any social phenomenon will be represented in the researcher's data.[139]

This study utilised the specific type of purposive sampling, which Patton, cited in Hoepfl, refers to as maximum variation sampling.[140] According to Lincoln and Guba, cited in Hoepfl, "…the most useful strategy for the naturalistic approach is maximum variation sampling".[141] This is a sampling strategy where cases with the widest possible variation in the studied attribute are deliberately chosen. Maximum variation sampling has the potential to yield detailed descriptions of each case, in addition to identifying shared patterns that cut across cases.[142] In choosing this sampling strategy, I aimed at capturing and describing the key factors that cut across all three

[138] See Lim, D. (1999) Quality assurance in higher education in developing countries. *In Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, Vol.24 (4) pp. 379-390*; Hopkin, A.G. (2003:4), op. cit.

[139] Maykut, P. and Morehouse, R. (1994), op. cit.

[140] Hoepfl. M.C. (1997:2) "Choosing Qualitative Research: A Primer for Technology Education Researchers." In *Journal of Technology Education,* Vol. 9 (1) pp. 15-21

[141] Hoepfl. M.C. (1997) "Choosing Qualitative Research: A Primer for Technology Education Researchers" in *Journal of Technology Education,* Vol. 9 (1) pp. 15-21

[142] Hoepfl. M.C. (1997:2), op. cit.

participating cases and, possibly, even other similar cases within the region that were not included in this study.

The shortcoming of this selection procedure in terms of the generalisability of the findings was understood in this study. Generalisation of results was neither the aim of the study nor a desirable outcome, given the contextual nature of the phenomena under investigation: quality assurance systems and procedures. The study was largely idiographic (it was concerned with the uniqueness of each particular case studied) and not nomothetic (concerned with the discovery of generalisations). My primary concern was to achieve deep understanding and explanation of quality assurance experiences in the case institutions, from the perspectives of the participants selected for the study, and to gain knowledge of how such experiences are influenced by international and local quality assurance perspectives. The study used selected participant institutions in different social contexts within the region as a way of understanding how people in such different institutions perceive quality assurance and the resultant mechanisms they put in place to assure quality education, taking into account their local demands and priorities on the one hand and international imperatives on quality assurance on the other. By so doing, the study aimed at creating an understanding of the key factors that help shape quality assurance systems in the studied universities.

Thus, the method of selecting institutions used in this study was different from the commonly used random sampling procedure which tries to achieve variation through the use of random selection and large sample size. In this study, the goal was not to build a random sample, but rather to select settings that represented the widest possible range of experiences on the phenomenon under study.

In line with the key tenets of the qualitative paradigm, the findings of my study can best be transferable to similar institutions, rather than generalised to institutions within the region. This is mainly because of the contextual nature of the case findings. Lincoln and Guba warn us about generalising findings of qualitative studies: "… the existence of local conditions makes it impossible to generalize".[143] According to

[143] Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1985:124) *Naturalistic inquiry.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Cronbach, "… when we give proper weight to local conditions, any generalization is a working hypothesis, not a conclusion".[144] The transferability of any findings from my case studies to other situations within the region depends on the degree of similarity between the original situation and the situation to which they are transferred and the specific aspect of the findings that is transferable. Referring to qualitative studies, especially case studies, Lincon and Guba point out that "… the researcher cannot specify the transferability of findings; he or she can only provide sufficient information that can then be used by the reader to determine whether the findings are applicable to the new situation".[145] Other scholars use different terminologies to refer to transferability of qualitative research findings. Stake calls it "naturalistic generalization",[146] Patton uses the term "extrapolation",[147] and Eisner calls it a form of "retrospective generalization"[148] that can allow one to understand the past and the future from current studies.

The perceptions of the various scholars highlighted in the foregoing paragraph clearly show the problematic nature of generalising findings of case studies. Thus, the choice of the design for my study was never preoccupied by the need for generalising findings. The main concern was to gain a deep understanding of forces that influence quality assurance practices in selected institutions that have significantly varied contexts within the region. I also settled for the case study approach because I wanted to cover contextual conditions which I believed to be pertinent to quality assurance.

3.5 Data collection plan and methods

3.5.1 Overview

[144] Cronbach, L.J. (1975:125) Beyond the two disciplines of scientific psychology. In *American Psychologist, Vol.30 (2), pp.116-127*

[145] Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1985:112), op. cit.

[146] Stake, R. E. (1978:6) The case study method in social inquiry. *Educational Researcher, vol.7 (2), pp. 5-8.*

[147] Patton, M.Q. (1990:489) *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (2nd ed.) Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

[148] Eisner, E.W. (1991:205) The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company

This study was designed in such a way that it could allow for the use of multiple sources of evidence. The findings of the study were based on three main pillars – the review of literature, documentary analysis and field study. The process of data collection was planned such that one method could guide the next process where a different method was employed. I started with a review of the literature, which provided insights on practices, contestations and trends in quality assurance. After reviewing the literature, I secured policy documents on quality assurance from the case institutions. These documents were carefully studied in order to understand institutional plans and expectations in terms of quality assurance. The documents also gave me some idea of the conception of quality held by various institutions, the specific areas to be quality assured, and criteria that are used in evaluating quality. Thus, before going into the field, I gained a tremendous amount of knowledge regarding what was going on in the institutions. This knowledge guided me in developing the survey instrument (questionnaire) and the interview guide that I used in the field.

Although this study was primarily qualitative, questionnaires were also used to collect baseline data. This stage immediately followed the analysis of documents and was primarily meant to map out the terrain before interviews were conducted. Thus, opinions of academic members of staff randomly selected from faculties in each case institution were sourced through the questionnaire. The data was analysed before interviews were conducted, and this also provided further guidance in terms of issues to focus on during interviews, and in some cases even targets for the interviews in some cases.

Interviews were conducted soon after preliminary analysis of survey data , and this was the main data collection method for the study. The interview visits were also used for informal discussions with various actors within an institution. These informal discussions were very fruitful as people were found to be more open in terms of giving their views in such informal encounters. During the site visits, I also made observations on some critical aspects of university quality delivery, like availability of facilities like computer laboratories, library facilities and staff office facilities. Thus, the data collection process which is illustrated in Figure 3.1 was planned in such a way that the various stages would feed into each other and allow for triangulation of data.

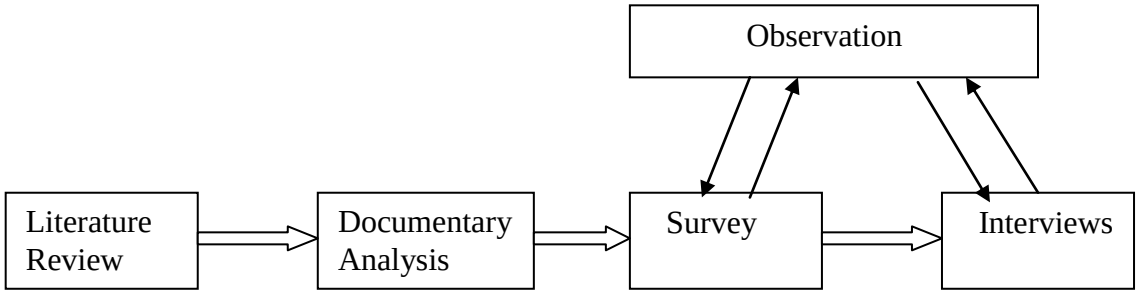


Figure 3.1
Data collection plan

These different stages are explained below to show how they contributed towards this study.

3.5.2 Literature review

In this study, literature was reviewed on international trends in terms of quality assurance policies and practices in university institutions, as well as more generally within the Southern African region. The review of literature gave me insights into the main debates and concerns in the area of quality assurance. An outstanding trend running through most of the debates is the highly contested nature of both quality and quality assurance in university institutions, in both developing and developed countries. I came to realise that quality assurance is not the responsibility of a university alone; in many ways it is also a shared responsibility between the academic communities and the increasing number of university stakeholders. This awareness guided my data collection, particularly during interviews with members of the academic community.

Engagement with the literature also revealed the importance of power dynamics in shaping quality assurance policy and practice in university institutions. With increasing stakeholder interest in university business, the nature of power relationships between the academy and external stakeholders is becoming more and more complicated. It became apparent during interviews that such power relationships

are replete with tensions, and have the potential to constrain as well as enhance quality assurance in institutions. Thus, a review of the literature helped me develop the conceptual framework used in this study, which is centred on power and control.

Through the literature review, I developed new perceptions regarding the whole issue of quality assurance in universities. While before this study, working as a university lecturer, I viewed quality assurance simply as a matter of management putting in place a system that had to be followed by academic units, after reviewing the relevant literature I came to believe that quality assurance processes are in fact a much more complicated phenomenon involving more than just management. I now view quality assurance as a constellation of multi-stakeholder power and interest which is very complicated to balance. Thus, apart from showing me trends in the field, the literature review helped me change my perceptions of quality assurance. This in turn helped me to refine my conceptual framework.

3.5.3 Documentary analysis

The second pillar of research evidence for this study was analysis of documents that mostly focused on institutional policies on quality assurance. Such documents were in the form of mission statements, strategic plans and explicit quality assurance policies that showed the focus of the institutions in terms of quality assurance. I also reviewed institutional evaluation reports that contained information pertinent to the quality delivery of the institutions. This pillar of the study design was meant to clarify policies that form the guiding frameworks for whatever quality assurance structures and practices there may be in an institution. Institutional policies also included explicit ways by which institutions show the emphasis placed on quality assurance. An important dimension of this pillar was the degree of congruence between policy text and policy in practice in the studied institutions. It was in this implementation process that the tensions that existed within the various actors were most felt.

3.5.4 Surveys

In each of the three cases, documentary analysis was immediately followed by a survey that was targeted at heads of department and other academic members of staff.

The survey was primarily meant to provide baseline data on what prevailed at institutions in terms of quality assurance and what opinions academic staff held on the subject. This data was very important in terms of guiding the focus of the subsequent interviews.

The survey instrument was deliberately closed-ended in order to encourage respondents to complete it. Open-ended questionnaires are generally shunned, and are associated with low return rates. Besides encouraging respondent participation, the questionnaires were made closed-ended because similar issues were going to be pursued through face-to-face interviews. Any respondents who felt strongly about expressing their opinions were provided that opportunity during the interviews, and the questionnaire had an item that specifically requested respondents to indicate their willingness to be interviewed.

At the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Botswana, all the faculties were covered, but only a limited number of schools and departments within faculties were sampled. However, the University of Zimbabwe is configured in such a way that there are as many as ten faculties, and not all of these faculties could be covered in the survey. Six faculties and several departments were randomly selected. In all the three cases, heads of the sampled schools or departments were targeted, over and above other academic members of staff who were randomly sampled from the same academic units. Survey data was analysed prior to conducting interviews, and this provided tremendous guidance to the interview process.

3.5.5 Interviews

3.4.5.1 Advantages of interviews

Structured interviews were conducted with administration personnel responsible for driving and monitoring quality assurance. Similar interviews were also conducted with academic members of staff, heads of departments and chairpersons of departmental or faculty quality assurance committees, depending on the specific arrangements of the institution (See appendix 4 for the interview sample). The interview approach was designed in such a way that a diversity of voices of the

various stakeholders that directly deal with quality assurance issues would be captured. Among these stakeholders were deans or deputy deans of selected faculties. These were the people who dealt with quality assurance issues at faculty level. They knew systemic policies that were supposed to guide faculties in developing quality assurance strategies. In cases where there was a quality assurance co-ordinator, as is the case at the University of the Witwatersrand, interviews were also conducted with that individual in order to get information on the factors that influence quality assurance policies at systemic level.

These qualitative interviews with various stakeholders were primarily meant to get the views of the relevant people on their perceptions of quality assurance practices in their institutions – the systems in place, how they were developed, how they are implemented and the constraints encountered. The views and opinions of these people helped to show not only the extent to which individuals in an institution hold common or diverse perceptions on quality assurance, but also the extent to which they have or lack ownership of the systems in place.

In this study, interviews were considered the most appropriate method because of the nature of data that I needed in order to address the question I was pursuing – that is, the nature of quality assurance policies in the institutions. Given that policy is both text and practice, it was necessary for me, after perusing the policy documents, to get actors' opinions on the policies they were implementing. This was important as it gave me insiders' interpretations of the text policy. The best way of getting that kind of information was through interviews, as these allowed me an opportunity to probe issues raised by respondents. The kind of data I needed was mainly qualitative, data based on how individuals interpreted and constructed reality in their specific contexts. It was on the basis of such interpreted data that I reinterpreted the reality, the nature of quality assurance policies in the case institutions. In a qualitative study, the researcher is interested not only in the physical events and behaviour taking place, but also in how participants in the study make sense of these, and how their understandings influence their behaviour.[149] This is what made interviews central to my study, getting

[149] Maxwell, J.A. (1997:75) Designing qualitative study. In Bickman L & Rog D. J, *Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods,* London: Sage Publications

to understand respondents' perspectives of their reality. I considered this perspectival approach as fundamental to the understanding of social phenomena influencing actors' behaviour in terms of quality assurance. As literature confirms, the perspectives on events and actions held by the people involved in them are not simply their accounts of these events and actions, to be assessed in terms of truth or falsity; they are part of the reality that one seeks to understand as a researcher.[150] Apart from what interviewees actually said, the interviews enabled me to "hidden" information by interpreting the non-verbal cues emitted by respondents on their personal opinions on the effectiveness of such approaches. The interviews also enabled me to "read between the lines" and get the meaning of what respondents implied from how they responded to certain questions, something that I could never have achieved through any other research method. Another important strength of interviews was that they enabled me to get meaning from some of my respondents' silent voices. Having read through the policy documents and having analysed survey data, there were certain issues and concerns I expected respondents to raise during the interview. When this did not happen, in spite of having asked questions that sought to elicit such responses, it prompted me to seek the meaning behind such silent voices.

The uniqueness of interviews lies in the opportunity they provide for the researcher to employ a multi-sensory approach to obtain meaning from the verbal responses of subjects. During interviews with various stakeholders in the universities, I could listen to their words, I could see their facial expressions and I could even feel their emotions on certain aspects regarding certain quality assurance processes in the institutions. All these were significant actions that I interpreted in order to get valuable meanings. A major strength of interviews was that they enabled me to get at processes that led to the quality assurance policies and mechanisms in the studied institutions. Various interviewed stakeholders gave their own construction of those policy processes and how that influenced their practice.

3.5.5.2 The challenges of interviewing

[150] Maxwell, J. A. (1997), op. cit; Menzel H. (1978) Meaning: Who needs it? In Brenner M., Marsh P. & Brenner, M. (Eds.), *The social contexts of method*. New York, St. Martin's

While interviews were the best method of eliciting the kind of data I wanted in order to address my research question, there were many challenges associated with the approach. Throughout my study, there were certain procedural issues that proved very critical to observe if the method was to yield the desired results. An important lesson I learned through the experience was the fact that, in interviews, one is dealing with social beings who operate in a social setting which often has profound influence on how they understand certain phenomena and on how they behave. It occurred to me during my interview visits that collecting research data from people is different from collecting loaves of bread from a baker's shop. Data cannot just be "lifted" from the field, like physical objects; rather it can only be arrived at through a carefully negotiated social process. I wish to share with colleagues who read my work some of the caveats I discovered through fieldwork experience on how to maximise the benefits of interviews as a data collection strategy.

When interviewing, the researcher has to create the right interview climate. With the benefit of hindsight, I now concur with Maykut and Morehouse, who argue that the responsibility for establishing and maintaining a positive interviewing climate rests with the interviewer, and that the quality of the information obtained during an interview is also largely dependent on the interviewer.[151] First and foremost, it is not only necessary for the researcher to make appointments with the respondents; it is equally important to be prompt for the interview appointments. Making appointments allows the respondent to set aside time for the interview and to give the commitment the exercise deserves. Most of my respondents preferred to have some idea of the issues that were to be covered during interview well in advance, and I found it convenient to email that information to them. Before the interview, it is necessary to ensure that all the equipment needed during the interview is ready. The recorder, the batteries, the mini-cassettes, the schedule of questions and even note-taking equipment should always be checked before the interview commences. Simple things like inserting the cassette in the recorder and testing it to ensure that it actually runs proved very essential pre-interview preparations. Little technical hitches can cause

[151] Maykut, P. and Morehouse, R. (1994:98) *Beginning Qualitative Research: A Philosophical and Practical Guide;* London, Falmer Press.

tremendous harm to the whole interview process and have the potential to reduce the quality of the data.

At the beginning of the interview, I always greeted my respondents and formally introduced myself, usually with a smile on my face. This I considered to be an important aspect of setting the right social climate for the interview. It is always important to spell out the purpose of the interview and to assure respondents of anonymity. This makes respondents feel free and keen to give information on issues that are considered sensitive. Although I indicated the probably duration of the interviews when I made the initial appointments by phone, I found it necessary to remind respondents of the planned duration of the interview at the beginning. There are respondents who also prefer to speak off the record, hence the need to request permission to tape record the interview before switching on the recorder. In my study, I made sure that I sought this permission; where interviewees expressed reservations about tape recording, I had to rely on taking written notes. The advantage of tape recording interviews was that I could concentrate on asking questions and probing issues in order to get deeper information, and I could capture every word uttered by the subjects.

It occurred to me that the researcher has to play the role of a referee during the course of the interview, for there are respondents who can easily be carried away by the interview and proceed to provide information that is not asked for. While respondents should be accorded some degree of freedom, the interviewer has to bring them back on course so that the interview does not go out of topic. To do this I always found it necessary to keep in sight the main object of the interview and to internalise my guiding questions, in their correct sequence, so as to avoid unnecessary repetition. The main idea is for the researcher to direct the whole interview process in such a way that the goals of the interview are achieved, for, essentially, an interview is a conversation with a purpose. Although unanticipated information may sometimes be relevant, it is critical to ensure that the main purpose of the interview is achieved. Notwithstanding the importance of covering all the planned questions, it is important for the interviewer to accommodate unanticipated but valid questions that are triggered by some responses during the interview.

It may be necessary to motivate the respondent during interview, so as to keep the conversation both exciting and enjoyable. With most of my subjects, I found paying attention to their talk, maintaining eye contact, probing their responses and even nodding quite effective in motivating them. They would always feel very enthusiastic about the interview and sometimes I would notice how emotional they felt about some of the issues under discussion. I was also mindful of time during interview, since I was dealing with people who work on busy schedules. I would always try to keep within the promised time, although sometimes some respondents showed that they could do better with a little more time, and of course I always exploited such opportunities.

Interviews, as social encounters, should be terminated formally. An interview conversation should be terminated in a socially appropriate way. I adopted a common way of terminating my interviews – thanking the respondents for availing themselves for the interview and for providing valuable information. I switched off my recorder soon after the formal termination. Interestingly, it was after such termination that some subjects gave what was at the bottom of their hearts regarding some practices in their institutions. This is what made it particularly necessary for me to sit down soon after each interview to make additional notes and to reflect on the interview.

3.5.6 Observations

In this study direct observation was used as another strategy of gathering data, though to a very limited extent. Observations in qualitative studies are usually associated with participant observation where the researcher "…actually participates in the events being studied".[152] The main advantage of participant observation is the ability to understand and perceive reality from the point of view of an insider rather than an outsider.[153] In this study, I did not opt for this kind of observation because of time constraints. My visits to the case study sites were too brief to allow for participant observation which normally takes a long time, in most cases several years, for the

[152] Yin, R. K. (1994:87) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (2nd ed.) London, SAGE

153 Borg, W. R. and Gall, M. D. (1983) *Educational Research: An introduction*. 4th edition, New York, Longman.

researcher to negotiate his or her way into the field of study. Besides the short visits to the sites, I had limited time within which to complete my study.

Given these conditions, the best type of observation I used during my site visits is direct observation. It was possible for me to maximise the benefits of my visits to case sites by observing environmental conditions that had a direct bearing on quality teaching and quality learning. Observable physical infrastructure like computer facilities in laboratories and staff offices, telephones, the condition of lecture rooms, office space for staff and library stocks were observed informally during my interview visits. On one of my visits to one of the case institutions, I still recall, very vividly, how students jostled for public transport at the end of the day, how they scrounged for resources in the library, and the absence of the jovial and vibrant student mood that characterised the university climate in the 1980s and early 1990s. I equally recall the lunch that I shared as I chatted with students in one of the university student canteens. It was possible for me on some occasions to picture the general social climate prevailing on campus and to relate it to a particular type of quality delivery at the institution.

This type of "observable data" was very significant in terms of enhancing my understanding of factors influencing quality in the institution. Observations alone enabled me to "see" different climates at the different institutions, and these still stand quite vividly in my mind long after encountering the situations.

3.6 Validity and reliability of research data

One of the criticisms of qualitative studies is that they are weak when it comes to validating research data.[154] The challenge for qualitative researchers is how to convince readers that they should believe the results of their study and the conclusions they draw. In planning this study, enough care was taken to ensure that this important concern was taken care of. The study was planned in such a way that I used multiple sources of evidence. Data on particular aspects under investigation were gathered

[154] See Verma, G. K. and Mallick, K. (1999) *Research in Education: Perspectives and Techniques*, Palmer Press, London

Best, J. W. and Kahn, J. V. (1993) *Research in Education*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston.

using more than one method so that there were converging lines of inquiry. Such convergence of evidence formed an important aspect of data triangulation in the study. With triangulation, the potential problems of construct validity can also be addressed, because the multiple sources of evidence essentially provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon.[155] To give an example of such data triangulation in the study, one of the policy issues I pursued was staff participation in policy development. I searched policy documents for evidence on this aspect; I collected data on the same aspect through surveys and interviews. Ultimately, data on staff participation in policy development was corroborated from these three different sources. This type of data triangulation was done throughout the study on many other dimensions of quality assurance that I was investigating, like teaching and learning facilities, class size, staff qualifications and experience, teaching loads, quality of programmes and research output.

Apart from relying on multiple sources of evidence, the other strategy employed in the study in order to improve validity was to establish more than one bit of evidence on an issue under investigation. Such reliance on a chain of evidence on a particular aspect of research is one recommended way of increasing the validity of qualitative studies. Again, an example can be cited of how of how this strategy was used in my study, where I explored the dimension of academic programme quality. My interest was to establish how institutions assure that they develop and offer academic programmes of high quality that are internationally competitive. Related to this aspect I collected evidence on the contribution of external experts like peer reviewers, professional bodies and national quality assurance agencies, where there were any. I also collected evidence on how programmes were accredited, on how academic staff collaborated with peers in other universities, and how departments benchmarked their quality standards in respect of programme offerings. Data on all these aspects were mostly collected through interviews and provided a chain of evidence on the quality assurance of academic programmes. Thus, on the basis of the two main strategies – use of multiple sources of evidence and establishing a chain of evidence on an aspect under investigation – I believe my results are very firm and valid and I have confidence in the conclusions that I arrived at in this study.

[155] Yin, R. K. (1994: 92), op. cit.

Apart from validity, the other important criterion for measuring the quality of a case study is the reliability of the measures used. As Neuman contends, "… reliability and validity are salient in social research because constructs in social theory are often ambiguous, diffuse, and not directly observable".[156] This is particularly true with quality assurance issues, where certain constructs or indicators have to be used to denote particular measures of quality. The challenge, then, was to devise dependable indicators to work with, so that if the study was to be repeated in the same context some consistency should prevail in terms of the results. The best way I could handle this was to clearly conceptualise the quality constructs that I needed to investigate and to devise specific questions to ask about them. For example, in trying to establish how academic staff identified with the quality assurance policy implemented in their institution, I had to ask staff members how they participated in the policy process, where they thought the policy came from, and what opinions they held about the effectiveness of the policy. Admittedly, it is impossible to achieve perfect reliability in measuring social constructs; one can only strive to increase the reliability of whatever measures are used and this is what I attempted to do in this study.

3.7 Making sense of field data

The essence of doing fieldwork in research is to collect data that becomes adequate evidence for whatever claims the researcher makes about reality in the field. This is only possible by putting the data into some order, classifying it into categories, and making it speak to the senses of the researcher. Unlike in many studies, where all data has to be collected before analysis can commence, in this study I started data analysis during fieldwork. As the data collection plan in Figure 3.1 shows, stage-by-stage analysis during data collection guided subsequent data collection processes. I found it beneficial to collect the next chunk of data after gaining a reasonable amount of insight on what had emerged from previously collected data. This was the whole rationale on which my data collection plan was based. I also found reviewing one day's interviews before setting on to the next day's interviews quite a worthwhile exercise as it provided me with an opportunity to identify weaknesses and to plan for

[156] Neuman, W. L. (1997:138) *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* Boston and London: Allyn and Bacon.

improvement in subsequent interviews, before the data collection process was over. This type of review consisted mainly of listening to the interview tape and taking note of issues of interest, the weaknesses of the interview and responses requiring more detail.

In analysing qualitative data, I looked for patterns emerging in the responses. I found it useful to use cross-case analysis, since I was dealing with a multi-case design. Cross-case analysis typically involves an examination of more than one case.[157] Huberman and Miles identify two strategies for cross-case analysis – variable-oriented and case-oriented analysis.[158] The former type of analysis involves describing or explaining a particular variable, possibly cutting through all or some of the cases under study. The latter type is an analysis that aims to understand a particular case or several cases by looking closely at the details of each.[159] In the analysis of my research data, I used elements of both forms of cross-case analysis. I arranged the data into conceptual categories and created themes. I analysed data for the first case along identified themes, making descriptions and explanations of pertinent patterns emerging. This enabled me to gain understanding of each case in detail before doing cross-case analysis. I then turned to the next cases and paid particular attention to the variables that appeared to be dominant in the first case, at the same time also noting new variables that were unique to each case. Thus, the subsequent cases had variables that were similar to those identified in the first case, but they also displayed their own unique variables that were different from the first case. These unique variables encouraged me to explore why some cases reflected one pattern while others reflected another. This kind of exploration shed a great deal of light on the uniqueness of institutions, an important contextual factor pertinent to quality assurance practices in an institution. By using case-oriented analysis, I managed to gain a deep understanding of the critical quality assurance factors of each of the studied cases, while variable-oriented analysis enabled me to do case comparisons on particular variables and patterns. This allowed my study to capture a wide spectrum of contextual factors influencing quality assurance policies and practices in the selected

[157] Babbie, E. (2005:388) *The basics of social research*,(3rd ed.), Toronto: Thomson Wadsworth

[158] Huberman, A. M. and Miles, M. B. (1994: 435) Data management and analysis methods. In Denzin, K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (eds.) *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

[159] Babbie, E. (2005: 389), op. cit.

universities, the very rationale on which my choice of the multi-case study design was based.

The quantitative data, which was mostly collected through surveys, was analysed using computer packages, mainly SPSS and Excel. Percentages, graphs and cross-tabulation of variables were used to analyse and present the data. This quantitative data was mainly used for corroborating interview and documentary data.

3.8 Challenges encountered during the study

Empirical studies always involve visiting the research sites, usually several times. In multi-case studies like mine, where the sites were located in three different countries, such visits needed extremely careful planning, both in terms of the logistics as well as in terms of finances. There were many challenges that I met in planning my study visits to ensure that I got the most out of them. The first challenge was getting respondents to confirm appointments in advance of my field visits so that I could budget my time. The second was getting subjects to stick to confirmed appointments when I got to the field. I found balancing the two aspects quite a challenge as it meant getting to the study site as early as 7.00 a.m. and spending the whole day, sometimes without a break, doing my research. There were times when I had to accept appointments that were scheduled after hours and at venues away from the university campus. I had no car, I was a stranger in the country, but because I wanted the data and I needed to operate within my limited timeframe, I had to do it.

One of the main challenges I confronted at all three sites had to do with the management of surveys. Having randomly selected the survey sample using internal staff directories, I had to locate my research targets in their respective faculties and departments. To do this, the protocol of going through faculty deans became very necessary since the latter would assist in enforcing co-operation from their staff. The distribution of questionnaires to academic staff taught me that different institutions, and sometimes different faculties within the same institution, have different cultures of operating and it was necessary to follow the right culture in each case. In some cases, the deans simply asked their secretaries to take care of the distribution of questionnaires to relevant members of staff, through an internal mailing system. In

other cases such internal systems were just not efficient and the deans preferred that I visit the individual subjects on my own. In either case, it became necessary at some point for me to follow up some of the questionnaires with respondents. While this was not an easy task, I found it to be worthwhile, as talking directly to the respondents made a difference in terms of the return rate of the surveys. In two of my case studies, I had to engage research assistants who were full-time undergraduate students to follow-up my surveys. This was done at some cost, but it helped because they followed up over a prolonged period of time, and then I would collect the surveys from a central office on my subsequent visit. Generally, the return rate of the questionnaires from staff was very poor in all the three institutions, and this is one of the major limitations of the study.

In terms of interviews, as indicated above the main challenge had to do with making appointments with respondents before I made visits. This entailed phoning or emailing them from my office. It took some of them a long time to respond and confirm the appointments. During each visit, which normally lasted one week, I tried to accommodate as many interviews as possible, hence the need for timely confirmation of appointments. In my bid to cover much, sometimes I ran into the pitfall of slotting too many interviews in a single day, with very short time intervals in between. I realised this to be a weakness as it did not allow me enough time to change my cassettes and to reflect on the just-completed interview before I moved on to the next one. The other challenge was that of respondents who forgot appointments and failed to arrive at the interview location. I had to phone them and reschedule the appointments, and this was one reason why I sometimes had too many interviews to handle in a single day.

In the evenings when I was back at my lodging, I always found it useful to replay the recorded sessions and identify some of my interviewing weaknesses. This is how I managed to improve my interviewing skills over time. The greatest challenge with my data collection had to do with transcribing the interviews once I was back in the office. This exercise called for a great deal of patience and perseverance, as transcribing one interview sometimes took me up to ten hours. I preferred doing the transcriptions personally for two main reasons. Firstly, it was during the transcribing that I managed to get much of the information I had gathered from respondents.

Secondly, doing it personally gave me the full confidence that the transcriptions were done accurately.

3.9 Limitations of the study

A weakness of this study, which arose from the data collection techniques, was the small sample of surveyed staff in each of the three institutions. While both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the study, and while the samples were randomly selected, the limited size of the survey samples used in the three universities does not allow any generalisations to be made regarding staffing conditions in the three institutions. This problem was exacerbated by the low return rate of questionnaires distributed among staff in the universities. In view of this weakness, the researcher took great care in interpreting the results of the survey. In all cases, trends discovered through the survey were confirmed with information obtained during interviews. Thus, the researcher was conscious of the importance of sample size and sample composition in so far as generalising findings is concerned.

3.10 Conclusion

This study was based on a qualitative epistemology that stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry.[160] It provided me with very insightful experiences on the use of some of the methodologies associated with the epistemology, especially interviews, observations and documentary analysis. Through the study, I came to appreciate some of the challenges that go with qualitative methodologies. These include planning for interview meetings, eliciting relevant data during the interview process, ensuring validation and reliability of research data, and processing interview data through transcribing.

Two main considerations were given to the selection of data collection methods: the appropriateness of the data collection methods to the research question and the

[160] Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1998: 3) Entering the field of qualitative research. In Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (eds.*) Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry (*pp.1- 34). Thousand Oaks, SAGE Publications

triangulation of the data collected through the various methods. The latter consideration was critical in terms of validating my research data.

Throughout the study, I also had valuable learning experiences which I can share with colleagues who plan to use the same methodology in their studies. The benefits of fieldwork depend heavily on the logistical and financial planning of the entire research exercise. In this regard, time and financial budgeting become very critical aspects of the research process. The use of a good recorder, which is clear and reliable, is also a very important factor to consider when doing interviews for it affects the efficacy with which the researcher captures interview data. For fieldwork to yield maximum benefits, it is important for the researcher to be organised and to exercise discipline. Anything short of this can lead to fruitless visits that frustrate both the researcher and the subjects, and that can affect the quality of data on which study conclusions are based.

In Chapter 4, I examine the key contextual factors that influence quality assurance in each of the three universities studied.

Chapter 4

CONTEXT AND INSTITUTIONAL LEGACIES: THE CASES OF THE UNIVERSITIES OF THE WITWATERSRAND, ZIMBABWE AND BOTSWANA

4.1 Introduction

> With few exceptions, studies on quality assurance remain silent about the political, economic and social factors that frame debates on quality and quality assurance. As a result, quality and quality assurance is dealt with in somewhat technicist fashion as a matter of specifying meanings, defining criteria and putting systems in place or just as efforts towards standardisation of academic practice. Models and practices on quality assurance are discussed as if they are generic to all contexts, developing or developed. This does not explain, however, why certain systems and forms of quality assurance are better or more effective than others in particular social and institutional contexts. Neither does it provide a basis for making informed choices in this regard. Where attempts have been made to come to grips with the political and social pressures, emphasis tends to be placed on efforts towards standardisation of practice with little contextualisation.[161]

This chapter discusses the unique contextual factors of the three institutions that were used in this study. The chapter aims to show how the performance of the institutions is influenced by the contextual factors, both in terms of the quality assurance policies developed and the actual practices on the ground. While there are common regional and global factors that influence the three universities under study, there are also local imperatives that give each institution its unique identity. In order to paint a clear picture of such institutional identity, the context of each institution will be discussed in terms of the following aspects: its historical legacies, the role of the state, its economic environment, and societal expectations of the institution. As this study unfolded, it became increasingly clear that there was a strong relationship between institutional performance and these contextual factors. While certain similarities were identified, significant differences were noted among the three institutions in terms of their levels of academic excellence. Part of the explanation of these differences lies in how individual institutions respond to the peculiarities of their social, economic, political and cultural environment. Thus, in highlighting the specific contextual

[161] Cross and Mhlanga, (2003:1).

factors influencing the performance of each of the three institutions, the chapter provides insights into why there are differences in terms of quality assurance practices among the institutions, although they are within the same geographical region.

The main argument pursued in this chapter is that the nature of quality assurance systems and their different operational strategies and effects on quality should be understood against country and institutional historical legacies, the role of the state, its economic environment, and societal expectations of higher educational institutions. First, past practices regarding quality control or quality assurance mediate the content and form of current quality assurances practices. Second, the particular form of articulation of the post-colonial state (or the emerging post-apartheid state in the case of South Africa) with higher education institutions has some bearing on the forms of quality assurance adopted in each country and institution. This articulation could, for example, be enabling or constraining depending on whether its emphasis is on control, interference or steering, and on how this relationship articulates to other relevant stakeholders. Third, the economic environment is increasingly becoming the single most important factor in determining the quality and effectiveness of quality assurance systems in developing countries, particularly Africa, given the declining budgets for higher education and the limited expertise on quality assurance in the sector. In addition, higher education institutions are now confronted with new pressures from new stakeholders on issues concerning the quality of higher education provisions. The following sections of the chapter show how the four key factors – legacies, role of the state, economic environment and social expectations of institutions – influence quality delivery and the quality assurance systems of the three studied universities.

4.2 Institutional legacies

The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) emerged from an apartheid system that emphasised state control of the higher education system. Although the university maintained a strong stance against apartheid policies and admitted black students, its student population was largely white and was highly internationalised. By 1987, for instance, there were only 268 black students enrolled at Wits. Most of these students were from high socio-economic backgrounds and their admission had no impact on

the existing culture of the university. Being in the minority and from fairly affluent backgrounds, they were expected to adapt to the culture of the university, which was predominantly white. The university recruited high-quality academic staff of international repute and this enabled the institution to peg academic standards at a level that was internationally competitive. It also developed strong pockets of collegiality (though racialised) and excellence, with international and private-sector linkages in research. Thus, the student population it catered for, the space it gained from apartheid interference and input of resources from the private sector made it possible to have enough expertise to operate as a university of high standing. A very enabling infrastructural base was established, including library facilities that match any university internationally. Though not in a systematic way, this made it possible to develop its own way of addressing issues of quality in management, programme design and delivery, as well as in generating knowledge through research.

Like the student body, most of the academic staff was white, with blacks dominating the low-level support staff. The 2006 Wits quality audit report attests to this:

> Falling in the category of a so-called historically white institution, Wits' inherited character in the pre-1994 years was largely white and male academic staff, largely white middle management and senior support staff and largely black support staff in the lower levels.[162]

Thus, Wits was an institution established to serve and preserve the needs, interests, and values of the English-speaking white community in apartheid South Africa. The establishment of universities for specific racial groupings was in line with the apartheid policy of separate development and mirrored the racially fragmented society. As highlighted above, the university thrived on the culture of the white community to which the few blacks who enrolled at the institution had to adjust.

It is in the wake of such anomalies and disparities brought about by the apartheid system that reforms in the South African higher education system, and at Wits in particular, have to be understood. The whole transformation process was premised on correcting the ills of apartheid by adopting more progressive policies and values that upheld equity and inclusiveness. Muller and his colleagues aptly put this point across:

[162] The 2006 Wits audit report, p. 35

> Transformation in higher education was seen by politicians and laymen, policy specialists and ordinary people as an indissoluble part of moving away from apartheid as a state form to a more open, inclusive, equitable and democratic society.[163]

Even as such reforms were meant to address the ills of the past and make the institutions more responsive to the local needs of the new democratic dispensation, national consensus on the transformation agenda was never realised, hence the contested nature of reform initiatives embarked on in the post-apartheid era; these initiatives included institutional mergers, a new funding formula and modes of governance, to mention but a few examples.

The University of Zimbabwe (UZ) is located in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. It was established in 1952 as a college of the University of London. It achieved university status in 1971 when it became the University of Rhodesia. After independence in 1980 it became the University of Zimbabwe, and two years later the Royal Charter was replaced by an Act of Parliament. The significance of this brief background is that, from its inception as a college of the University of London, there were certain standards of excellence that were upheld by the University and emulated by many people, locally and abroad, notwithstanding some of the unprogressive values and policies that were associated with the colonial administration. Much of the academic staff, including Professor Robert Craig, the Vice Chancellor, was from the United Kingdom and academic excellence was benchmarked on established British institutions like the University of London, Cambridge and Oxford. A large proportion of the student enrolment was white, mainly from Britain and other Anglophone European countries.

An important point to note is that, like the British system then, the University of Rhodesia was an elite institution, enrolling very few students in its academic programmes, and all of them were fully paid for by the state. Thus, the University's perception of quality was closely linked to the "ivory tower status" of the institution and its elitism in terms of access policy. While limited access for black students was a negative factor that needed redress soon after independence, it is significant to note that the University of Zimbabwe inherited a legacy of academic excellence and values

[163] Muller, J., Maasen, P., & Cloete, N. (2005:289)

that was sustained for the first two decades of independence, something that contributed quite significantly to the development of a sizeable pool of high-quality local academic staff. Government and the public alike cherished this valuable inheritance. Thus, after independence, when access was increased, the state still continued to provide strong financial support to the institution, including healthy student grants. The role of the state in university affairs remained unchanged from that of the colonial period, except that in the latter period state policies were more inclusive and in favour of previously disadvantaged groups, just like in the South African case. This support, coupled with reputable academic staff, enabled the university to sustain its high standards of scholarship in its core activities of teaching, research and community service.

The various research institutes run by the university on and off campus (e.g. Institute of Development Studies, Kariba Research Institute, Institute of Water Engineering) bear testimony to the immense contribution the university was making towards national development. Leading academics from the university also spearheaded the formation of other academic tertiary institutions of which they eventually became the first vice chancellors and executive directors, like the National University of Science and Technology, Chinhoyi University of Technology, Masvingo State University, Midlands State University, and the Institute of Scientific and Technological Research. Because of sound public funding, the University of Zimbabwe expanded tremendously in terms of campus student accommodation, lecture theatres, laboratory facilities and staffing levels. These developments made it possible for the university to uphold the inherited standards of excellence in spite of the substantial increases in student enrolments, and there is no doubt that the institution remained the cradle of knowledge generation and dissemination in the country, if not in the region. It is also noteworthy that public support of the secondary education system through systematic improvement of infrastructure, training of teachers and provision of textbook materials resulted in the churning out of competent students who had no difficulty in coping with the demands of university education. There was a holistic approach to improving the education system in the country, both in terms of quality and quantity of provision, from primary through secondary right up to tertiary education level. It is worth noting that the positive picture painted in the foregoing paragraphs was supported by an economy that was very vibrant till about 2000.

The positive environment described above depicts a positive legacy of colonialism that extended into the first decade of political independence, and on which high levels of scholarship at UZ thrived. The quality assurance system in the university was inherited from the colonial period. This was primarily internal and developed within the university, with government playing no role. The main structures assuring quality of programme development, delivery and student assessment were departmental, faculty and Senate committees. All programmes developed were reviewed at departmental level before they were tabled before the relevant Faculty Boards. After approval at faculty level they had to be cleared by Senate before they could be implemented in the university. The same procedures were followed in student assessment. Over and above such internal structures, there was also heavy reliance on external peer reviews. This ensured that the university offerings were in keeping with international standards. Details on the actual quality assurance practices in the university are given in Chapter 7 of this work; the summary provided here is merely illustrative of the influence of the culture inherited from the colonial days, which has started disintegrating in the past few years.

An important point to note at the University of Zimbabwe is the trend towards corporate governance models. Deanship has been changed from elected to executive appointment posts. Deans run their faculties more like enterprises, mooting ways of raising revenue in order to make their faculties viable. The notion of profit centres is now very common in academic units in faculties. The design of new academic programmes is very much informed by market trends. Those programmes that have higher demand on the market are given priority over those that offer knowledge for its own sake. Thus discourses of the market overshadow liberal discourses when it comes to programme development. Short professional courses that are responsive to immediate market needs are more popular than long, non-professional degrees. Apart from state control, there is the tendency to peg student fees at current market rates, a trend that is the major cause for regular student uprisings on campus.

Unlike South Africa and Zimbabwe, Botswana is a very small country in terms of population size as well as in terms of the higher education system. According to the estimates for July 2006, the country has a total population of about 1 639 833 million

and, because of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the population size is threatened with further decline.[164] As of 2005, the University of Botswana (UB) was the only university in the country. Plans are at an advanced stage, though, for the establishment of a second public university about 200 kilometres to the east of Gaborone, and for the construction of a School of Medicine at UB. The University of Botswana was established primarily to provide the economy with local skilled labour, a move meant to reduce heavy reliance on expatriate labour. Of importance is the realisation by the national authorities of the need to develop a higher education system capable of meeting the economic development needs of the country, and that would place the country at a competitive advantage in the changing global economy. To achieve this end, the government has realised the need for greater private participation in the higher education sector. For the first time, the Tertiary Education Council (TEC) opened a new chapter in the higher education system in Botswana by registering five private tertiary institutions as degree-conferring institutions in early 2007.[165] This liberalisation of the higher education system, which is in line with the government's public sector reform policy that is aimed at attracting direct foreign investment, transforms what was a simple national university system dominated by one university to a more complex and competitive system where the University of Botswana will now have to compete with many other private universities in the country. Liberalisation of the higher education market is, however, a very recent development and it yet has to be seen how the local market will respond to it.

The long-standing position of a single-university situation had serious limits, both in terms of student places as well as the quality of delivery by the institution. In other words, prospective students have had no other institution to resort to locally, even if the programme they wanted was poorly offered at UB. Competition between and among institutions, as is typically the case in South Africa, helps enhance the quality of programme offerings. The single-university situation that prevailed in Botswana has resulted in the enrolment of too many students by the young institution and this has impacted negatively on the quality of delivery in many programmes. In the

[164] *The world fact book:* Botswana http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/rankorder/2119rank.html (Retrieved on 4 July 2006)

[165] Obasi, I. N. (2007) *Globalisation and Private Higher Education in Botswana* (2). http://allafrica.com. (Retrieved on 5 July 2007).

2005/2006 academic year, the University had a total enrolment of 15 710 students, of which 12 602 were full-time and 2 724 were part-time.[166] It was evident from this study that this enrolment was far beyond the institution's capacity to provide service that is in line with its quality assurance objectives. The large student enrolment places unprecedented pressure on the limited resource base of the institution. This situation is partly due to the pressure that was placed on the government as a result of sending many students abroad because the local university was unable to meet the demand. In 2004 alone, for instance, the Department of Student Placement and Welfare of the Ministry of Education sponsored a total of 26 943 students in tertiary institutions both at home and abroad.[167] Of this number, 17 932 were enrolled in local institutions. In that year alone, it means that the government was sponsoring over 9 000 students who were studying abroad, and this placed severe limitations on what could be invested at the local university. The enrolment figure of 15 710 cited above for the 2005/2006 academic year, for instance, was serviced by only 827 academic members of staff. Throughout the faculties in this study, staff complained about unmanageable class sizes that could not even be accommodated in the available lecture rooms. There was general consensus among all the interviewed Heads of Departments in the different faculties that the major constraints the departments are facing in trying to achieve their desired quality benchmarks is large class sizes resulting from over-enrolment of students. One of them aptly explains the problem:

> Besides that, the other thing is facilities; sometimes you find you have a class of 300 and the classroom can only take 150, so we have that problem. And you see if students find themselves congested in classrooms, they use that as a reason for not attending lectures. So you have what I sometimes call telephone students, absentee students who will only appear when you give a test because the class will be packed. We have a situation where an instructor went to a class with 150 scripts only to realise that the class size was 250. Yah, these are some of the stumbling blocks.[168]

[166] University of Botswana: facts and figures, http://www.ub.bw/about/facts_and_figures.cfm, Retrieved on 7 July 2006

[167] University of Botswana: facts and figures, http://www.ub.bw/about/facts_and_figures.cfm, Retrieved on 7 July 2006

[168] Interview with Head of Department in the Faculty of Social Science, University of Botswana, 26 July 2005

It was quite apparent in some cases that the mismatch between student numbers and available resources was demoralising staff that was quite enthusiastic to implement quality reforms in their departments:

> Of course, meagre resources, resources, resources, resources!! The teaching and learning environment is very critical, apart from quality assuring your programmes. Even when you evaluate performance of staff, the environment is very critical; anything you touch, the environment has to be of standard. The environment that we teach in does not tally the requirements and the expectations of how we should perform. Both material and manpower resources are a major constraint.[169]

It would appear that the pressure to over-enrol at the University of Botswana is one of the biggest factors militating against effective implementation of the quality assurance policy. This pressure can only be relieved after the second university opens its doors to students or if UB, working in concert with government, re-thinks on its enrolment policy. Thus, although the population of Botswana is very small, preoccupation with the need to develop enough local manpower so as to reduce reliance on expatriates seems to be creating an unfavourable climate for the realisation of UB's vision of becoming "a leading academic centre of excellence in Africa and the world".[170] UB is currently operating in a context where the planning and provision of university education is driven by social demand and manpower planning rationales. This seems to be different from the general trend in higher education today where there is a shift from such planning rationales towards cost-benefit approaches, a trend that is a direct result of diminishing public funding of university education.

4.3 The changing role of the state

4.3.1 University of the Witwatersrand

The dynamics of state-university relationships and how they impact on quality assurance in the case universities are discussed more fully in Chapter 6. Here it suffices to highlight a few state-driven policies and initiatives that have direct bearing on the quality assurance arrangements of the universities.

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[169] Interview with Head of Department in the Faculty of Science, University of Botswana, 28 July 2005.

[170] University of Botswana: Vision, Mission and Values, http://www.ub.bw/about/vision.cfm, Retrieved on 7 July 2006

Given the apartheid legacy of the national higher education system as a whole in South Africa, the need for state intervention in order to address the many imbalances and anomalies of the system cannot be overemphasised. As stipulated in the South African Constitution, the state had to position itself in such a way that it could steer the system in desirable direction while at the same time it remained sensitive to the need for institutions to exercise their academic freedom and autonomy. Evidently, the context in which Wits quality assurance initiatives operate is characterised by "an interesting mixture of traditional state control and arm's length government steering approaches".[171] The following paragraphs show why it was necessary for the state to assume a steering role in South Africa's university system and the effects that particular relationship had on institutional performance.

A unique feature of the South African higher education system is the wide diversity of universities that were created by the apartheid system. This diversity did not only represent a highly fragmented university system that was financed and managed differently; indeed it also reflected the different institutional cultures and levels of scholarship across universities in the country. Due to several reasons, including gross under-resourcing, historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs) were and still are very uncompetitive in terms of their levels of scholarship. Historically privileged institutions (HPIs), however, compared favourably at international level in respect of their standards of academic excellence. Given the different nature and types of universities that emerged out of apartheid, it was neither possible for government to claim that a particular standard of output was achieved by the higher education system in the country nor to be accountable for the activities of these varied institutions unless a unitary national system of higher education was established. At the same time, there was widespread agreement that the market could not correct the injustices and imbalances created by apartheid, and that individual institutional transformation, left to itself, could hardly result in a co-ordinated, equitable and efficient system that would be responsive enough to the demands of the new social and economic order.[172] For this to happen, national co-ordination and monitoring mechanisms needed to be

[171] Maasen, P. and Cloete, N. (2003:20) Global reform trends in higher education: In Cloete, N. et al (eds.)*Transformation in higher education: Global pressures and local realities in South Africa*, Landsdowne, Juta.

[172] Muller, J., Maasen, P. and Cloete, N. ((2005:291)

put in place. Thus, state steering mechanisms for the university's quality assurance systems were introduced through national policy, although it was mediated through the buffer agency of the Council on Higher Education (CHE). A particular kind of relationship between the state and the university system had to be established in order to enable the state to regulate and shape the activities of the higher education sector. This relationship has arguably not been static since 1994 when more democratic and more consultative processes were used by the state to develop regulative policies. This shift in the way the state has positioned itself over the years is explained thus:

> It seems that the consultative and participatory process of policy formulation and the first cycles of the three-year planning dialogue gave way to a much stronger state-steering approach, driven by government's frustration at the lack of progress made towards achieving transformation goals.[173]

The initial approach of consultation with and participation of various stakeholders in developing higher education policy was understood to be well in keeping with the new notion of shared and participatory governance that was to characterise the higher education system. This democratic process seems to be gradually giving way to more top-down approaches of monitoring policy development. At national level, quality assurance is used as a multipurpose strategy for ridding the higher education system of inherited ills like fragmentation, inequality and inefficiency. It is also used as a mechanism for enhancing efficiency and effectiveness on the part of universities, by laying down minimum standards of quality performance to be met by all universities and through a regular monitoring system meant to ensure that state expectations are met by the institutions. To allow regular self-review and to facilitate more efficient monitoring by the CHE, definite criteria were set and all institutions, Wits included, are expected to adhere to the prescribed criteria in implementing their quality assurance systems. Institutions are also reviewed by the CHE on the basis of the criteria that have been laid down.

One of the purposes of quality assurance in the South African higher education system is to enhance systematic improvement of HDIs in order to bridge the gap between them and their HAI counterparts. This move is at the fore of government planning, as it is seen as one of the important ways of enhancing the life chances of the many

[173] Ibid p. 300

students who enrol with those institutions and of making the institutions more responsive to the human resources needs of the growing economy. As the National Council on Higher Education (NCHE) argued, quality assurance mechanisms are essential to tackle differences in quality across institutions and institutional programmes. It also viewed quality assurance as an important element of the new form of governance proposed for higher education as well as one of the ways of drawing private higher education into the system.[174] In this context, state steering of the higher education system at national level became an absolute necessity if the afore-mentioned anomalies were to be addressed and if higher education was to be used as one of the strategies for achieving the broader socio-economic goals of the new democratic dispensation. In this respect, the Wits context displays what Neave refers to as the rise of the evaluative state[175] as well as Power's notion of the audit society.[176] At the heart of the notion of state evaluation is the strong emphasis on state monitoring and co-ordination. There is a sense in which it can be argued that student and staff demographics at Wits are largely influenced by national policy imperatives, and these aspects of the university have direct implications for the quality performance of the institution.

In the overall planning of the national system, policy has it that "… the state will govern through a softer regulatory framework that seeks to steer the system in three important ways".[177] The first is that institutions are required to develop three-year rolling plans which should clearly outline their distinctive missions, their programme mix and their enrolment targets. The second is that, through the use of incentives, the state will encourage institutions to reorient themselves towards addressing national, regional and local education and training needs and priorities. Thirdly, institutions are required to report their performance to government, using measurable performance indicators such as enrolment levels, student throughputs and the extent to which the institution's plan is being met. The reported performance indicators would be very

[174] NCHE cited in HEQC Founding Document (2001:2)

[175] Neave, G. (1998) The Evaluative State Reconsidered. In *European Journal of Education, Vol.33 (3) pp. 206-283*

[176] Power M. (1997) *The audit society; Rituals of Verification*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

[177] Kraak, A. (2002:250) Discursive tensions in South African higher education, 1990 to 2002. In *Journal of Studies in International Education, Vol.8 (3) pp. 244-281*

influential in shaping the allocation of the next cycle of funds. Thus, the requirement for institutions to have rolling plans which spell out specific goals to be achieved in specified areas is in itself a very significant contextual factor influencing where institutions place emphasis in terms of their quality assurance practices. At the same time, the linking of student enrolments to funding levels drives the university towards enrolling large numbers of students and in particular disciplines of study. Thus the state funding formula has resulted in the preference of some disciplines and the marginalisation of others. Such state steering mechanisms and state co-ordination of the higher education system remain in place until the system is harmonised and is developed enough to sustain quality; then, and only then, can the state adopt a "softer touch".

It is within this context of increased state monitoring that the quality assurance policy and practices of the University of the Witwatersrand should be understood. The limitations and constraints brought about by this external dimension of the quality assurance arrangements include, among others, stringent reporting requirements by the university to the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) on indicator-based performance, "wastage" of teaching and research time by staff in putting together the evidence and compiling cumbersome reports, and striving to meet the required levels of student throughput rates. There is always the human tendency to "whitewash" the self-evaluation reports that are used as a basis for institutional evaluation by the HEQC. This is particularly so given that site reviews by the HEQC can have negative consequences ranging from losing self-accreditation status to complete closure of academic programmes. Academic members of staff expressed concern about the HEQC site visits:

> We are scared. Institutions are a bit timid. The HEQC could close us down if they are not happy about something.[178]

Although the institution is renowned for its long-standing quality ideals, it is evident that there is still some uneasiness arising from the mere fact that the external agency will conduct some site audits which are not just aimed at institutional improvement,

[178] *Interview response from the Faulty of Commerce quality assuran*ce representative, Wits University, 18 May 2005

but which may also have negative consequences for institutions, like lower levels of funding and losing self-accreditation status. This policy arrangement has many implications for staff impressions of the HEQC audits and how the quality assurance policy is implemented. Instead of using the quality assurance policy to improve their practice, staff may focus more on the accountability dimension of the policy at the expense of the more important improvement objective.

An important aspect defining the role of the state in steering post-apartheid higher education in South Africa has to do with the merging of institutions. One of the major effects of institutional mergers concerned changing institutional identity. This did not only result from changed demographics but also from the change of names. Institutional mergers were primarily meant to achieve greater efficiency of the higher education system by eliminating duplication of programmes by institutions in the same city. According to the policy, South Africa's 21 public universities and 15 technikons were restructured into 11 universities, five polytechnics and five comprehensive institutions that offer both technical training and undergraduate and graduate degrees.[179] It is worth noting that central government and not the universities themselves decided on which institutions were to merge. As a result, "…administrators say they often feel forced to make decisions they may not agree with".[180] In line with the process of mergers, the government's policy also sought to blur the distinction between universities and polytechnics.

The merger process has, among other things affected the identity of both institutions and the personnel within them. This identity crisis is an issue of concern among the universities as it does not only affect the programmes they can offer but also the new type of students and faculty they now have as well as the size of the merged institution. In many instances, the so-called mergers in reality entailed one or more institutions being absorbed by another so that there was loss not only of the name but also of some of the staff and the entire culture of an institution. Thus, mergers heavily affected some of the fundamental dimensions of the benchmarking of performance by an institution. Obviously, many institutions struggled to decide how they should offer

[179] Rossouw, H. (2004:2) Leveling the learning field: *The chronicle of higher education*, 16 April 2004.

[180] Rossouw, H. (2004: 2). Leveling the learning field: *The chronicle of higher education*, 16 April, 2004.

courses on multiple campuses without duplicating entire programmes. This problem was exacerbated by the fact that institutions had to continue serving all their clients, without allowing the merger process to prejudice them. Rossouw notes that institutions like the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU, now the University of Johannesburg) developed a simple rule of thumb to resolve the problem of programme duplication at the various campuses of the new mega-institution.[181] Programmes that were popular and economical, such as business degrees, could be duplicated at the East Rand and Soweto campuses that were formerly part of Vista University. The new mega-institution believed that too much duplication of the same courses could be avoided by making sure that business-degree programmes at East Rand and Soweto were general, and that more specialised courses and programmes were offered at the main campus; less popular programmes could be limited to a single campus. Given the diversity of students the new institution will have, this rule of thumb may be very difficult to apply, as students may continue to demand the programmes they used to enjoy at their traditional campuses.

An important dimension of the merger process affecting institutional identity was the change of institutional names that had been around for decades. These names had long been associated with particular institutional culture and identity that stretched beyond national boundaries. The new name was not necessarily embraced because it depicted a completely new set-up arising from the trade-offs and compromises that characterised the merger process. Many students worried that when they graduated they would receive certificates printed with the name of an institution that did not exist when they enrolled. Thus, the name of an institution carries with it a particular public perception of the quality of an institution. Mergers also pushed historically white institutions to become racially balanced, and an undercurrent of fear, not often spoken about, tugged at white students who had had to make few adjustments since the end of apartheid.[182] At the same time, students from former historically black institutions feared that their voices would be drowned out after merging with larger

[181] Rossouw, H. (2004: 3) Levelling the learning field: *The chronicle of higher education*, 16 April, 2004.

[182] Op. cit. p.4

institutions. Many of the latter students also worried about whether they would be able to afford the relatively high tuition fees at the new institutions.[183]

Professors had their own share of worries arising from the change of institutional identity brought about by mergers. Those at the more prestigious universities feared that their reputation and research would suffer once they were made to teach alongside polytechnic lecturers who had inferior academic profiles. For example, only 4 per cent of Technikon Witwatersrand's faculty members had doctorates and 20 per cent had master's degrees, while at Rand Afrikaans University 54 per cent of faculty members had doctorates and 28 per cent had master's degrees.[184] Hence the worries RAU expressed over merging with the Technikon because staff and management feared that a merger with a less prestigious institution would result in losing their place as one of South Africa's top research universities. It is precisely for this reason that Mr. Botha, the president of RAU, unsuccessfully appealed the government's order to combine with the Technikon.[185]

While academic staff from the more prestigious institutions felt threatened with loss of status, their counterparts from the less prestigious merging partners felt threatened by possible layoffs. This was mainly because, in the majority of the cases, the merger process inevitably led to overstaffing. Again, the case of Rand Afrikaans University can be cited – RAU had 435 lecturers, Technikon Witwatersrand had 383, and the two former Vista campuses had 108 lecturers.[186] Unless there was a drastic increase in student enrolments, chances were very high that there would be retrenchments in order to avoid overstaffing.

It is clear that the mergers had significant implications for quality assurance policy implementation in the South African higher education system. Although Wits did not merge with any other university, its merger with the former Johannesburg College of Education (JCE) is a significant factor in terms of the increased size of the institution. This is so firstly in terms of the sheer spatial expansion which had implications for the

[183] Op. cit.

[184] Rossouw, H. (2004:5)

[185] Rossouw, H. (2004: 5)

[186] Rossouw, H. (2004: 5)

convenience of management, and secondly in terms of the new training role the School of Education had to assume. The new institution has to effectively balance JCE's training role with the traditional research role that is typical of any university. Achieving this balance and getting all academic staff into the fold in terms of research and publications seems to be quite a challenge to the new School of Education (formerly JCE), and yet these aspects are key quality dimensions against which institutional performance is measured. The merger process also involved reconfiguring the School as new academic units were formed and staff reshuffled to these units. All this happened under new School management. Thus new quality assurance policy implementation is taking place amid a number of other sensitive reforms in the School and, to some extent, in the University as a whole. This barrage of transformation policies confronting the institution caused quite a bit of anxiety on the part of staff, especially given that this was the time the HEQC was also doing its site audits. Thus, the improvement aspect of the quality assurance policy is masked by other transformation activities taking place at the same time the new policy was operationalised.

4.3.2 University of Zimbabwe

The University of Zimbabwe is a state-controlled institution with frequent episodes of direct and indirect state interference. Characterising such interference are state activities like the appointment of the university Chancellor (who has been the president of the country for the past 30 years of political independence), Vice-Chancellor, and Council Chairperson, monitoring of staff and student political activities on campus, as well as pegging student fees. Thus, the dominant mode of co-ordination at UZ is state interference, although government policy has it that the University is autonomous.

An interesting point to note is the centralised nature of the higher education system in Zimbabwe. Generally, tertiary institutions are centrally controlled and regulated from the Ministry of Higher Education. It is noteworthy that such a centralised governance system where the state plays an active role in controlling, directing and shaping the activities of universities is no departure from the colonial system. The nature of state-institution relationships in post-colonial Zimbabwe is consistent with the mode of co-

ordination that prevailed during the colonial period. Chapter 6 of this thesis provides a more elaborate picture of the nature of the relationships between the Zimbabwean state and the university, and the effects such relationships have on institutional performance. Here suffice it to state that the culture of centrally controlled public institutions could, in fact, be understood as a legacy of the typical British system of colonial governance. Again, typical of the British system, and indeed of trends elsewhere, is the emphasis that is placed on accountability and efficiency in such centrally controlled systems. Clearly, quality assurance practices at the University of Zimbabwe, which were heavily informed by the colonial legacy of the institution in the early years of independence, have shifted in character as they respond more and more to macro-economic fundamentals in the country's fast-deteriorating economy. This aspect will be illustrated in the ensuing section on the impact of the economic environment on quality assurance.

The formation of the Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education (ZCHE) to regulate the national university system is in line with the traditional trend of centrally-managed higher education systems, and with general trends in higher education systems on the continent. The Council is housed in the Ministry of Higher Education premises, and some of the Council members are also high-ranking, experienced officials from the same Ministry. Thus the ZCHE quality assurance initiatives are in effect government-driven initiatives. There is a sense in which it can be argued that the new quality assurance arrangements in universities are state-driven rather than institution-driven. Although consultations were held with international experts and with the university, the state was the key stakeholder involved in the process of developing the new quality assurance system.

4.3.3 University of Botswana

In Botswana there is realisation of the changing role of the state in higher education, from that of direct control of universities to that of supervision and oversight. State control and regulatory regimes for tertiary education institutions tend to stifle creativity and scholarship.[187] Apart from influencing enrolments and providing

[187] Tertiary Education Policy for Botswana: Challenges and Choices. Consultation Paper Prepared by the working group on the tertiary education policy for Botswana, February 2005, p.23

student grants, the government of Botswana has very little influence on the academic activities of the institution. As Chapter 6 argues, the autonomy UB enjoys and the responsibilities it is given by the Ministry point at a particular type of relationship prevailing between the state and the University. Some theorists refer to this relationship as "arm's-length steering".[188] It is the feeling of the state in Botswana that universities that enjoy such an arm's-length relationship with government and enjoy a significant degree of autonomy, perform better in terms of research and their general scholarship. Thus, academic policy making is the prerogative of academics, and the formation of the Tertiary Education Council signals major tertiary education reforms in the country.[189] Under the oversight and steering role of government, the University of Botswana will enjoy much autonomy in terms of developing its academic policies, including quality assurance systems, managing its own budgets and responding appropriately to changing market trends. The type of relationship the institution maintains with the state has given it space to steer reforms and develop quality assurance systems that are driven first and foremost by academic values, without any constraining political interference, as is the case in most other African countries. This is confirmed by one senior official in the university:

> Our approach is different from institutions in the developed world where you have all these outside agencies telling you what standards are, what best practices are, and you have to comply. I think we have much more freedom, and one unique thing about UB is that we don't have anyone telling us what to do.
>
> We are very autonomous. We get money from government but we are considered a parastatal. Our students also get funding from government but that's about all. We really don't have to report to anybody.[190]

It is clear that the Botswana state is repositioning itself very much in line with international trends in terms of its role in university affairs. It recognises the strength and influential role in terms of policy making of the new management cadre in

[188] Maasen, P. and Cloete, N. (2002) Global Reform Trends in Higher Education. In Cloete, N. et al (eds), *Transformation in Higher Education: Global Pressures and Local Realities in South Africa.* Cape Town, Juta Company (Pvt) Ltd. (See also Scott, 1996)

[189] Tertiary Education Policy for Botswana: Challenges and Choices. Consultation Paper Prepared by the working group on the tertiary education policy for Botswana, February 2005, p.24

[190] Interview with an official in the university

universities.[191] Unlike most African countries, where state heavy-handedness is felt in universities, the shaping of university academic cultures, management structures, as well as curriculum responsiveness is left to institutions. Government is there to create an enabling environment for such institutions to function effectively, by providing sufficient resources for the development and maintenance of infrastructure, by investing in broadband facilities, and by providing students with the necessary grants.

4.4 The economic environment and quality assurance

There is a mutual relationship between educational institutions and the economy. While economic growth generates resources that are needed by higher education institutions and provides employment opportunities for graduates, the latter in turn provide the economy with the labour skills and research expertise needed to enhance economic growth. This study pursued this relationship with specific reference to the three case universities, and explored the influence of the economy on the performance of the universities and how they implement their quality assurance systems.

4.4.1 University of the Witwatersrand

Since the end of apartheid in 1994, the South African economy has registered economic growth that has been coupled with prudent fiscal management practices. The steady growth of the economy for the past five years is illustrated by real gross domestic product (GDP) shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 South Africa GDP – real growth rate[192]

Year	GDP- real growth rate
2003	3.1%
2004	4.9%
2005	5.0%
2006	5.4%

[191] Tertiary Education Policy for Botswana: Challenges and Choices. Consultation paper prepared by the working group on the tertiary education policy for Botswana, February 2005.

[192] South Africa: fast facts: GDP growth in South Africa. http://www.southafrica.info/about/facts.htm Retrieved on 19 June 2008

2007	5.1%
2008	3.9% (estimates)

The inflation rate as measured by the Consumer Price Index excluding mortgage rate changes averaged 4.6 per cent in 2006, compared to 9.8 per cent in 1994.[193] In terms of foreign investment, the country reportedly remains one of the cheapest places in the world to do business. According to a World Bank and Department of Trade and Industry survey, South Africa's investment climate was rated "favourable" in comparison to that of other African countries, as well as Malaysia, Brazil, Poland and China.[194] The report cites the country's legal protection of property, labour productivity, low tax rates, reasonable regulation and good access to credit as some of the incentives attracting foreign investment.

The positive economic performance illustrated above immensely benefited virtually all social sectors in the country, education included. South Africa's investment in education tripled since the end of apartheid. In 1994 R31.8 billion was spent on education, and in 2006 the budget was increased to R92.1 billion.[195] The country spends about 6.6 per cent of GDP and 17.7 per cent of total government expenditure on education. While the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) paid out R21 million to fund higher education of disadvantaged students in 1991, in 2005 it paid out a total of R1.2 billion. In its quest to develop labour skills to support the growing economy, the government plans to spend R1.9 billion on upgrading Further Education and Training colleges in the country. Universities also benefit from government support in terms of integrating information and communication technologies (ICT) in their teaching and learning, by investing in broadband improvement and capitalising the improvement of infrastructure on campuses.

Although overall, public subsidies for university education is on the decline and user fees are on the increase (a trend characterising higher education internationally), the vibrant economy allows space for the government to provide meaningful support to

[193] Ibid

[194] Ibid

[195] Ibid

universities so that the latter can operate at acceptable levels of quality. Institutions have good study facilities for students, like library resources and computer and science labs. As will be shown in Chapter 8, there is strong support for academic staff in the area of research at national level, mainly through the National Research Foundation (NRF). The quality of institutions like Wits and the space that is provided for doing research attracts academic staff of international repute, an important aspect of the quality performance of an institution. Staff of such high credibility has better capacity to quality assure their teaching and research activities than less-experienced and less-qualified staff. Thus Wits operates in an environment where the economy is still enabling enough for high standards to be sustained and for the institution to develop and implement credible quality assurance systems.

4.4.2 University of Zimbabwe

4.4.2.1 General situation

The University of Zimbabwe's quality assurance system is implemented in an environment of severely adverse economic conditions. There is negative economic growth, and the inflation rate as measured by the consumer price index has been reportedly above 2.2 million per cent by July 2008[196]. Unemployment stands at 75 per cent, and foreign investment is on the decline. The real growth rate of GDP for the past five years has been negative, and Table 4.2 illustrates the negative trends in the performance of the economy as measured by the GDP.

Table 4.2: Zimbabwe GDP –real growth rate[197]

Year	GDP - real growth rate
2003	-12.10%,
2004	-13.60%
2005	-8.20%
2006	-7.70%

[196] Zimbabwe Inflation Rate, http://www.post1.net/lowem/entry/runaway_hyperinflation_zimbabwe. Retrieved on 21 August 2008

[197] Zimbabwe GDP- real growth rate, http://indexmundi.com/zimbabwe/gdp_real_growth_rate.html Retrieved on 19 June 2008

2007	-4.40%
2008	-6.00%. (estimates)

The economy has been seriously underperforming for the six years reported in Table 4.2, and there are no indications that turnaround may be realised soon. Although government subsidy to higher education has been increasing over the same period, in real terms it has seriously declined due to the hyperinflationary conditions. Institutions like the University of Zimbabwe can hardly maintain existing infrastructure, late alone undertake any new developments in order to enhance quality. At the same time, larger numbers of students are enrolling at the University, an institution that has long been associated with high standards of scholarship. The university has developed a new quality assurance thrust that emphasises the following:

- Revamping the system of external examination that used to prevail in the past.
- Offering joint modular courses with other universities in the region and internationally.
- Putting in place a quality assurance system which is transparent and effective.
- Recruiting academic staff that is qualified, experienced and committed.
- Maintaining academic staff:student ratios of not more than 1:20 .
- Limiting student enrolment to 12 000.
- Emphasising postgraduate training – 25 per cent of the student population should consist of postgraduate students;
- Emphasizing ICT competence on the part of both students and staff.[198]

The university's strategic plan reflects, in very emotive tone, the desire and aspirations of the oldest and leading university in the country to reclaim its academic reputation nationally and within the region. It is important to note that the second strategic plan of the university, which was launched on 24 September 2004, was developed within the current period of the country's economic downturn and therefore took full cognisance of the challenges that are posed by the macro-economic environment for the higher education system in the country. It is noteworthy that the

[198] University of Zimbabwe Five Year Strategic Plan, 2003-2007

specific quality objectives outlined above are to be achieved against a very bleak background of low levels of financial independence by the institution, and heavy reliance on government subsidies which are continually dwindling due to inflation, a massive exodus of qualified and experienced staff, and declining performance of the economy.

The limitations posed by the poor staffing conditions at the University of Zimbabwe are discussed at quite some length in Chapter 7 of this thesis. The same chapter also shows how the unfavourable conditions of service for academic staff at the University have led to the ever-increasing problem of brain drain. At the risk of repetition, it is necessary to refer to some of the constraints discussed in Chapter 7 in order to show where they fall in what I see as the vicious circle of the tragedy of quality faced by the university.

4.4.2.2 The constraints of the economic environment

The major contextual factor influencing effective institutional performance at UZ is the underperforming economy of the country. It is from this generic problem that implementation of the reform initiatives spelled out in the strategic plan (and listed on the previous page) is severely constrained. I choose in this analysis to perceive the problem of quality performance at the University of Zimbabwe as being complicated and cyclical. It is complicated in the sense that its origins lie outside the institution, in the macro-economy that is engendered by a particular form of state-political policy and therefore is beyond the control of the university. It is important to note here that the change in state politics that set in around 2000 gave the state a new shape and ushered in a completely new approach to the overall management of the national economy. It is beyond the scope of this study to delve into the dynamics of the new political economy that emerged in the post-2000 period in Zimbabwe. An important point to note, however, is that the new dispensation impacted negatively on all public institutions in the stalled economy. By end of 2005 when this study was conducted, the institution had clearly changed from what it used to be in the 1990s and before. Furniture had broken down, staff offices had no computers, student services had deteriorated, and staff was demoralised. One journalist confirmed my observations

after visiting the once high-flying and prestigious institution: "The UZ I saw is a pale shadow of its former great self".[199]

The analysis of the constraining context of the University is illustrated in Figure 4.1.

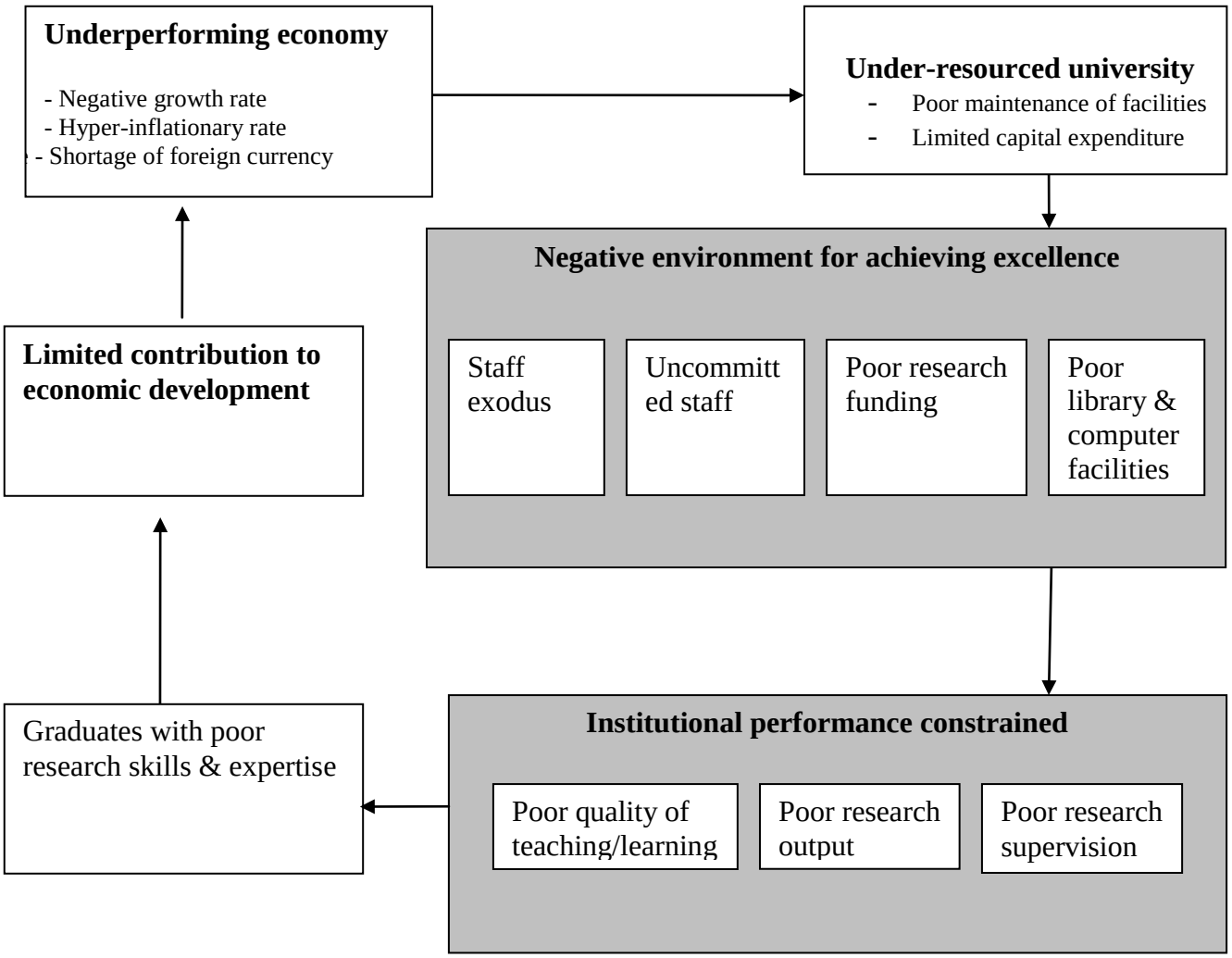


Figure 4.1
The vicious circle of quality dilemmas at the University of Zimbabwe

[199]Molokele, D.F. (2007) The Virtual Nation; The Zimbabwe I Don't Want. http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/fortune91.16476.html. Retrieved on 29 May 2007

Due to the current economic problems prevailing in the country, many public institutions have been rendered inefficient and ineffective in service delivery. The hyperinflationary conditions in the country make it very difficult for institutions and individuals to plan their activities as prices of commodities and services change by the day. The effects of such uncontrollable levels of inflation are felt at the University of Zimbabwe by both students and staff. This is clearly evidenced by the interview responses from some of the faculty members. Asked whether staff was getting enough financial support for research, one of the senior staff members in one department gave the following response:

> At the moment the economy is not conducive.… Even if one were to get research funds from the research grant, it is swallowed by inflation before you even start using it. In this department we bid for Z$100 million and we got it a few weeks ago so that we do research and publish as a department. But that Z$100 million is now meaningless. There are six of us; if you divide that by six, it's less than Z$20 million per person. To go into a hotel you need more than Z$20 million per person; you need fuel and that alone swallows the entire Z$100 million. So we are stuck. So research output is very minimal.[200]

Thus, research output is severely constrained by lack of adequate research funds for staff. This constraint has a demoralising effect on staff, apart from undermining the research reputation of the university, an important quality aspect that will be re-visited in Chapter 8.

The level of subsidies given to the University at the beginning of each financial year fall far short of the institution's requirements before midyear and this forces the institution to run on inadequate funds, thereby compromising on the quality of service delivery. Student fees are ever-increasing, sometimes by as much as 100 per cent, and this causes a great deal of frustration on the part of students and parents. In a bid to prevent poor students dropping out of the system, the government discourages the university from excluding those students who default on payments. This practice usually results in large numbers of students staying on campus for many months without paying fees, a culture that further strains the ability of the university to provide high-quality service. In its current strategic plan, the university managers indicates that they are aware of the limitations of heavy reliance on the government in

[200] Interview with a senior member of staff in the Department of Educational Administration, University of Zimbabwe, 15 October 2005.

terms of finance and they aim at "raising at least 50% of its total annual operational budget from sources other than those of the Zimbabwean Government by the end of 2006".[201]

It is important to note that in the previous plan period, 1998-2002, the university had a similar target which it failed to meet. The university clearly admits:

> A major target in the 1998-2002 strategic plan was for the UZ to raise at least 50% of its annual operation budget from earned income by 2001. This target was not met due primarily to the declining performance of the economy as a whole during the plan period.[202]

It is inconceivable how the institution plans to achieve this goal in the current plan period, given the further depressed economic conditions in the country and an inflation rate that has more than trebled since 2002. Besides, the plan is silent on what strategies the university will use in order to raise the required funds. Under these conditions, it is safe to conclude that lack of adequate financial resources will continue to pose the greatest threat to effective implementation of the quality assurance thrust of the current strategic plan.

As Figure 4.1 illustrates, efforts by the University of Zimbabwe at revamping the quality dimension of the institution are being made under extremely difficult conditions. The university's overall performance is likely to be negatively affected by financial constraints, just like in the previous plan period. This constraint derails the entire plan, as every one of the quality strategic focuses outlined in the plan requires strong financial support in order to succeed. An important aspect of the quality thrust of the university is its newly defined niche market, postgraduate training. The emphasis on postgraduate work will be reflected by an increase in the proportion of graduate students to at least 25 per cent of the student body by the end of 2006.[203] For the university to implement this important innovation, it is necessary to have highly qualified and committed academic staff with experience in research and supervision. This study showed that staffing is indeed one of the biggest problems many faculties

[201] University of Zimbabwe Five Year Strategic Plan, 2003-2007

[202] U.Z. Five-Year Strategic Plan, 2003-2007, p.3

[203] Op.cit. p.2

are facing, with some departments having to do with less than 20 per cent of their staffing complement. During an interview discussion on the constraints the faculty is facing in terms of research, one senior member of staff expressed concern:

> Research output is very low because producing a research paper requires certain skills and it may also call for some experience and it requires a lot of guidance from senior people. Writing itself is frightening, you see, I have got a pile here. This is from the Human Resources Research Centre; it looks like I am the only one who is being asked to read through and then evaluate the work for materials publishing. Every week I receive quite a bit of chunk and as I read through all this, I find that there is none that is suitable for publishing.[204]

Similar concerns on staffing problems were expressed by academic members of staff and deans in other faculties:

> We have a lot of staffing problems, particularly at higher levels. Almost all our departments are heavily understaffed. You are talking about a situation where you have vacancy rates of 40-45%. Like, I am saying the situation is bad, a lot of middle-aged lecturers have gone, we have old staff that is too old to go away and very young staff that is inexperienced. You find that a department may have 80% of the staff still on probation and so we have a pyramid kind of structure.[205]

> Like now, I have just been talking to personnel that the whole --- section, the ---, the --- sections, we have lost staff. We are left with three ---, two of them have gone, we had two ---, we are left with only one now. When we advertise the posts we find that the people who apply may not be suitable, they are barely 'appointable'. We are forced to appoint some barely 'appointable' people just to fill in the posts because we can't find the right people. At the moment our staffing complement is 17, but full-time lecturers in post are nine, the rest are temporary staff. Temporary staff because in most cases they don't fit for what we require for the posts, or teaching assistants.[206]

Given the pressing problem of staffing in the university, it is unlikely that the implementation of the university's postgraduate training initiative will succeed. In the absence of qualified and experienced staff, it is difficult to produce graduates who excel in basic and applied research as expressed in the strategic plan. Thus, churning out graduates with shaky research grounding will not give the university any competitive advantage in this chosen niche area.

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[204] Interview response from a senior academic member of staff.

[205] Interview response from one of the faculty deans at U.Z.

[206] Interview response from a department chairperson at U.Z.

As is the trend in most higher education systems, the UZ strategic plan emphasises the integration of new information and communication technologies in the teaching and learning processes. Every graduate from UZ will have to pass at least one compulsory ICT course, ensuring that UZ graduates come out of university computer literate.[207] The Vice-Chancellor of UZ echoed this aspect of the university's transformation:

> We are exploiting information technology for the benefit of our staff and students. It has been said of e-learning that it has the advantage of distributing quality content to facilitate dynamic learning anywhere and any time. As a University, it is our motto to make our business information and communication technology driven in line with global trends.[208]

By the end of 2005, when this study was conducted, some academic members of staff still had no dedicated computers in their offices. This made it difficult for them not only to master computer literacy but also to access the Internet. Commenting on the availability of computer facilities, one member of staff had this to say:

> Until recently, I didn't even have a computer in my office. I couldn't even access Internet, so that was a constraint in terms of my research output. But I struggled and produced something but I did not reach my full potential in as far as research output is concerned.[209]

The chairperson of a department in a different faculty also painted a very grim picture of the University in terms of the supply of computer facilities to academic staff:

> Lecturers don't have computers. I don't, what I have here is what I bought with my money. Lecturers need to have computers in their offices so they can search on Internet and update whatever they are going to do.[210]

Such constraints obviously demoralise staff in their efforts to implement the ICT dimension of quality. Although there were some computer laboratories in some of the faculties, staff showed concern over inadequate computer facilities for students.

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[207] U.Z. Strategic Plan, 2003-2007, p.2

[208] Special Events: Speech by the Vice-Chancellor delivered at the launching of the University Strategic Plan, 2003-2007 in September, 2004 in Harare.

[209] Interview with a member of staff

[210] Interview response from a department chairperson

The University of Zimbabwe case is a clear demonstration of the importance of running a viable economy in order to support social institutions like universities. There is a mutual relationship between a university system and the economy; the economy generates wealth that enables the state to commit sufficient resources for institutions to operate at acceptable standards of excellence, whilst at the same time institutions function to produce high-level labour expertise required by the economy. Where the economy performs poorly, it is impossible to sustain the higher education institution at internationally competitive standards of performance.

4.4.2.3 A window of opportunity

It is worth noting that apart from the negative environmental factors discussed above, arising mainly from the underperforming economy, there are some areas of strength that the university can take advantage of in terms of developing and implementing effective and viable quality assurance systems. One of the factors relates to the motivation and academic commitment of the students who enrol in the country's universities, particularly at UZ. Although the university now competes with other new institutions for students, most of the students with the highest pass grades at high school prefer to go to UZ because of the long-standing academic reputation and popularity it has enjoyed for many years. The university is associated with a particular type of quality status by both employers and the public. This gives the institution a big competitive advantage when it comes to the calibre of students that it recruits and the level of academic performance they are capable of achieving. Academic staff at the university realise and acknowledge this fact:

> I think the quality of students in Zimbabwe is generally high, it's really not a problem. Within our region generally we have either O-level or A-level before university. So compared to many countries in the region and even internationally, we have students who come to university when they are fairly mature. A-level has age over and above somebody who has not done it. So we receive students who are highly qualified and competent. Because of the demand we tend to have very high cut-off points.[211]

Asked to comment on the quality of students the department recruits, the chairperson of one department had the following to say:

[211] Interview response from one of the Faculty Deans interviewed on 14 October 2005

> They are the cream; we only take 14 points out of 15. For the medical programmes the top students, most of them have a minimum of 10 or 11 points.[212]

The ability of students to do much of the work independently of lecturers is an asset that the institution exploits in terms of benchmarking standards of performance by learners.

Another significant contextual factor influencing the quality delivery of the University of Zimbabwe is the presence of a wide pool of human expertise in the working and business community of the city of Harare. This great concentration of both retired and working manpower has immensely benefited the university in terms of provision of part-time lecturing staff. It is through the extensive use of such part-time staff that quite a number of departments have managed to keep their doors open to students even after experiencing a massive exodus of their permanent academic staff. One dean of faculty Dean confirmed this in his response to the question on whether there were any staffing constraints experienced in his faculty:

> The area where we are mostly hit in terms of staffing is the clinical department. People have moved down South [to South Africa]; we are using also the practices in Harare, we are using experienced staff to come and teach on part-time.[213]

In a different faculty, one head of department indicated that out of a complement of 21 academic members of staff, there were only five in post. It was interesting to note that the department was still running because they were relying on temporary and part-time staff:

> We are supposed to be 21 but at the moment we are five. The five I am talking about are part-time staff. Permanent staff is me only, then the others are temporary full-time staff, on yearly renewals. Some of them had retired and had to come back. Some of them have other commitments elsewhere and we ask them to come and teach courses in their special areas.[214]

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[212] Interview from chairperson of a department: Interview held on 14 October 2005

[213] Interview response from a faculty dean

[214] Interview response from one Chairperson of a department

Given this critical role played by temporary staff, it is important that the university, working in collaboration with the relevant Ministry, should devise ways of motivating such staff so that they continue to be committed to university service and uphold the quality goals of the institution. It is noted with regret that at the moment, in spite of the valuable contribution made by this temporary staff, they enjoy no substantial benefits. This affects their levels of commitment and has implications for the effectiveness of the implementation of the institution's quality assurance policy.

It is apparent that the efforts being made by the university to resuscitate quality face challenges that are posed by the non-conducive economic environment in which the institution operates. Unless there is some significant improvement in the economy, it will remain difficult for the once-reputable institution to reclaim its national and regional space in academia. As many of the quality objectives of the institution's 1998-2002 strategic plan could not be achieved, it is very likely that little will be achieved in terms of the current plan. The University of Zimbabwe context demonstrates the importance of the relationship that exists between higher education institutions and the national economy. It is clear from this case that a sound economy forms a firm basis for a sound higher education. Quality assurance systems of institutions depend very much on the supporting economies in which they operate. They in turn influence the capacities of institutions to support those economies through research and provision of efficient labour resources. Poor management of economies yields poor university systems that struggle to manage sound quality assurance systems, and the ultimate effect is the production of graduates whose contribution to economic growth is very insignificant. Thus, a vicious circle of poverty prevails

4.4.3 University of Botswana

4.4.3.1 General situation

An important aspect to note about the Botswana context is the existence of a welfare state in so far as facilitating student participation in university education is concerned, both locally and abroad. All students who qualify for university entry access study grants from the government, even if they enrol in private institutions that have

recently joined the national higher education market. Through a fund disbursement system managed by the Department of Student Placement and Welfare, students apply for government grants which are almost guaranteed as long as the student qualifies. In 2004, for instance, the Department sponsored 26 943 tertiary students, of which 17 932 were at local institutions and a further 9 011 were sent for training outside the country.[215] Thus, the constraints associated with escalating user fees common in Zimbabwe, and to some extent in South Africa, are not yet experienced in Botswana. For quite some years now, government has committed 1 per cent of GDP to tertiary education.[216]

Government funding policy for higher education has been supported by a vibrant economy which has been recording real growth rates above 5 per cent since 2003, with the exception of 2005. Table 4.3 illustrates GDP real growth rate for a period of five years.

Table 4.3: Botswana GDP – real growth rate[217]

Year	GDP - real growth rate
2003	6.00 %
2004	7.20 %
2005	3.50 %
2006	5.50 %
2007	5.40 %
2008	4.70 % (estimates)

The inflation rate as measured by the consumer price index has been below 10 per cent in the same period, with the exception of 2007 when it peaked to an unusual level of 11.4 per cent.[218] This rate has since gone down quite significantly, and estimates

[215] Tertiary Education Policy for Botswana: Challenges and Choices. A consultative paper prepared by the Working group on the Tertiary Education Policy for Botswana, February 2005, p.10

[216] Op. cit

[217] Botswana GDP- real growth rate, http://indexmundi.com/botswana/gdp_real_growth_rate.html (Retrieved on 17 June 2008)

[218] Botswana Inflation Rate (Consumer Prices), http://indexmundi.com/botswana/inflation_rate_(consumer_prices)html (Retrieved on 17 June 2008)

for 2008 show that it will come down to 7.2 per cent. In spite of the greater part of the country being a desert, beef farming that has been enhanced by a well-planned cattle breeding system and diamond mining have generated wealth that has managed to bring about meaningful economic growth beneficial to all in the country. The well-managed economy has also been coupled with sound democratic governance that has ensured national stability since the country gained independence in 1966. Such economic and political stability has been a great national asset in terms of attracting foreign investment as well as skilled expatriate labour. Thus, although the country suffers from severe shortage of local skilled labour, it has been able to harness qualified labour in all the key sectors of the economy, including university education. The majority of these foreigners work on a contract basis; as more and more local people acquire the relevant qualifications and expertise, they replace the foreign employees.

Table 4.4 shows the distribution of the paid labour force by sector and by citizenship. It is clear from the table that Education is the sector that has the greatest representation of foreign employees. In this sector, foreigners constitute about 26 per cent of the total employees in the sector. This is followed by Health and Social Work with 25 per cent and Agriculture with about 21 per cent expatriate employees.

Table 4.4: Estimated number of employees by industry and citizenship - March 2005

Economic Sector	Botswana Citizens	Non-citizens	% of Non-citizen Employees	Total Employees
Agriculture	4,398	1,157	21	5,554
Mining & Quarrying	8,650	620	7	9,270
Manufacturing	30,272	2,124	7	32,397
Water & Electricity	2,376	54	2	2,430
Construction	22,395	1,969	8	24,364
Wholesale & Retail	38,689	2,722	7	41,411
Hotels & Restaurant	13,865	703	5	14,568
Transport & Communication	11,387	1,221	10	12,608
Financial Intermediaries	4,869	312	6	5,181
Real Estate	14,337	2,245	14	16,582
Education	**5,831**	**2,019**	**26**	**7,850**
Health & Social Work	1,487	483	25	1,970
Other Community Services	2,898	269	8	3,167
Private & Parastatal	161,453	15,898	9	177,351
Private	149,172	15,316	9	164,488
Parastatal	12,281	582	5	12,863
Central Government	94,983	1,719	2	96,702
Local Government	24,264	398	2	24,662
All Sectors	**280,700**	**18,015**	6	**298,715**

Central Statistics Office, Gaborone, Botswana. Date of Creation: 6 June 2006.
Source: http://www.cso.gov.bw/html/labour/lab_tab1_2_06.html, Retrieved on 5 July 2006.

The trend on expatriate labour is even more pronounced at the University of Botswana, where 50 per cent of the surveyed staff indicated that they were foreigners working on contract terms. Of this foreign staff, 29.2 per cent was from countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), 8.3 per cent from the rest of Africa, another 8.3 per cent from Europe and 4.2 per cent from Asia. While in many

instances such diversity of staff in terms of nationality is an important element of internationalisation that brings rich cultural diversity to the teaching-learning experience, it seems that at UB this has also become a constraint in terms of staff commitment to their work. There is usually no guarantee of contract renewal for expatriate staff. One of the interviewed professors indicated that this problem is one of the limitations for achieving quality benchmarks in his faculty:

> Major constraints are again staff motivation. When we ask staff who are appointed only for two years, and they sit on the balance, whether they will be re-appointed after two years or not, that is a problem. Although they do work, because this is also one of the conditions for contract renewal or extension, they really don't feel they are part of the department.[219]

Expatriate staff interviewed also expressed their dismay over the different conditions of service at the University. One of the Heads of Department who is an expatriate expressed the following concerns when he was asked whether he enjoys any incentives from the University for research and publishing:

> No, actually in a system like UB the expatriate worker gets a contract which is reviewed periodically, every two years, three years or five years. But ordinarily for the citizen employee the only incentive is promotion; there is no other incentive because they are permanent and pensionable.[220]

It does appear that the main problems relating to expatriate staff have to do with their conditions of service. Expatriate staff do not get permanent appointments and are not pensionable. There are a number of limitations associated with heavy reliance on expatriate staff. Foreign academic staff work on short contracts, a situation which is usually not conducive to implementing good teaching and research programmes. In a contract of three years, for instance, the first year is spent adjusting to the strange environment and the third year may be spent looking for another job. This leaves very little time for committing oneself to academic work. This is particularly true of UB, where some contracts are as short as two years. While the recruitment of international staff has given UB a premium in terms of the quality of staff – 92 per cent of the surveyed staff had doctoral qualifications and 8 per cent had a Master's degree – the

219 Interview with dean of the Faculty of Science, University of Botswana, 27 July 2005

220 Interview with Head of Department of Sociology, University of Botswana, 26t July 2005.

institution is not maximising the benefits of having such highly qualified staff due to the unfavourable contract conditions.

Lim argues that there is usually tension between local and foreign staff, especially where the latter is paid higher salaries than the former.[221] "This creates jealousy among the local counterparts…. The problem is exacerbated when the foreign academics come from countries where the standards of living and salaries are much lower than those in the country they work in".[222] Lim's observation points at some of the shortcomings of relying heavily on foreign staff, although in terms of the current situation at UB this aspect was hardly noticeable.

It is interesting to note that not only foreign but also local staff is unhappy about the conditions of service at the institution. Generally, staff feel that salaries are low and other conditions of service and benefits need to be improved if they are to be more committed to their academic work.

4.4.3.2 Negative effects of state welfarism

While public subsidy of university education is positive in terms of enhancing access to university education irrespective of the economic background of students, it is sometimes felt that this encourages complacency on the part of students. If students do not pay fees, they tend to be less committed to their academic work and less responsible in making their choices in terms of areas of study to pursue and the quality of their learning. Where students pay fees, they demand value for their money from the service providers and this encourages institutions to observe quality.

This study identified student laxity as one of the areas of concern in some departments at the University of Botswana. Responding to the question on what he considered to be some of the constraints his department was facing in terms of achieving its quality goals, one Head of Department expressed the following general opinion about students:

[221] Lim, D. (1994)

[222] Lim, D. (1994:384)

> I think one of them is student initiative. For some reason, our students don't seem to be motivated enough. We have students who are not driven to attain an A. We don't have a culture of excellence among our students; most of them are contented with getting minimum grades and getting out of here. Let me put it this way: for most of our students, education is not an end in itself, it is a means to an end. The problem every year is that high school results are improving in terms of passes but the quality of students we are getting is poor.[223]

This interview response, which came from a head of department in the Faculty of Social Science, was also confirmed by another head of department in the Faculty of Science. Asked whether lack of student motivation was a problem in their faculty, the professor responded:

> We do have that problem; that problem is universal. What we find is that year one and year two, they have very high motivation and then when you get to year three and four, students lose motivation.[224]

In pursuing this response, the professor was asked why he thought students lost motivation after their first two years of university education. In his view, part of the reason lies in the student screening system followed by the University:

> You see, the practice at the University of Botswana is that in year one and two you have all the good students and everybody leaves together. After year two, they transfer to professional courses which are not offered in Botswana. So you find the bright students are all taken to go and do Medicine and other courses outside the country. So students who remain are rather, the not bright ones. I believe that affects their motivation. But that notwithstanding, you still have students who are very difficult to push.[225]

The second response from the science professor seems to suggest that part of the reasons for low student motivation lie in the system of selecting students for the purpose of pursuing programmes of study abroad. This system is followed because there are programmes, like Medicine, that are not offered at UB. As already alluded to above, the Botswana government finances these students to pursue medical studies outside the country, and the students have to go through their first two years of study

[223] Interview with Head of Department of Sociology, University of Botswana, 26 July 2005.

[224] Interview with Head of Chemistry Department, University of Botswana, 27 July 2005.

[225] Interview response from the same Head of Chemistry Department, University of Botswana, 27 July 2005.

at the local institution. The selection procedure is based on how well students perform in these initial years of study. It seems that this practice demoralises the less brilliant students who are not selected for study abroad. It is possible that this selection practice, coupled with the government's shouldering of the entire financial burden for students' university education, may partly explain why some students have low academic aspirations.

Notwithstanding the negative effects of state welfarism highlighted in the foregoing paragraphs, the overall impact of a sound economy can be seen in sound funding policies that government has implemented in order to support the development of a local skilled labour force through higher education subsidies. Direct government funding of university education in Botswana does not only reflect the existence of a welfare state, as pointed out above; it also reflects the absence of the broader discourse of market-driven consumerism that plagues many higher education systems in both developed and developing countries today. The general trend in many countries is that higher education systems are characterised by cuts in public funding and increases in user fees. As some theorists argue, such a trend is not only meant to relieve governments of the financial burden associated with provision of higher education, but also to instil a sense of self-discipline and responsibility on the part of learners.[226]

> The explanation for tuition increases is not simply that governments are focused on deficit reduction. Rather, fee increases and cuts to university funding comprise part of the larger discourse that emphasises educational production for the market. This discourse assumes that universities should operate as businesses in the service of a client market. Certain assumptions are made here. First, students are seen as the key customers. Universities are to gear themselves towards satisfying these customers. Second, it is thought that the customers should take greater responsibility for their education by paying higher tuition. Third, higher fees are seen as beneficial because they will encourage students to make more informed choices in choosing their university education. And finally, once students become concerned with the quality of their education, universities will have to pay attention.[227]

[226] Sosteric, M., Gismondi, M. & Ratkovic, G. (1998). The University, Accountability, and Market Discipline in the Late 1990s. In *Electronic Journal of Sociology:* http://www.sociology.org/content/vol003.003/sosteric_d.html. Retrieved on 10 July 2006

[227] Sosteric, M., Gismondi, M. & Ratkovic, G. (1998:4).

If the argument that the market discipline encourages students (who are the consumers) to demand quality education is true, then it can be argued that the lack of motivation by students at UB may partly be explained by the absence of a market discipline in the provision of university education in Botswana. Although there is no research evidence to link the poor performance of students and their low academic aspirations to having their financial burden shouldered by the government, it is nevertheless true that where students pays upfront, they are likely to be much more accountable to parents and guardians than where they do not.

Thus, the political context in which UB operates is conducive for the realisation of a reasonable degree of autonomy, freedom and social responsibility, which must be granted to the actors of the intellectual community. The ability of government to fund university education is, in a way, a positive factor enhancing recruitment and retention of qualified staff at UB. It is critical to note that the country's vibrant economy offers an enabling environment for the government to afford reasonable levels of subsidy to the university. At the same time, the welfare position of the state can be viewed as both a facilitator of access as well as a negative factor in terms of motivating students to aspire to higher achievements.

4.5 Social expectations of university institutions

Universities in the developing world are socially embedded institutions; they serve, first and foremost, the interests and needs of societies in which they are located. They recruit students from those societies and they reform their curricula in ways responsive to society's needs. In many contexts they are viewed as a key social agency for engendering social and economic development, including the generation of knowledge. Thus, there are certain expectations society has of a university and these must be sufficiently met if the institution is to remain relevant. Often, such expectations vary from society to society, depending on the needs of that society at any one given time. The following sections of this chapter treat some of the social expectations of the three case universities in order to illustrate how such expectations vary from context to context, and how they are a significant factor influencing quality performance and quality assurance in the institutions.

4.5.1 University of the Witwatersrand

Emerging from apartheid as a university for the white sector of South African society, society had new expectations of the University of the Witwatersrand in the new democratic dispensation. It no longer could afford to remain an elite institution, neither could it continue to cater for one sector of the community; reform was imperative.

The priority on reform policy focused on the creation of a single, co-ordinated and differentiated system of higher education that is believed to be effective in addressing the pressing needs of the wider society, such as access, equity and development, while at the same time meeting high standards of quality. It is clear that such policy required institutions to reposition themselves both in terms of their goals and in terms of practices that would ensure the achievement of such national goals. Specific quality-related goals spelled out in the national plan and to which all universities are to subscribe include:

- addressing race and gender imbalances with respect to student enrolment in programmes of study;
- improving throughput, retention and graduation rates;
- developing and effectively managing relevant curricula;
- achieving equity and development goals with respect to staffing.

To achieve these goals, institutions had to refocus their priorities, redefine their missions, rethink new ways of operating and assume new identities. Not only did the demographics of the institutions change as a result of these reforms, as pointed out above, but even the societal expectations of universities changed. In meeting the specified goals, universities were expected to play a significant role in changing the entire social structure of South African society in order to reflect the new democratic ideals that formed the hallmark for development. It is important to remember that such development is taking place within a globalised economy where competitiveness counts as a measure of success, in the wider economy of a nation as well as in its higher education system. Thus, higher education institutions are expected to be highly responsive to the pressing needs of the wider society in order to set the nation on a

new course of competitive development, where all sections of society participate without discrimination based on race, gender or social background. Thus, important principles guiding staff appointment and student recruitment processes at Wits are openness and inclusiveness; these are critical for the achievement of demographic equities that are in line with national government policy.

As alluded to earlier on, the new order emerging from the advent of democracy required the university to function in a very transparent and efficient manner, and to be accountable for whatever it does. National policy places emphasis on shared (or co-operative) governance of the higher education system, where government plays a very active role in governance issues while at the same time it cherishes values of institutional autonomy and academic freedom. This notion of shared governance implies shared responsibility for quality assurance between the state and the university, as opposed to traditional practice, although the need for some amount of conditional and not absolute autonomy is recognised.[228] As the White Paper on higher education confirms, the Department of Education reaffirms its commitment to academic freedom and institutional autonomy within the framework of public accountability as fundamental tenets of higher education and key conditions for a vibrant system.[229] Clearly, this shows a context where universities exercise conditional autonomy and within parameters that are defined at systemic level. This compromise on university autonomy is, in itself, a huge constraining factor when it comes to university performance. Academic staff need space within which to exercise their intellectual power in generating and disseminating knowledge. They need control over what they do, including making decisions on the best ways of quality assuring their work (what class sizes to enrol, which forms of knowledge to promote, the balance between teaching and research, mechanisms for reviewing their work). The act of inquiry is central to and pervasive within all institutions of higher education. Its realisation requires a necessary degree of autonomy, freedom and social responsibility, which must be granted to the actors or the intellectual community

[228] Jansen, J (2004: 297) Changes and continuities in South Africa's higher education system, 1994 to 2004. In Chisholm, L. (ed.), *Changing Class: Education and Social Change in Post-apartheid South Africa*. Pretoria, HSRC.

[229] DoE (1996:31) Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education DoE, Pretoria

involved.[230] Put in different words, universities serve their clients – the students – by hiring expertly trained professionals. Wherever these professionals may work, they will demand *autonomy* in their work; they will have *divided loyalties* (to their peers, organisation, etc.); they will rely on *peer evaluation* of their work; and they will demand a large measure of control over institutional decision-making processes.[231] Receiving already conceived and designed packages from outside authorities of how they should operate always generates a considerable amount of resentment and is regarded as an infringement of academic autonomy. This tends to weaken the implementation of policies.

It is quite apparent that under the new quality assurance arrangements at national level, institutions have to approach quality from a very broad perspective because of the broad goals that are nationally defined. Institutional audits, which are an important dimension of the quality assurance practices, address quality-related issues pertaining to the adaptability, responsiveness and innovativeness of institutions in the production of new knowledge and skills, and the utilisation of new modalities of provision. In addition, audits also seek to evaluate institutional initiatives to produce a vibrant intellectual culture both within the institution and in society, and act as an incubator of new ideas and cutting-edge knowledge as part of the national system of innovation.[232] Thus Wits quality assurance arrangements should be understood within a broader national context where the quality assurance system is intended to enhance access not simply to higher education but to high standards of provision and their concomitant intellectual and economic benefits.[233]

4.5.1.2 Equity and accountability expectations

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[230] Pullias & Wilbur, (1984: 5) cited in Cross, M. and Mhlanga, E. (2003: 8) Rethinking Quality Assurance Practices in Higher Education in the SADC Region, A Paper presented at the Kenton/SACHES conference at Goudini Spar, Cape Town, 23 – 25 October 2003.

See also Pullias, 1972; and Pullias, 1973

[231] Baldridge, J.V. (1986: 13) Alternative models of governance in higher education. In Marvin E Peterson (ed.), *ASHE Reader on Organisation and Governance in Higher Education (3rd Ed).* Massachusetts: Ginn Press

[232] HEQC's Framework for Institutional Audits, p.3

[233] Op cit. p. 1

Thus, the South African restructuring of higher education is unique to the extent that it is driven by a political agenda of transformation, redress and equity that explicitly seeks to break the apartheid mould of higher education.[234] The university's transformation processes are therefore located within and influenced by this broad national agenda and social expectation for self-transformation as an institution, and for sending similar values to the wider society through its exemplary practices. As the institution's self-audit report states:

> In 1998, Wits adopted a definition of Transformation as being:
>
> '… a process of negotiated organisational change that breaks decisively with past discriminatory practices in order to create an environment where the full potential of everyone is realised and where diversity – both social and intellectual – is respected and valued and where it is central to the achievement of the institution's goals'.[235]

It is clear from the report that in striving to meet its academic goals, the institution has to deal with the discriminatory legacies of the past, and success and progress as a university is partly measured in terms of how well it succeeds in meeting this end. The university's position on matters of transformation was well-articulated by the current Vice-Chancellor, Prof LG Nongxa, in his installation address in 2003:

> The twin goals of our Transformation Agenda should be
> i) to eliminate or eradicate race and gender stereotyping in academia;
> ii) to enhance the institution's performance, its effectiveness and its reputation.
>
> Our transformation project should be both forward-looking and about redress. It should be about where we want to be in 10, 15 or 20 years' time. It should be about a new vision, a new Wits, a better Wits. It should address the creative tensions between access and success or between excellence and equity ….[236]

The contextual imperative of redress is clearly not devoid of tensions and has significant implications in terms of staff recruitment and student enrolment policies at Wits. As part of its transformation process, the university continues to change the demographics of its student and staff community so as to achieve equity targets that

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[234] Hall, M., Symes, A. & Leucher, T. (2004) The governance of mergers in South African Higher Education: A research report prepared for CHE, Pretoria.

[235] Wits HEQC Quality Audit 2006 Self-Evaluation Report, p.32

[236] Wits HEQC Quality Audit 2006 Self-Evaluation Report, p.23

are in line with statutory requirements and which should be reported on to relevant government authorities on a regular basis:

> A Transformation and Employment Equity Office, recently renamed as the Transformation Office [www.wits.ac.za/tee], was established as part of the Human Resources Directorate at Wits in August 1999 to assist the University in fulfilling its commitment to diversity, equity and transformation at all levels of the institution. In this regard, the Transformation and Employment Equity Office plays various roles. It develops employment equity plans in accordance with the Employment Equity Act, for submission to the Department of Labour – these plans set numerical equity targets and propose strategies for meeting those targets.... These strategies include the recruitment, appointment and retention of staff from designated groups, particularly black African staff.[237]

While on the one hand the university wishes to maintain its highly reputable culture of excellence in both teaching and research, on the other hand the imperatives of redress, coupled with declining public funding, militate against the achievement of such cherished goals. Thus, Wits operates within a context in which it is steered by the state towards certain goals that are considered, at national level, to be in the interest of national development and in tandem with the new democratic dispensation. In this new context, equity reforms are, in fact, an integral aspect of the quality assurance dimensions of the university that have to be constantly reviewed and have attracted much attention in the institution's reform process. As the university's audit report states, this drive to meet equity reforms has resulted in significant changes in the shape of both the student and the staffing structure of the university:

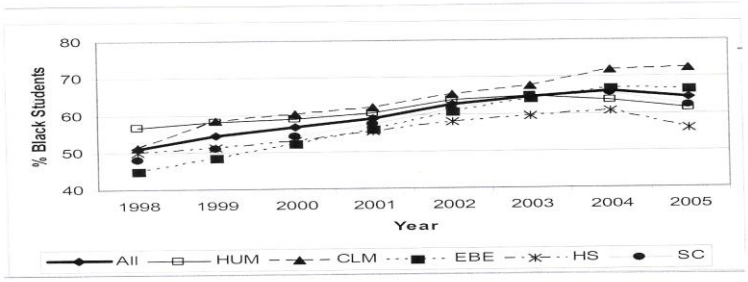
> From having a student body that was largely white and male for much of its history, Wits has seen and driven a radical transformation in its student demography. Driving this change has been considered as being central to the achievement of our mission statement because, in different ways, the diversity in our student population underpins each of our Mission Priorities. We therefore see this as an important area of development in dealing with issues such as equity, diversity, redress and growing the future cohorts of academics and researchers in South Africa.[238]

Figure 4.2 shows the changes that occurred in the black student population across all five faculties over an eight-year period as a result of the redress policy.

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[237] Wits HEQC Quality Audit 2006 Self-Evaluation Report , p. 173

[238] Wits HEQC Quality Audit 2006 Self-Evaluation Report p. 39



Faculty abbreviations

HUM = Humanities

CLM = Commerce, Law and Management

EBE = Engineering and the Built Environment

HS = Health Sciences

Source: Wits audit report, 2006 p.39

Figure 4.2
Change in proportion of black students at the University of the Witwatersrand, 1998 to 2005, by current faculty definition

These changes in institutional demographics, though meant to achieve equity goals, have no doubt had implications for the quality performance of the university. Over the past ten years, there have not only been overall increases in student enrolments, but the percentage of students from low socio-economic backgrounds has also risen quite significantly. This has particularly affected student retention and throughput rates in many academic programmes. A study on student retention and output rates conducted by the university in 2003 showed quite worrying trends:

> Not only are we graduating a relatively low average number of students from each cohort, but our trends and averages are skewed. Black students do much worse at Wits than do white students and women fare better than men. Of students who originally registered in the 1992 to 1998 cohorts, less than 50% on average graduate in most of our degrees. In some cases, less than 30% of a cohort graduate while in only one faculty is the average over 60%. In almost

> all our degrees, less than 45% of students graduate in minimum time. Many of our degrees exclude more than 20% of their students – with highest exclusion levels of 52% and the lowest being 4%.[239]

Clearly, changes in student demographics have impacted quite significantly on student throughput rates, an important dimension of institutional quality performance. These changes place new demands on the institution to change methods of delivery and to adopt a new culture of supporting a diverse student population. In terms of its teaching role, this means the university has to adopt new ways of operating that can enable it to cope. Current concerns commonly debated in the university regarding the calibre of the new type of student are, on the one hand, around student under-preparedness. Various academic units are grappling with trying to find the best ways of helping such needy students so they can cope with their studies. On the other hand, some think that part of the problem has to do with the university's own under-preparedness to handle the new type of student it is enrolling. In developing its quality assurance strategies, it seems necessary that both aspects of the problem have to be addressed if improvements in student retention and throughput rates are to be realised.

Changes in student demographics have been accompanied by corresponding changes in staff demographics. The numbers of academic staff from the designated groups have progressively increased over the years, although at a much slower rate than what would have been needed in order to meet Department of Labour equity requirements. The Wits audit report refers to a 2004 study conducted by Cloete and Gallant, which showed that:

> Over the period 1999 to 2003, the proportion of African academic staff at Wits grew from 10% to 17%, marginally lower than the average of 20% for universities in South Africa and significantly lower than the national target of 40%. Importantly, our sense is that this is a significantly higher proportion of African academic staff than the average for the other historically white universities in South Africa … the Cloete & Galant report shows that, over the period of their study, the proportions of African, Coloured and Indian academics at Wits grew by 83%, 38% and 83% respectively.[240]

The same study shows that changes in academic staff took place not only along racial lines but also in terms of gender:

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[239] Wits HEQC Quality Audit 2006 Self-Evaluation Report p.45

[240] Wits HEQC Quality Audit 2006 Self-Evaluation Report p. 35.

> The proportion of female academic staff at Wits grew from 37% to 43% from 1999 to 2003. However, by March 2005, this figure had grown to 44.5%, which is higher than the national average of 40% but still less than the target of 50%.[241]

These changes in academic staff profile have brought about differences in the quality of staff in terms of academic qualifications, international exposure, and research and teaching experience. For the institution to continue meeting the standards of excellence to which it aspires, much greater resources are obviously needed to support staff development initiatives that enhance the teaching and research capacity of the less experienced staff. Reputable and committed academic staff is the single most important factor determining how far the university can manage to stretch itself in terms of maintaining its established culture of quality performance. Many scholars of higher education studies recognise this factor; Muller, Maasen and Cloete, for instance, argue that:

> An institution's academic capacity resides not only in academics with reputable qualifications, but also in their ability to restructure programmes, to attract good undergraduate and postgraduate students, to engage with business, local communities and government in research and contract work, to be part of international academic networks, and to have effective relationships with funding agencies.[242]

From a quality assurance point of view, the changing nature of academic staff continues to be a challenge for the university. This is particularly so given that the university has chosen to be a research-intensive institution.

Clearly, a new culture of quality enhancement is emerging at Wits, a culture that is premised on a transformational agenda underpinned by a social justice discourse. Societal expectations of the university are that it be responsive enough to the needs of the new democratic society in terms of equity, shared governance, opening access, and imparting knowledge and skills that are relevant to the growing South African economy. At the same time, there is a strong drive to bring the system in line with international trends and practice. Within this framework of transformation, and as in

[241] Wits HEQC Quality Audit 2006 Self-Evaluation Report p.36

[242] Muller, J., Maasen, P. & Cloete, N. ((2005:298)

many universities in developed countries, quality assurance at Wits is steered towards greater accountability, transparency, efficiency and responsiveness. This global discourse is dealt with more comprehensively in Chapter 5. Here suffice it to mention that the notion of quality at national and institutional level, as well as resulting policy, is strongly influenced by the international discourses. The Founding Document of the Higher Education Quality Committee, for instance, states:

> The demand for greater accountability and efficiency in respect of public financing, trends towards mass participation in the face of shrinking resources, and greater stakeholder scrutiny of education and training processes and outcomes have led to the increasing implementation of formal quality assurance arrangements within higher education institutions and systems. A quality assurance system is intended to ensure that higher education and training programmes at under-graduate and postgraduate levels are relevant and responsive to the needs of learners, employers and other stakeholders within the context of the social, intellectual and economic requirements of societal development.[243]

It is clear from the HEQC document that, at national level, quality assurance is located within an accountability framework. In this sense, assuring quality in a university ceases to be the preserve of the service provider, as used to be the case at Wits; other stakeholders like the HEQC, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), the Department of Education and peer institutions are also involved, and whatever quality arrangements are put in place in an institution have to be objective, defendable and acceptable by the external stakeholders. Institutional quality assurance policies have to explicitly show the accountability dimension and practices have to involve relevant stakeholders external to the university, not just for the sake of gaining legitimacy, but more importantly in order to convince key stakeholders that the offerings of an institution meet nationally defined norms. This practice seems to be in line with the nationally shared value of shared governance of higher education institutions. The Wits Quality Assurance Policy explicitly confirms the accountability emphasis of the institution's position on quality assurance as well as the shared nature of the responsibility for ensuring high standards of quality for the university's performance:

> … our view of quality assurance includes accountability; however, it is not just for the University and the education community (particularly publicly

[243] HEQC Founding Document, (2001:1), CHE, Pretoria

> funded institutions) to be responsible and account for themselves; with responsibilities come rights and respect for roles. Therefore quality in higher education is also the responsibility of the public and public representative structures, e.g. government, to foster and support.[244]

Thus in order to gain legitimacy and greater transparency, national policy upholds a quality assurance system where there is integration of both the internal and the external dimensions, what I choose to call a mixed approach model. The quality assurance arrangements at Wits have a mixture of institutional self-evaluation and external independent assessment, a possible result of the traditional culture of the institution (that is characterised by independent quinquennial evaluation of schools as well as external peer reviews systems) and the national expectation for transparency. At stake in the institution with direct relevance to quality assurance is the current tension between societal expectations of the university in terms of achieving sufficient transformation through its student demographics and staff composition on one hand, and the quality benchmarks the institution set itself in order to maintain its international and regional reputation as a centre of excellence on the other

4.5.2 University of Zimbabwe

In line with trends in many developing countries, the higher education system in Zimbabwe opened doors to many students after the country's attainment of political independence in 1980. This expansionist policy was seen as a way of redressing the legacies of colonial rule where access to university was limited to a handful of blacks, and creating a local pool of skilled labour to replace the large number of whites who emigrated at independence. In this regard the University of Zimbabwe, as the highest institution of learning in the country, harnessing the best intellectual expertise, was expected by the public in general and the business sector in particular to provide the required skills to support an economy that was immediately opened up to the rest of the Southern African region, and indeed the global market. Thus, there was pressure from parents, employers and the government for the university to open its doors to larger numbers of students, especially from poor rural families. In terms of enrolment, the University of Zimbabwe grew from only 2 240 students in 1980, to 10 139 in

[244] The Wits quality assurance policy: Improving Quality, p.8

2001, to over 12 000 by 2005.[245] The figure of 12 000 students by 2005 is corroborated by the University of Zimbabwe strategic plan 2003-2007.[246] Today, the enrolment in tertiary education as a percentage of the 18-24 age group is about 6.6 per cent.[247] This mass higher education has resulted in great pressure being exerted on the available higher education resources in the country, particularly at the University of Zimbabwe.

Due to the phenomenal increase in university enrolments, it became necessary for the government to establish more public universities in the different provinces of the country in order to relieve pressure at UZ; at the same time, this move enhanced access. Most of these new institutions started as colleges of the University of Zimbabwe, and quality assurance of the academic activities of the colleges was the responsibility of UZ. This fact is significant in that most of the staff that pioneered these new universities, including Vice-Chancellors, came from the mother university and much of the benchmarking of their standards of performance was based on the University of Zimbabwe. To date there are 14 universities in the country, five private and nine public. Four of the private institutions are church universities. Two other private universities run by churches are also in the pipeline. This expansion of both university institutions and student enrolments has resulted in the spreading of public financial resources more thinly among these many institutions, a development that has obvious implications for quality. As demand for university education increased, particularly in the late 1980s, more private providers also came into the higher education market and this increased competition among institutions.

Provision of university education in Zimbabwe seems to be largely demand-driven and such approaches generally have problems with quality. As stated above, the higher education terrain in Zimbabwe has been characterised by a significant increase in university enrolments and in the number of both public and private universities. This situation has dictated the need for some kind of central regulation of service provision by these universities through quality assurance. In the past quality assurance

[245] University of Zimbabwe-Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/university_of_Zimbabwe, Retrieved on 12th July 2006

[246] University of Zimbabwe strategic plan 2003-2005, p.10

[247] World Bank. Statistical Profile of Education in sub-Saharan Africa 1999, World Bank 1999

was the sole responsibility of the University of Zimbabwe; with the reputable culture of quality inherited from the parent University of London and the University of Rhodesia, neither government nor the public had concerns regarding the quality of the institution. This faith in the ability of the university to institute acceptable levels of quality education changed, both from the point of view of government as well as the general public. As one high-ranking official in the Ministry of Higher Education expressed:

> But then with the establishment of more private universities and even other state universities, nine state and five private, that comes to 14. So now issues of quality assurance came to the fore. There was this concern over how we can ensure that we are maintaining and guaranteeing the same standards, so that we are able to say a degree from all the universities in the country has the same weight.
>
> We are aware of course generally that there are other mechanisms, for example, the entry requirements are another quality assurance mechanism. For example, here in Zimbabwe normal entry requirement is A-level. There is peer review, external assessment and all that, but with this sudden expansion, it was felt that this was no longer enough.[248]

Thus, as in the South African context, the proliferation of universities in Zimbabwe prompted the government to institute some buffer mechanism that facilitates steering of the quality assurance policy of university education at national level. A buffer mechanism is generally a statutory body that steers higher education on behalf of government and usually consists of representatives of government, institutions of higher education, the private sector and other key stakeholders like student organisations. Such mechanisms are quite common in many higher education systems as governments become more and more aware of the disadvantages of direct state control of universities, yet at the same time they need to maintain a steering role because universities are viewed as a national asset. In order to minimise infringing on the academic freedom and autonomy of institutions, while at the same time ensuring the protection and promotion of the public's interest within those higher education institutions, many governments have found it more expedient to devise buffer mechanisms. In many instances, these mechanisms are in the form of councils of

[248] Interview response from an official in the Ministry of Higher Education, Zimbabwe, 13 October 2005.

higher education that advise central government on the size, shape and funding of higher education; often they are also responsible for promoting and monitoring quality assurance.[249] As in the South African context, the Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education was formed as one such buffer mechanism, through an Act of Parliament in 2005. Its responsibility is to:

> ... oversee higher education. But what happens is with respect to other matters it will play an advising role. But when it comes to quality assurance, yes, it assumes executive powers. It means it will then be able to accredit both institutions and their programmes, what are the things in place to guarantee that the output in those programmes is generally of minimum standards.[250]

There is clearly a shift in terms of national quality assurance policy in Zimbabwe, from an internal system where universities used to rely on self-accreditation and self-evaluation to a more integrated system with an external dimension. The new quality assurance system is regulated by the ZCHE and requires institutions to be accountable to it. This arrangement very much resembles use of quality assurance as an important steering mechanism by the state. It is due to the changes in the national higher education terrain that the University of Zimbabwe is now taking steps to put in place a coherent and explicit institutional quality assurance policy, just like developments at Wits a few years ago. This is in line with new government expectations of all the universities in the country, private and public. At the time of this study, a retired professor and prominent educationist in the country had been tasked with the responsibility of doing research in the university with a view to devising a framework for such a quality assurance policy for the university. There is an apparent movement by the institution away from reliance on quality assurance guidelines scattered throughout several senate and other university documents to a situation where faculty and administration alike are guided by a coherent quality assurance policy that can be easily interpreted for implementation purposes while at the same time it can be subjected to regular reviews by outside stakeholders. According to the university's 2003-2007 strategic plan, this policy should be in place before the end of this planning

[249] World Bank (2000:53), Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise, World Bank, Washington D.C.

[250] Interview response from an official in the Ministry of Higher Education, Zimbabwe, 13 October 2005.

period. This signifies a move towards making quality assurance more transparent, more objective, and with a stronger external dimension – a phenomenon very similar to the Wits case.

The current general opinion of the majority of the Zimbabwean people today is that UZ has lost its reputation of high quality delivery, and is no longer imparting knowledge that is marketable internationally. This thinking is most conspicuous in the private sector which now prefers to employ graduates straight from high school and train them on the job. This trend, coupled with the shrinking economy and high unemployment rate, has resulted in most of the graduates of the university (and other higher education institutions) going unemployed after they finish their studies. Those that secure employment sometimes work in fields not related in any way to their fields of specialisation. These factors have resulted in university education losing its value as a life investment, and some young people prefer to engage in various forms of self-employment instead of going for university education. The more affluent parents are increasingly sending their children to institutions abroad where they perceive the quality of education to be high. Thus, in the eyes of the society, a university has certain quality expectations to meet and failure to do so results in loss of confidence in the institution. Due to problems beyond its control, the University of Zimbabwe is increasingly failing to meet the expectations of the local business community, parents and students.

4.5.3 University of Botswana

As already alluded to earlier on in this chapter, the Botswana context has long been characterised by the absence of not only other public universities, but also very few private providers of university education. With only 15 other public training colleges (six colleges of education, five institutes of health sciences, three nursing institutions and one college of agriculture), the higher education system of the country is less complex than that of South Africa and Zimbabwe. Thus, while in the South African and Zimbabwean contexts there is a need to harmonise the quality assurance activities of the many institutions in the system, both private and public, there has not been such a need in Botswana (until recently), hence there has been minimal participation by government in the quality assurance activities of the university. With the coming in of

private providers, this situation is likely to change very soon. In so far as quality assurance of the higher education system is concerned, it would appear that the government has invested a great deal of trust in the only university in the country. Kigotho confirms this:

> Thus the Ministry of Education has entrusted training in this field to the University of Botswana, which is responsible for the academic and professional standards of these institutions. This trust suggests that an excellent relationship exists between the University and the Government, a situation that is unusual in the developing world in general and Africa in particular.[251]

The University of Botswana acts on behalf of government in setting and monitoring standards of performance in the higher education system, through a system of affiliation. The programmes of the colleges are also validated by the university.[252] The official policy document on the tertiary education for the country states:

> These public institutions (training colleges) were centrally directed according to the Government's understanding of their role and responsibilities…. The exception was the University of Botswana, which is directed at arm's length through a self-regulating governing council, albeit funded solely by Government and with the head of state as Chancellor.[253]

Thus, apart from enjoying much autonomy in developing its own quality assurance system, the university is tasked with the responsibility of overseeing quality assurance in all the tertiary colleges in the country. With reference to the quality assurance arrangements of the institution, one of the top management officials underlined this autonomy:

> Our approach is different from institutions in the developed world where you have all these outside agencies telling you what standards are, what best practices are and you have to comply. I think we have much more freedom and one unique thing about UB is that we don't have anyone telling us what to do.

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[251] Kigotho, W. (2000:10) cited in Hopkin, A. G. (2001:2) Towards quality and institutional enhancement through agreed standards, A paper presented at the National council for teacher education fifth biennial conference held in August 28 – 30, 2001 in Gaborone

[252] Hopkin, A. G. (2001:3)

[253] Tertiary Education policy for Botswana: Challenges and Choices. A consultation paper prepared by the Working Group on the tertiary Education Policy for Botswana, (2005: 11)

> We are very autonomous. We get money from government but we are considered a parastatal. Our students also get funding from government but that's about all. We really don't have to report to anybody.[254]

Key social expectations of the university have been that it supports economic development in the country by producing the required labour skills and expertise. In this regard, the institution should meet the needs and demands of employers, including the public sector. Because of such expectations, the university had to come out of its "'ivory towers" and forge new relationships with the society. As the Tertiary Education Policy states, the major trend has been that university education is no longer reserved for an exclusive minority but instead is opened up towards universal participation.[255] Thus, apart from responding to the increasing demand for university education by upping enrolments, the institution has more stakeholders participating in the affairs of the university in particular, and in higher education in particular. Such stakeholders include industry, business, the media and professional associations. All these stakeholders affect how the institution benchmarks its quality and the quality assurance practices that are pursued.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the contextual factors that influence quality assurance practices in each of the three case institutions that were used in this study. In analysing these factors, I looked at four key contextual aspects that have profound influence on both the quality performance and implementation of quality assurance systems in the institutions. These four factors are the legacies of the institutions, the changing role of the state in university education, the effects of the macro-economic environment on institutional performance, and how specific societal expectations of university education impact on the quality of university offerings. Through an examination of these factors, the chapter has demonstrated how they can facilitate as well as constrain the development and prudent implementation of sound quality assurance systems in the universities. It has also illustrated the startling differences

[254] Interview with a Deputy Director of CAD, University of Botswana, 13 October 2005

[255] Tertiary Education policy for Botswana: Challenges and Choices. A consultation paper prepared by the Working Group on the tertiary Education Policy for Botswana, (2005: 5)

that exist between and among the three institutions, in spite of the fact that they share a common regional location.

The study noted that all the three institutions have, in recent years, made tremendous investments in the development of sound systems and structures that are meant to enhance quality performance. Yet, in some cases, the environment militates against effective implementation of those quality assurance arrangements. At the University of Botswana, major constraining factors to effective quality assurance policy implementation include over-enrolment of students which results in overstretching available resources, a mismatch between quality assurance policy expectations and resource support, low levels of motivation of students to excel in their academic work and unsatisfactory conditions of service for staff. At the same time, the strong economy of the country coupled with government commitment towards the development and support of university education are major strengths that can enhance quality delivery by the university. The realisation by the state of the need to adopt a "hands off" approach and to steer higher education from a distance has allowed the University of Botswana a sufficient degree of autonomy to develop sound quality assurance systems that are premised more on epistemic than on external accountability values.

The context of the University of the Witwatersrand shows sharp contrasts with the University of Botswana case, in that the higher education system is not only much more complex but also bears the legacy of the erstwhile apartheid higher education system. This legacy makes it necessary for the state to play a more active role in running and shaping the university system as a whole. Wits is therefore located within a higher education system that is in transition and where state monitoring and state evaluation characterise the type of relationship prevailing between the state and the university. The institution enjoys conditional autonomy, a position that is spelled out in the country's Constitution. This gives staff a particular kind of perception of the current quality assurance arrangements recommended by the HEQC and being implemented by the institution. As opposed to the University of Botswana, where the quality assurance policy is internal to the university, Wits has a mixed approach model to quality assurance, where the internal practices are supported by external practices in the form of audits and external accreditation of academic programmes.

The mixed approach model is both a strength and a constraint in so far as quality assurance at Wits is concerned. It is a strength in that the quality assurance arrangements of the institution gain international legitimacy through external validation by the CHE, and the system encourages the institution to constantly reflect on its practices. At the same time, the external requirements are associated with a great deal of bureaucracy that does not necessarily lead to effective self-improvement. A contextual strength identified through this study that is in favour of sound institutional performance is the sound economy that is capable of supporting institutional academic projects. Although government subsidy is on the decline, the government commits reasonable amounts of funds to support university business, such as research funding, student grants and funds for general infrastructural development. There is, however, tension between redress which involves changing student and staff demographics in order to reflect the new South African society on one hand, and the priority to peg quality standards according to international benchmarks on other. Thus, social expectations of the institution are not necessarily in tandem with the quality priorities of the university, at least in the short term.

The University of Zimbabwe is in a rather unique and, perhaps, transitory context that is replete with overwhelming challenges and calamities that constantly call for crisis management. The institution has suddenly found itself in a context where all public and private social institutions find it hard to function due to the adverse economic conditions in the country. While the other two cases are located in contexts where the economies are still vibrant, the University of Zimbabwe's efforts at implementing sound quality assurance systems and maintaining academic excellence are hampered by Zimbabwe's depressed economic environment. The institution is a clear demonstration of the significance of the mutual relationship that prevails between the economy and public institutional performance in a country. Due to the general economic depression in the country, the University of Zimbabwe is faced with many problems like a brain drain leading to staff shortages, shortage of essential equipment like computers, library resources and research funds, as well as staff who are demoralised due to poor conditions of service. At the same time, state interference and state control mechanisms stifle the academic freedom and autonomy of both students and staff. These problems stall efforts by the university to revive its long-standing tradition of excellence. The sound quality assurance goals spelled out in the

university's strategic plans can hardly be achieved due to lack of adequate qualified staff and other essential support resources. In the main, it can be argued that the University of Zimbabwe is now failing to adequately meet its social expectations as the country's oldest institution of higher education. Its research capacity has declined, students and staff do not derive satisfaction from their academic activities as they used to do in the past, and parents and employers alike are gradually losing confidence in the institution. In short, the university is struggling to fulfil its academic project.

It was evident in the analysis of factors dealt with in this chapter that the effectiveness of quality assurance policy implementation in university institutions depends very much on the existence of supportive social, economic and political factors. The chapter also underscores the importance of the state maintaining a non- interference form of relationships with universities in order to allow the latter sufficient scope to be innovative and respond to market trends. It is necessary to create an enabling environment if quality delivery is to be enhanced in university institutions within the region.

While this chapter dealt with matters of context in each of the studied universities, the next chapter focuses on global and regional factors that influence not only quality assurance, but also the general performance of the three universities used in this study.

Chapter 5

REGIONALISATION AND ITS IMPACT ON QUALITY ASSURANCE

5.1 Introduction

In many parts of the world, higher education is still predominantly shaped at national level, and tends not only to reflect but also to underscore the specific traditions and circumstances of individual countries.[256] As a result, it has been mainly assessed in the context of national systems with very little attention being paid to its international dimension. This state of affairs has arguably been due to the strong relationship that often prevails between higher education and the nation state. Generally, the higher education sector has long been almost wholly publicly funded and therefore strictly controlled by the state. Under these circumstances, quality assurance mainly served as a form of public accountability and the nation state steered the system as the sole player with a significant stake in higher education. However, this trend has started to change and the predominance of the nation state as the main determinant of the character of universities is now heavily challenged. Thus, the higher education system today is characterised by de-nationalisation, a process where states are losing their monopoly on the control of university institutions while at the same time the systems are gradually being shaped by factors beyond their national borders. Significant among these external factors is the influence of globalisation and internationalisation forces on local higher education systems and on quality assurance in particular.

Globalisation within Sub-Saharan Africa is assuming the form of regionalisation, a process that involves the creation of a common space in the various aspects of social and economic development of the countries within the region. As in the European Union, the process is characterised by the adoption of common policies on matters of education, trade, migration and general development. There is increasing realisation

[256] Enders, J. (2002:1) Higher Education, Internationalization, and the Nation State: Recent Developments and Challenges to Governance Theory. Paper presented at the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers (CHER) 15th Annual Conference in Vienna, Austria, 5-7 September 2002

globally of the importance of close co-operation between countries through sharing resources and technologies, addressing common problems and facilitating the free movement of people.[257] The key advantage of creating such regional blocs lies in the benefits individual countries enjoy in confronting problems as a group rather than as individuals, and in building on each other's synergies in the process of development. Member countries support each other in the process of economic development by concentrating on different niche areas. This chapter argues that, in so far as quality assurance in the case institutions is concerned, regionalisation takes the following forms: (i) standardisation of systems and strategies and synchronisation of standards and procedures in quality assurance; (ii) marketisation and commodification of knowledge; (iii) a new managerialism (iv) efforts towards the establishment of regional quality assurance bodies; (v) mobility of students and staff; and (vi) alignment of systems with global trends.

5.2 Regionalisation and higher education in Southern Africa

5.2.1 The regionalisation project

The project of regionalisation has undergone several metamorphoses in Southern Africa. Starting as an apartheid project during colonialism, this political project was aimed at integrating the region into a wider Southern African economy. This was to be achieved by creating a constellation of states within the region that would promote, support and consolidate colonial interests. As more states became politically independent within the region, they reconceptualised the concept, through the formation of the Southern African Development Co-ordination Committee (SADCC), into an emancipatory strategy. The regional body was meant to facilitate collaboration and co-ordination of activities among the member states. Such collaboration was extended beyond political frontiers to include economic and social dimensions of development. In order to enhance such development, the regional body identified niche areas for member countries, and co-ordinated development in those areas for the benefit of the entire region. These areas included, among others, transport networks, regional food security, mining and fisheries, tourism, and the development of energy

[257] The context of harmonization of higher education programmes in Africa: Report of the Third ordinary session of the conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union (COMEDAF III) held in Johannesburg, South Africa, 6 - 10th August 2007, p.4

resources. Thus efforts were made to identify areas of economic strength, including the natural resource endowments of each member country, which were to be developed for the benefit of the region. There was the realisation that for such development to happen, human resource capacity was a key prerequisite, hence the focus on the development of higher education by the region.

SADCC evolved into the Southern African Development Community (SADC), a body that is increasingly becoming an expression of globalisation, much like the European Union. As more and more calls are made for greater regional integration, efforts at harmonising and integrating higher education systems are gradually intensifying. The SADC Protocol on Education and Training is one instrument meant to achieve such harmonisation of the system. Article Seven of this Protocol deals with co-operation in higher education and training and clarifies some of the key areas of harmonisation. The major aim of the Protocol is "to progressively achieve equivalence, harmonisation and eventual standardisation of the education and training systems in the region".[258] The SADC Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA) was established in 1997 with a specific mandate to develop and recommend policy guidelines, instruments, structures, and procedures that would eventually facilitate equating, harmonising, and standardisation of accreditation and certification of qualifications in the SADC region. To achieve this mission, the TCCA set the following objectives:

- to facilitate the development and implementation of national qualifications frameworks;
- to facilitate harmonisation of national qualifications frameworks into the development of a regional qualifications framework;
- to strengthen national assessment, quality assurance and accreditation structures, systems and procedures; and
- to facilitate the development of credit transfer systems.[259]

[258] Harmonisation of higher education programmes in Africa: Opportunities and Challenges. A report of the Third ordinary session of the conference of ministers of education of the African Union (COMEDAF III) held in Johannesburg, South Africa, 6th to 10th August 2007, p.46

[259] Harmonisation of higher education programmes in Africa: Opportunities and Challenges. A report of the Third ordinary session of the conference of ministers of education of the African Union (COMEDAF III) held in Johannesburg, South Africa, 6th to 10th August 2007, p.47

Among other tasks, this Committee undertakes studies and analyses of issues of accreditation and recognition, which provide a basis for making recommendations that will lead to comparability of criteria of evaluations and recognition of degrees within the region. The SADC TCCA has reportedly initiated the process of establishing a regional qualifications framework known as the Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF). In 2006, the TCCA produced a Draft Concept Paper on the SADC Qualifications Framework, in which it proposed the establishment of a SADC Qualifications Agency. On the recommendations of the Ministers responsible for higher education in the SADC member countries, the TCCA should first focus on assisting countries to strengthen their quality assurance systems before the development of national and regional qualifications frameworks. It is clear from the activities of the TCCA that there are moves towards greater harmonisation of higher education offerings and standardisation of quality assurance systems within the region.

Clearly, SADC is a key driver in the creation of a higher education space in the region, and of a regional quality assurance system with which all universities within the member countries will have to comply. The regional body's influence on institutional quality assurance systems is mainly through the formation of a regional quality assurance framework, the emphasis placed on comprehensive national approaches to quality assurance that fit within a regional qualifications framework, and the benchmarking of quality standards that align with international trends. There is greater realisation that progress in the SADC region cannot be seen in isolation from global developments, and that member institutions will be very much influenced by this value in their quality assurance practices.

Beyond the SADC region, regionalisation on the continent is further driven through the formation of bodies like the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the African Council for Distance Education (ACDE), the Association of African Universities (AAU), the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), and the Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA). All these organisations seek common strategies towards educational problems in Africa and in the Southern African region, particularly in addressing quality assurance.

One result of such regional integration in higher education is the enhancement of both student and staff mobility across institutions within the region and on the continent in general. There is also harmonisation of policy and guidelines for quality assurance and the evaluation of qualifications across institutions in order to facilitate equivalency and comparability. Such comparability further enhances student movement and credit transfer across country institutions. Within the SADC region, regionalisation ushers in (i) standardisation of quality assurance systems; (ii) a new managerialism in the management of higher education institutions; (iii) marketisation and commodification of knowledge; (iv) changing forms of state-university relationships; (v) greater emphasis on efficiency, cost saving and income-generating discourse; (vi) the forging of university-private sector partnerships; and (vii) increasing staff and student mobility in the region and on the continent. This chapter pursues these themes and shows how they are influencing the operations of the three case institutions, and the impact this has on quality assurance.

5.2.2 Standardisation of systems and strategies

Standardisation of higher education and of quality assurance systems in particular, is explicitly expressed through the activities of several bodies on the continent and in the Southern African region. The Arusha Convention of December 1982, which was subsequently revised in 2002 in Cape Town and in Dakar in 2003, is one such initiative. This Convention pushes for the recognition of certain studies, certificates, diplomas, degrees and other academic qualifications in higher education in African countries. Underlying this move is the principle of harmonisation and portability of qualifications on the continent. The African Union (AU), on the other hand, is developing a strategy for harmonising higher education programmes, and at the core of this initiative is the development of criteria for harmonising qualifications across countries. There is talk of joint training and joint offering of certain degree programmes in order to provide skills that are considered key to economic development on the continent. The African Council for Distance Education has identified as its priority area the establishment of Pan African Standards and of a regional quality assurance body for distance education. Thus, benchmarking of standards in programme offerings becomes a regional rather than an institutional

concern. The Association of African Universities is poised to raise standards of higher education in African countries, primarily by building capacity in the area of quality assurance. In Southern Africa, the promotion of national and regional qualifications frameworks has been on the agenda for quite some time, again in order to facilitate mobility and portability of qualifications across countries. A direct consequence of all the above-cited initiatives by various organisations is: regional integration through increased regional student and staff mobility; increased sharing of information, intellectual resources and research; strengthening African expertise to avoid over-reliance on skills from elsewhere; promotion of greater networking within the region; and the creation of a common African higher education and research space.

Regionalisation has an indirect but very profound influence on institutional quality assurance. Apart from giving higher education a transnational character, today's market-driven regionalisation fosters similarities that are related to the "consolidation of international (and regional) epistemic communities that seek common responses to common problems".[260] The dynamics of regionalisation have a significant impact on the perceptions of what constitutes valuable knowledge and quality degrees, and hence influences how institutions proceed to assure their offerings. At the same time, national quality assurance agencies try to align their quality assurance systems with regional quality assurance frameworks and to the ideals of international quality assurance agencies. At the University of Botswana and at the University of Zimbabwe, for instance, it was evident that in developing institutional quality assurance systems there was extensive consultation with international and regional experts, sometimes at the expense of local stakeholders. Although there was no evidence of similar consultations at the University of the Witwatersrand, the literature shows that international consultation was quite extensive in developing quality assurance policy at national level in South Africa.[261] Because of regionalised markets, "ways are needed to provide, internationally, information about the nature, level, and

[260] Torres, C.A. and Schugurensky, D. (2002:43) The Political Economy of higher education in the era of neo-liberal globalisation: Latin America in comparative perspective. In *Higher Education*, Vol.43, pp429-455

[261] See Kraak, A. (2004) Discursive tensions in South African Higher Education, 1990 to 2002. In *Journal of Studies in International Education,* Vol.8 (3) pp.244-281

quality of education"[262]of any university institution that claims space on the regional higher education market. Within the region, institutions closely follow market trends and try to align their degrees and their research programmes with the demands and needs of the ever-changing and expanding regional market. A typical example of this is the increasing recruitment of students and academic staff by South African universities from the rest of the continent. According to a survey conducted at Wits in 2004, 9 per cent of the surveyed students came from the SADC countries while 8 per cent came from the rest of the African continent.[263] The vision of the University of South Africa (UNISA), for instance, places the institution as an African university that is poised to serve South Africa and the African continent. Due to regionalisation, universities within the region find themselves in a new information age in which society, the economy and knowledge have become part of an irresistible regional environment, and therefore are forced to conform to regional trends, consciously or unconsciously. This trend is greatly enhanced through the growing awareness by universities of international and regional co-operation, collaboration and competition in the globalised higher education market.[264]

5.2.3 A new managerialism

In most regional institutions, including the three case universities for this study, an emerging trend is that managers have assumed greater importance and enjoy heftier benefits than academic professionals. Greater emphasis is placed on "hard" approaches to management in order to achieve efficiency. As Cloete and colleagues confirm from their study of the South African higher education system, many vice-chancellors believe that the biggest challenge facing their institutions has shifted away

[262] Woodhoues, D. (2001:1) Globalisation: Implications for Education and for Quality. A paper presented at the AAIR Conference held at Rockhampton, Australia on 3 September 2001.

[263] Cross, M., Sehoole, T., Mhlanga,E., Bayers-Ameguide, P., Inglis, J. and Koen, S. (2004) University experience in the 21st century: Perceptions of global and local exposure at the University of the Witwatersrand. (Unpublished research report)

[264] See: Enders, J. (2002) Higher Education, Internationalisation, and the Nation State: recent Developments and Challenges to Governance Theory. A paper prepared for the CHER conference held in Vienna, Austria, 5-7 September 2002.

Teicler, U. (1999) Internationalisation as a challenge for higher education in Europe. In *Tertiary Education and Management,* Vol. 5 (1) pp.5-23

Altbach, P. and Teichler, U. (2001) Internationalisation and Exchanges in a Globalised University. In *Journal of Studies in International Education,* Vol. 5 (1) pp.5-25

from achieving the national goals of equity, democracy and relevance to one of safeguarding the "bottom line".[265] The same authors further note that at most of the South African universities they studied, the struggle to stay solvent had become the new battlefront.[266] In order to achieve such solvency, institutions have resorted to tight management systems that are characterised by an entrepreneurial ethos. The three case universities, like business enterprises, now engage managers at every level of the system and these managers emphasise performance – the capacity to deliver outputs at the lowest possible cost. New managerialism manifests itself in the increasing levels of accountability on the part of institutions and the individuals therein, and in the growth of an audit culture within the institutions. Quality assurance policies for these institutions are premised on the same managerial values, hence the feeling among academics at the case institutions that quality assurance is managerialistic. As is shown in the following section, marketisation and commodification of knowledge have profoundly influenced enrolments for the three case universities, the forms of knowledge they privilege, and the type of research they engage in.

5.2.4 Marketisation and commodification of knowledge

While the process of globalisation is not new, what seems to be novel about it, especially within the Southern African context, is the degree of expansion in trade and transfer of capital, labour mobility, production, consumption, information and technology which, together, are ushering in significant changes in lifestyles, working patterns, how nations relate to one another within the region, and how institutions deliver their programmes and set their research agenda. Like anywhere else, universities within the region are listening more to the voice of the market than ever before. Market-induced processes, driven mainly by market expansion, are informing what counts as valid knowledge and what disciplines to prioritise. Regionalisation is enhancing transnational business activities that thrive on selling the culture-ideology of consumerism. The expansion of South African companies and businesses to other

[265] Cloete, N., Bunting, I. and Kulati,T. (2000) Higher education leadership challenges in 1999. In Cloete, N., Kulati,T. & Phala, M. (eds.) *Leadership and Institutional Change in Higher Education,* CHET, Pretoria.

[266] Ibid

countries within the region and indeed on the continent is a typical example of such market expansion. Mobile communication, finance and retail companies are penetrating the regional markets. The same trend is noticeable in the field of higher education, where South African universities are recruiting more and more students and academic staff from the region. The ideology of consumerism privileges the perpetual expansion and growth of the regional market. Thus, today's market-driven globalisation, with its push for commercial interests that protect profits rather than people, is an unstoppable process on a world (and indeed regional) scale.[267] The market discourse has entrenched itself quite significantly in higher education and has influenced new ways of redefining the role of the African university and the clients that it serves. All the three universities studied advertise conventional programmes as well as innovative short courses offered to employees in various fields, the latter mostly on a part-time basis. Such short courses are meant to attract more revenue for the institutions. They also run university enterprises, forge partnerships with the private sector, and engage in a number of income-generating activities. The universities have shifted from being public institutions that serve public interests to being entrepreneurial enterprises that operate as business entities that view students as consumers and that survive on values of competition and efficiency. Any notion of educational process serving a form of collective public good has all but disappeared; instead participation in tertiary education is now regarded as a form of private investment.[268] This is particularly noticeable at Wits and at the University of Zimbabwe. This thinking explains why students (consumers) at the University of Zimbabwe and to some extent at Wits are required to shoulder the bulk of the increasing cost of higher education. It also explains why organisations like the World Bank have in the past recommend less public investment in higher education than in basic and secondary education. Institutional operations and policy decisions are informed more by corporate values than by epistemic ones.

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[267] Op. cit. p.272

[268] Sosteric, M, Gismondi, M and Ratkovic, G. (1998) The University, Accountability, and Market Discipline in the late 1990s. In *Electronic Journal of Sociology, CAAP*, http://www.sociology.org/content/vol003.003/sosteric.html?PHPSESSID=6f415d42b427a127d1a3fc3907ec71b2 Retrieved on 24 May 2006

The desire to do more with less (e.g. upping student-lecturer ratios, increasing teaching hours for staff, making staff do with minimum of resources needed for effective teaching and research) was one of the major identified threats to quality delivery in the three universities. Staff in the three institutions were very concerned about the practice of basing planning on the economic rationale. At Wits the following concerns were raised by some of the interviewed staff regarding prevailing student/ lecturer ratios:

> There are variations from school to school. Some schools complain they are overloaded, e.g. here [at School of X] the [lecturer/student] ratio is 1:40 and the trend is that it's getting higher and higher every year. There are more students being enrolled and less staff being recruited; the faculty focuses more on the budget.[269]

A respondent from a different faculty expressed the following regarding class sizes in the school:

> Our belief has been, for a while now, that we have more students than we should have had in the faculty. … In my school, which is the School of [Y], we operate at class numbers which can be as high as 300. I think that is too large. My personal view is that 120 is reasonable.[270]

The situation regarding class sizes was far worse at the University of Botswana. As was revealed by interviews with staff in departments, unmanageable class sizes are a university-wide problem, not only militating against quality teaching and learning in the university but also demoralising both staff and students. One academic member of staff had the following to say regarding class sizes at the university:

> Our lecture rooms are bursting to the seams. This is a university-wide cry and we continue to say that for us to really arrive at our goal, some of these things have to be taken care of.[271]

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[269] Interview with a quality assurance coordinator, Faculty of Engineering, University of the Witwatersrand, 7 April 2005.

[270] Interview with a quality assurance coordinator, Faculty of Science, University of the Witwatersrand, 16 March 2005.

[271] Interview with a Head of Department, Faculty of Science, University of Botswana, 28 July 2005

On the same problem of class size, one head of department expressed the following views:

> Besides that, the other thing is facilities. Sometimes you find you have a class of 300 and the classroom can only take 150, so we have that problem. And you see if students find themselves congested in classrooms, they use that as a reason for not attending lectures. So you have what I sometimes call telephone students, absentee students who will only appear when you give a test because the class will be packed. We have a situation where an instructor went to a class with 150 scripts only to realise that the class size was 250. Yah, these are some of the stumbling blocks.[272]

In response to the question on what he considered to be some of the constraints to achieving quality benchmarks in the Department, another Head of Department responded thus:

> One [constraint] definitely, the number of students; it's just very high. If they could reduce that.... [273]

There is evidently the generic problem of large class sizes in the studied universities. At the University of Botswana, most staff reported that they handle classes that are generally too big for the available lecture rooms in the university. In some cases, students spill out of the small rooms during lectures and this has a demotivating effect on the students. Most departments reported undergraduate class sizes of between 100 and 300 students. This trend is confirmed by survey data, which shows that at the University of Botswana 50 per cent of the respondents taught undergraduate classes that were in excess of 75 students, and 17 per cent of them had classes that were over 150 students. Thus the general view of UB staff is that class size is an essential variable militating against quality teaching and learning at the university and requires urgent attention if the newly developed quality assurance policy is to yield the desired results. At Wits, 22.5 per cent of the surveyed staff taught classes that were 150 students or more, while 15 per cent taught classes that had more than 200 students.

[272] Interview with a Head of Department, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Botswana, 26th July 2005.

[273] Interview with an academic member of staff in the Department of Educational Foundations, University of Botswana, 26 July, 2005.

The literature shows that class size has an effect on the quality of learning that takes place in a class:

> Research on class size and student performance suggests that pedagogical technique is the most important variable in determining the quality of a learning experience: classes that are engaging, have the opportunity for one-on-one discussion and encourage participation achieve high quality learning.[274]

The tendency in the studied universities, and indeed in many other universities within the region, to handle too many students using minimum resources and to engage academic staff at unattractively low salaries leads to the creation of Fordist-style degree mills.[275] Postmodern theorists call it "performativity" – that is, "the capacity to deliver outputs at the lowest cost [which] replaces truth as the yardstick of knowledge".[276] This practice defeats the whole purpose of achieving academic excellence by universities as it constrains the effective implementation of the quality assurance policies in the case universities.

Such are the manifestations of market-induced regionalisation in the studied universities. Commercialisation of research has now seen the privileging of applied research at the expense of basic research. In the South African context, for instance, patterns in research and publishing show an alarming tendency to "follow the money".[277] In all three universities, curriculum relevance is viewed in terms of knowledge application to the world of work, and the market is exerting profound influence on curriculum reforms. At Wits for instance, the Faculty of Humanities has closed down some of the departments that are considered to be out of touch with market trends, like Classics, Religious Studies and Afrikaans. Other disciplines like History are equally threatened with closure due to the limited number of students who opt for them. At the same time, new study areas are being introduced because they are considered to be relevant to current market trends, and for this reason they attract large numbers of students and significant revenue. Examples of such areas are Work

[274] Post-Secondary Education in Alberta, 1997: 21-22.

[275] Noble, 1997 cited in Sosteric, et al 1998

[276] Crook et. al. in Delucchi and Smith, (1997: 323).

[277] Muller, J. (2005) The world is not enough: Knowledge in question. In *South African Journal for Higher Education*, Vol. 19 (3) pp. 89-103.

and Labour in the Global Economy (a sociology field) and Issues in South African News Media. All these curriculum trends are influenced by market ideology. Decisions as to whether courses will or will not be delivered are measured by their financial viability and not only by their long-term intellectual contribution to the project within the unit.[278] The notion of profit centres forms the hallmark of the functioning of academic centres, and institutions are run on business/corporate lines, including the use of strategic plans.

University curricula following market trends rather than knowledge for its own sake was not only peculiar to Wits; it was also noted at the other two case study universities. The literature shows that this is a common trend worldwide in higher education systems and is an integral aspect of globalisation. As Carnoy would argue, globalisation enters the field of education on an ideological horse.[279] Institutions continually scan the market, and their success is determined by their ability to adjust and align themselves with the needs and demands of the market. It is the neo-liberal ideology that ushered in economic reform policies that promote massive privatisation and decline in public spending, removal of trade barriers and promotion of export orientations, deregulation of markets and reduction of state intervention in the economy. All these aspects are characteristic of higher education in the Southern African region. Such policies, which have also been strongly supported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (themselves peddlers of the globalisation process) in developing countries, have had the overall impact of increasing corporate culture in the operations of universities, institutions that hitherto functioned primarily for the public good.

One of the most disturbing reform policies that caused student unrest at the University of Zimbabwe as well as at the University of the Witwatersrand, although to a lesser extent at the latter, was the cut by the universities in public funding for students as a consequence of reduced funding by government. The implications of this development at Wits and at the University of Zimbabwe was that students had to pay

[278] Johnson, B. (2005) Towards post-managerialism in higher education: the case of management change at the University of the Witwatersrand, Unpublished doctoral thesis, Wits School of Education

[279] Carnoy, M. (1999:59) *Globalization and educational reform: What planners need to know*, UNESCO, Paris

for their university education at economic rates, something that obviously had tension with state policies on access and equity. At the University of Zimbabwe, this policy saw many students from poor family backgrounds failing to meet their financial obligations to the university and going on disruptive strikes that paralysed the university teaching programme for the greater part of 2006. In the same year, students went on strike at Wits, crying foul over the proposed increase in fees for the following academic year. It is interesting to note that in the South African context, several incidents of student uprisings have disrupted university business as a result of fees increases. The following excerpt illustrates this point:

> Lectures at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) were brought to a halt on Monday after talks between management and the Student Representative Council broke down…. Students are protesting against a planned 100 per cent hike in registration fees, an increase in residence fees and lack of transport to student residences. Students have staged pickets and protests at the institution's various campuses. …The SRC's media liaison officer said DUT planned to increase registration fees to R4 000 in 2008. Students paid R2 000 registration fees in 2007.[280]

At the University of Zimbabwe, university teaching and learning facilities declined quite significantly, thereby affecting the overall quality of learning by students. This development is resulting in the general decline in public confidence in the university. Thus, fundamentally, expansion of enrolment has increased the tension between numerical access (in terms of increasing student numbers) and epistemic access at UZ as well as at Wits. Heavy student fees are cited as one of the possible causes for the decline in university enrolment in South Africa after 1998.[281] In the South African context, private costs of higher education were increasing at rates well above the Consumer Price Index (CPI) throughout the 1990s, and the overall effect of this was a substantial increase in student debt being carried by some institutions.[282] To avoid losing their overdraft facility from commercial banks, institutions had to tighten regulations enforcing upfront payment of fees, a move that edged needy students out of the system.

[280] Published on the Web by IOL on 2007-07-23 17:06:28

[281] Clote, N., Bunting, I. and Khulati, T. (2000)

[282] Ibid

In higher education, it is clear that globalisation has changed the discourse of rights into an economic discourse of investment, where decisions to invest are determined purely by the perceived social returns of such investments. Such rationale is not consistent with the equity values espoused by the state in Zimbabwe and South Africa. It also falls far short of providing a conducive funding framework for institutions to manage effective quality assurance systems.

5.2.5 State-institution relationships within a regionalised market

Regionalisation and internationalisation forces have also influenced the changing patterns of state-institution relationships, the subject of discussion in Chapter 6 of this thesis. The first effect of regionalisation was the ushering in of new international reform ideologies that fundamentally challenged the notion of institutional self-steering in higher education.[283] Regionalisation has led to the broadening of the role of higher education policy to embrace economic growth, the promotion of the knowledge economy, internationalisation and trade.[284] The assumption that universities and colleges should be left to steer themselves has been challenged. Instead, the new thinking is that universities should be externally steered, subject to market forces, audited through formal evaluation, accountable for their performance, and run by professional leaders and managers rather than academics.[285] Underlying this reform thinking is the belief that universities should be externally controlled and that their activities need to be continually evaluated, hence scholars like Neave discuss the "the rise of the evaluative state".[286] The rationale behind this thinking is that universities in the region, very much unlike in the developed world, are key instruments for inducing social and economic development, and hence the importance of state steering in order to align their activities with broader national and regional development plans. Thus, the impact of international reform ideologies has been the rejuvenation of state interest in the running of university affairs, which is basically the

[283] Maasen, P. and Cloete, N. (2002:16) Global reform trends in higher education. In Cloete, N. et al (eds.) *Transformation in Higher Education: Global Pressures and Local Realities in South Africa;* Cape Town, Juta

[284] Tertiary Education Policy for Botswana: Challenges and Choices, p7

[285] Tertiary Education Policy for Botswana: Challenges and Choices, p.7

[286] Neave, G. (1988: 17)

core of Neave's argument. This thinking has informed the relationship between the state and universities in the Southern African region.

Another significant effect of regionalisation has stemmed mainly from the international connectedness that has been brought about through the Internet, mobile telephony and intensifying patterns of travel.[287] In recent years, such forces have also been felt through the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) under the auspices of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Such agreements as GATS have accelerated the influx of private and foreign providers of university education where domestic capacity is inadequate, and this has mainly been in developing countries. Transnational provision of higher education has emerged as big business for universities in the developed world, especially in Australia, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA). The phenomenon of foreign providers of higher education was noted in South Africa and recently in Botswana; it is one of the factors influencing how governments position themselves in relation to the national higher education institutions. This development, which has been largely enhanced by the liberalisation of the higher education market, takes various forms, like recruitment of international students, establishment of campuses abroad, franchise provision and online learning. There is great concern by some developing states that liberalisation of higher education may not only hamper the development of institutions in the developing countries through stiff competition, but also compromise on quality of programme offerings.[288] As a result of these concerns, transnational provision of higher education has further awakened the interest of states in the regulation of domestic higher education policies, particularly in the area of quality assurance. Such regulation has been done in the name of protecting local consumers against provision of poor-quality university education by unscrupulous foreign and private providers who seek nothing more than profits. State regulation has also been aimed at making institutions more competitive by making them international in terms of their curricula, by enrolling increasing numbers of international students and by recruiting international staff. Such positive effects of state regulation were identified at the

[287] Maasen, P. and Cloete, N. (2002:14) Global reform trends in higher education. In Cloete, N. et al (eds.) *Transformation in Higher Education: Global Pressures and Local Realities in South Africa;* Cape Town, Juta.

[288] Knight, J. (2003:5) Trade in Higher Education Services: The Implications of GATS. In *Kagisano*, Issue No. 3, Autumn 2003

University of the Witwatersrand, where both international students and staff were very significant aspects of the institution's demographics. To some extent, the University of Botswana also showed some of these international features, particularly with regard to staffing. The situation was starkly different at the University of Zimbabwe where only a few international students were reported to be enrolled in some faculties. In fact, there is a sharp decline in the population of international students and academic staff at that institution. The changing global environment dictates that states should reorient and reposition their predominantly public higher education systems. Failure to do so spells doom for the university system as institutions fail to be competitive.

5.2.6 Efficiency, cost saving and income generation

An important impact of regional integration is the shift of policies in most institutions, higher education included, to promote economic efficiency through the liberalisation and deregulation of markets. The implication of deregulating national markets is the emergence and growth of a regional integrated market that masks the long tradition of local markets and in the process forces nation states to retreat in terms of shaping economic activities within their countries. Integrated markets, especially in higher education, do not only call for an interstate (or global) regulating system, they also raise questions regarding the relative benefits that accrue to individual countries, given their different competitive capacities in such integrated regional markets. Thus, activities of institutions are left to be shaped mainly by market forces. Institutions need to raise enough revenue in order to survive, and to do so they have to be competitive and innovative enough to attract sufficient clients from the market, which is now defined in regional rather than in national terms. In a market situation, those with stable leadership, with an ability to carry out environmental scanning, and those that have the skills and resources to move in new directions, will be at an advantage.[289] Rich institutions stand to benefit as they have the capacity to move quickly and take advantage of the expanded market, drawing students from countries where there are weak institutions that have shaky quality assurance systems. At the same time, the presence of foreign providers in the region obviously introduces

[289] Ibid.

competition for the local, poorer universities. This makes it more difficult for the poor universities to develop their systems and provide opportunities for access for the disadvantaged who lack the capacity to pay the high fees required to sustain institutional viability. This jungle situation of survival of the fittest is certainly in favour of institutions that have an upper hand in terms of quality delivery. Thus, regional integration is a significant phenomenon of globalisation that is in favour of allowing market forces to determine what institutions can offer and with what amount of success. Rui Yang aptly describes the gloomy side of market-induced policies and economic systems:

> Arguably, the market has gone too far in dominating social and political outcomes. The opportunities and rewards of globalization spread unequally and inequitably – concentrating power and wealth in a select group of people, nations and corporations, while marginalizing others. When the profit motives of market players are unconstrained, they challenge people's ethics – and sacrifice respect for justice and human rights. It is just here where the market falls short. It places the whims of the rich over the most elementary necessities of the poor. The market cannot safeguard the needs of those without money, which is why so many people die every day within sight of global abundance. In this sense, the market is deaf and blind. It responds only with the sensory equipment that can detect money.[290]

In a situation where the logic of the market determines service provision and patterns of consumption, the role of the state in protecting the weak against being down-trodden by the more powerful is severely eroded. Thus, as will be discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis, the state's prime role of protecting the rights of all citizens in the higher education system is undermined. As already mentioned above with regard to the provision and governance of university education, globalisation has resulted in a shift from the logic of rights to a logic premised on economic convenience. Market-driven higher education systems inevitably call for a different kind of relationship to be established between higher education institutions and the state. This repositioning of the state has many implications regarding state monitoring of the quality provision of these institutions and aligning higher education with overall national development goals. Regional countries ought to analyse the direct implications of globalisation on higher education in terms of various dimensions like staffing, changing forms of knowledge and the nature of

[290] Yang, R. (2003:272) Globalization and Higher Education Development: A Critical Analysis. In *International Review of Education, Vol. 49 (3) pp. 269-291*

work in the academy, and relations with other social agents. Similar concerns need to be raised at regional level regarding moves to open up the regional higher education market to transnational providers.

There are particular symptoms of regionalisation that have bearing on quality assurance which can be identified in the studied institutions. These relate to performativity, professionalisation of degrees, and standardisation of degrees and qualifications in order to facilitate labour mobility and credit transfer. Because of the need for universities to account to external stakeholders like the state, management emphasises measurable aspects of staff performance and by so doing shifts the academic staff from their traditional roles and interests to those aligned to the organisation.[291] As alluded to earlier on, the concern with performativity does not necessarily focus on epistemic issues that improve the performance of universities as academic institutions.

5.2.7 Partnerships

Marketisation of higher education is characterised by closer partnerships between universities and outside clients and other knowledge producers, and an increasing burden on faculty to access external sources of funding.[292] The success of an institution is measured in terms of its ability to forge such partnerships with strategic partners and to maximise revenue generation. This practice has had profound influence on the way the studied institutions perceive knowledge and the resultant restructuring of degree programmes in order to meet the immediate needs of the market. In all the three universities used in this study, the trend to professionalise degree programmes and commodify knowledge was very distinct. Institutions run many new short courses that are offered in order to cater for the immediate needs of particular professions, especially in the Business and Education schools and faculties. In all three universities, some of these courses are run in the evenings and during weekends in order to allow working clients an opportunity to attend. This tendency to

[291] Johnson, B. C. (2005:210) Towards post-managerialism in higher education: the case of management change at the University of the Witwatersrand 1999 – 2004: A PhD thesis submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand in October 2005

[292] Subotzky, G. (2006:2) globalisation and Higher Education/ Firgoa: http://firgoa.usc.es/drupal/node/26911 (Retrieved on 18 May 2006)

professionalise degree programmes is clearly a market-driven innovation which privileges mode 2 forms of knowledge at the expense of mode 1. These forms of knowledge will be revisited later in this chapter for more elaborate clarification. The important point to note here is that customisation of university offerings for particular professions and other immediate business client needs has undoubtedly resulted in considerable influence being exerted on institutions in terms of their curricular reforms and the way they benchmark their quality in those programmes. It was also worth noting that such outside business partners influence, in very significant ways, how quality should be assured, not only in the academic programmes offered but also in the form of research that is undertaken in some of the studied universities. In all three contexts of this study, particularly in South Africa, institutions have aligned their research with the national and regional market as well as with national development goals. There is a dramatic shift away from basic toward applied research – a 25 per cent shift over a five-year period is reported in South Africa.[293] One interviewed academic at Wits confirmed the influence of external factors like professional organisations and the market on curricula:

> We have the generic quality assurance policy by the university, but within the faculty our programmes are accredited according to certain professional requirements. There are professional organisations that make an input into our programmes and they accredit those programmes.
>
> Our programmes are developed around certain professions internationally and locally. These include the Royal Chartered Institute of Quantity Surveyors, the South African Council of the Built Environment. These organisations have certain demands on our programmes. Their demands are higher than what the Higher Education Council [sic] requires.[294]

Thus, the perception of quality and the way it is assured was identified as a product of the concerted efforts of the universities and their outside partnerships. At Wits this was mainly conspicuous in the fields of Engineering and Business Studies. At the University of Zimbabwe the practice was quite prevalent in Agriculture, Commerce and Business, and Education. At the University of Botswana the trend was noticeable

[293] Bawa and Mouton, 2002 cited in Muller, J. (op.cit: 96)

[294] Interview with the quality assurance coordinator in the Faculty of Engineering, University of the Witwatersrand, 7 April 2005.

in the Faculties of Engineering and Business Studies as well as in the Nursing Science degrees. This practice, in which outside stakeholders, especially professional organisations, have such influence in quality assuring university activities, is becoming a global trend. Motivated by the increasing international mobility of professionals and facilitated by regional and global trade agreements which concern the international trade in professional services, these professional organisations initiate far-reaching agreements on mutual recognition of professional qualifications and on international quality standards, and actively support the development of international accreditation practices.[295] As exemplified by the above interview citations and examples, this is quite a significant trend influencing quality assurance of particular disciplines in the studied universities. It was also apparent in this study that, due to the role of external partners with a stake in university business, a new dimension of multiple accreditation could become an important component of quality assurance of programmes in universities. The impact of globalisation in the studied cases is thus characterised by epistemological and organisational changes towards applications-driven or strategic forms of knowledge production and dissemination.[296]

5.2.8 Labour mobility

Regionalised markets operate alongside the phenomenon of a regional economy, which survives largely on mobility of capital and labour across national boundaries. Within the Southern African region, this "regionality" necessitates the prevalence of labour mobility across geographical boundaries and across national economies. Countries within the same geographical and political regions are increasingly recognising the need to collaborate in order to facilitate mobility of students and skilled labour in an orderly manner.[297] There is increasing relaxation of migration

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[295] Van der Wende, M. (n.d. p3) Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the Link to Internationalisation (1) Paper to be published by the OECD in a publication with the title: " Quality and the International Dimension in Higher Education Institutions" (forthcoming): http://www.ipv.pt/millenium/wende11.htm Retrieved on 7 December 2005

[296] Subotzky, G. (2006:2) globalisation and Higher Education/ Firgoa: http://firgoa.usc.es/drupal/node/26911 Retrieved on 18 My 2006

[297] The Statesman, 27April 2007, p.4 http://www.thestatesman.net Retrieved on 5 September 2007

regulations among countries within the Southern African region, a development that makes cross-border travel easy for students and academic staff. For this to happen more smoothly, there are moves within the region to standardise qualifications from universities and other tertiary institutions. This encourages harmonisation of study programmes, articulation of qualifications and cross-transfer of credits. Thus, one of the effects of regional integrated higher education systems is to maximise standardisation in particular disciplines in order to facilitate labour mobility as well as student exchange. In line with this trend, institutions are aligning their quality assurance arrangements with those of regional and international agencies; hence the increasing discourses of internationalisation (and regionalisation) of quality assurance of university education.[298] Within Southern Africa, this process is augmented by efforts at establishing a regional quality assurance agency that enhances quality among the regional institutions. Such an agency also ensures that higher education institutions stretch themselves up to quality levels that make them competitive at international level. In the region, this is partly being achieved by encouraging the formation of national councils of higher education which, in turn, affiliate to the regional body. Asked whether the newly formed Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education will have any collaborative linkages with other quality assurance agencies in other countries, one of the senior officials driving the process in the Ministry of Higher Education in Zimbabwe had this to say:

> I want to think so … definitely the logical thing to do is that you can't just have it for the sake of having it; apart from accrediting, it will have to establish links with others because the world is becoming more and more globalised.[299]

An example of this regionalisation initiative is the creation of the Southern African Regional Universities Association, which is pursuing collaboration among its multiple country members in ICT infrastructure, specialised graduate programmes, and management training. Several other examples of regionalisation of the higher education systems on the continent and in Southern Africa have already been cited

[298] Van der Wende, M. (n.d.) Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the Link to Internationalisation (1) Paper to be published by the OECD in a publication with the title: " Quality and the International Dimension in Higher Education Institutions" (forthcoming): http://www.ipv.pt/millenium/wende11.htm (Retrieved on 7 December 2005)

[299] Interview with an official in the Ministry of Higher Education, Zimbabwe, 13 October 2005

above. The anticipated benefits of regional integration and harmonisation extend beyond education to include social cohesion and peace among different peoples within the region, an optimistic discourse of globalisation that will be elaborated towards the end of this chapter. As pointed out above, such regional integration encourages harmonisation of study programmes, qualifications and cross-transfer of credits on the one hand, and collaboration in order to take advantage of economies of scale on the other. There is also exchange of ideas and capacity building in the area of quality assurance between and among academic staff within the region. In the case institutions, this was mostly done through peer reviewing course offerings and examination processes.

As alluded to earlier on, the problem with a globalised higher education market is that there is a tilt in terms of the benefits in favour of the developed world. Although student options are no longer constrained by national boundaries due to opening up the higher education market, it is not every student who can take full advantage of this new integrated market, given the high levels of poverty in most communities in Sub-Saharan Africa. In the majority of cases, it is mostly those students who either come from rich backgrounds or who are lucky to secure scholarships who can travel abroad for higher education. Innovative forms of transnational education like Internet-based distance education, establishing branch campuses in foreign countries and educational franchising have profoundly expanded opportunities for students from affluent backgrounds to study through foreign providers. Such innovations have in fact widened the gap between the rich and the poor who have no access to such facilities. The choices for poor students are still very limited and depend heavily on local institutions, irrespective of the quality of their offerings. In Zimbabwe, for instance, there are several new universities, both public and private, which are seriously under-resourced and yet still manage to enrol large numbers of students from poor home backgrounds. Students from rich backgrounds either go to the few local private universities that are expensive or are sent abroad, mainly to South African universities, where they have to pay in foreign currency. There is, therefore, a sense in which it can be argued that quality in university education in Zimbabwe has assumed political dimensions, where those in authority have reduced it to mere political rhetoric in order to appease the poor when in fact they have

withdrawn their own children and sent them elsewhere to acquire better quality education.

The presence of foreign providers in the regional higher education market can be viewed as a double-edged innovation. While it spells out the need for an integrated quality assurance system which is likely to benefit local institutions on the one hand, on the other it tends to constrain the same institutions in terms of raising adequate revenue and allowing them time to gradually develop their own quality benchmarks, taking into account their legacies and local contexts, till they catch up with esteemed international standards. The presence of foreign providers has, no doubt, increased competition for the best and brightest students, as more and more countries recognise the economic potential of higher education as a service export sector.[300] In this competition, student flow patterns are from the poorly resourced institutions to better resourced ones, a trend that may not be in favour of less competitive institutions most of which are located in those regional countries where economies are not growing. It is also apparent that the more competitive universities, especially branches of transnational providers from the developed world, cherry-pick students from the most affluent sector of the developing societies. Transnational providers also cherry-pick the most profitable programmes, thus depriving local institutions of those funds while at the same time they ignore the less advantaged students. With the exception of Botswana, where the phenomenon of private provision of higher education (including a transnational provider from Malaysia) is new, and where students who register with the five recently accredited private institutions are paid for by the government, experience elsewhere shows that transnational providers do not cater for the poor.

A phenomenon associated with studying abroad is that most of the students end up working in the better economies when they finish their studies. The Economic Commission for Africa estimates that 20 000 professionals a year left Africa during the 1990s and that on the whole the continent has lost 30 per cent of its stock of

[300] Arnold, D. (2001:1) Globalization of Higher Education: What it means for India? http://www.iie.org/PrinterTemplate.cfm.Section=SpeechesPR&Template=/Content Retrieved on 10 September 2005

skilled human resources.[301] The same source shows that emigration of skilled workers from Uganda alone is 15 per cent per annum.[302] This phenomenon also assumes a regional pattern where there is southward drift of skilled personnel from regional countries to South Africa. Institutions within the region strive to curb the trend by attracting visiting professors, establishing public bodies to encourage and assist skilled nationals to return home, and by giving incentives for skilled nationals in the Diaspora to invest in their own countries.[303] Interviews with academic members of staff at UB and UZ clearly showed that such efforts are constrained by relatively poor conditions of service, especially as they relate to support for research, as well as by the unstable economies and lack of peaceful political climate as in the case of Zimbabwe. Thus the phenomenon of brain drain and brain gain that is a global characteristic of the relationship between the developing and the developed countries is replicated at regional level between poorer Southern African countries and South Africa. Coupled with this problem is a similar trend where universities in the region increasingly find it difficult to attract and retain world-class faculty members in the face of attractive offers from South African universities, research institutes and multi-national corporations.[304] Thus, integrated higher education markets, which are a direct result of globalisation discourses of liberalisation, are posing serious threat to peripheral institutions in terms of competition from metropolitan South African universities.

5.3 The market logic and quality assurance in higher education

5.3.1 The influence of market discourses

As alluded to earlier on in this discussion, the market discourses of accountability, enterprise and efficiency are pressurising universities to see themselves as providers of a service to consumers. The more this type of thinking about education entrenches itself in the academy, and the more public funding cuts trickle down, the greater the

[301] The Statesman, 27 April 2007 p2. http://www.thestatesman.net Retrieved on 5 September 2007

[302] Ibid

[303] Ibid

[304] Arnold, D. (2001:1) Globalization of Higher Education: What it means for India? http://www.iie.org/PrinterTemplate.cfm?Section=SpeechesPR&Template=/Content Retrieved on 10 September 2005

danger that higher education in Africa will lose much of its substance. Funding cuts have substantially altered the make-up of university budgets, putting pressure on universities to seek alternative funding sources and making upfront payment a strict requirement for student admissions. The practice of seeking alternative sources of funding was noted at all three case institutions. At the University of Zimbabwe, for instance, the Vice-Chancellor emphasised the need to be financially more independent from the government and to raise 50 per cent of the university's annual operational budget from other sources of funding.[305] In a study conducted in South Africa, most of the vice-chancellors interviewed indicated that they spent the greater part of their time fund-raising for their institutions.[306] The same study reported one instance of a vice-chancellor who spent only three months of the entire academic year at his institution; for the rest of the year he was on international and local fundraising trips.[307] In the majority of cases and contrary to what universities aspire for, such funding comes from a number of sources, none of which increases the independence of the university. This seems to confirm what dependency theories argue, that universities will always find themselves being accountable to an increasing number of stakeholders because of the diversified source of funding and this has obvious implications on their decision-making processes regarding curriculum and research, and on their conceptions of the quality they should uphold. Fee increases and cuts to public university funding comprise part of the larger discourse that emphasises educational production for the market. This discourse emphasises that the university should operate as a business in the service of a client market and have its own unique perception of quality that is not necessarily premised on academic excellence.

In terms of quality assurance, the logic of the market is that students are the key customers for universities and, as such, universities have to gear themselves towards satisfying these customers. Customers should, in turn, take greater responsibility for their education by paying high fees. High fees are seen as beneficial because they encourage students to be more rational in their choice of programmes of study. Once students become concerned with the quality of their education, universities will have

[305] University of Zimbabwe Five Year Strategic Plan 2003 – 2007, p.2

[306] Cloete, N. Bunting, I. and Khulati, T. (2002:13)

[307] Ibid

to pay attention to quality provision. Thus, this logic views quality as customer satisfaction, based primarily on the value-for-money rational. In the studied universities, however, it was not clear how the student clientele would be able to press for a particular quality in terms of their learning.

Part of the problem with the above-outlined approach to quality assurance is that it assumes that all students know what they should get from the university. It does appear from this study that this may not necessarily be the case, especially with many undergraduate students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds who have very little exposure to possible career options offered by the regionalised market. For many such disadvantaged students, university education is itself an eye opener regarding both career opportunities and their individual potential to pursue certain careers. Not until they go through such a system can they realise their full potential to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the borderless market.

The other problem lies in the multi-stakeholder nature of the university, which is a direct result of multiple sources of funding and which requires the university to be accountable to many stakeholders including students, taxpayers, and business. As some scholars would argue, instead of being accountable to the deeper educational needs of students, to issues of social justice and equity, and to a standard of truth not coupled with hegemonic discourse, institutions become accountable to narrow criteria of economic efficiency.[308] The many short courses that are offered in the Business faculties at UB and UZ, and the collaborative linkages these faculties had established with the relevant private enterprises that were sponsoring them, were clear manifestations of institutional accountability to the needs of influential stakeholders.

Globalisation has also brought about changes in the role, organisation and nature of universities. Marketisation of higher education is characterised by increasing partnerships between the university and outside stakeholders, by an increasing burden on faculty to access external funding, and by a managerialistic ethos in

[308] Sosteric, M, Gismondi, M. & Ratkovic, G. (1998: 7) The University, Accountability, and Market Discipline in the late 1990s. In *Electronic Journal of Sociology, Vol. 3(3) pp.1-27*

institutional governance, leadership and planning.[309] Institutions within the region, just like elsewhere, judge their success mainly in terms of achieving the above. It was clear in the studied institutions that issues of quality assurance are perceived from this broad market discourse where everything has to be planned and managed from the top, within the institution as well as at systemic level. What prevails at the lecturer-student interface should always be documented, objectified and measured in such a way that it is reducible to quantifiable indicators that can be seen not only by institutional management, but also by outside stakeholders. Thus, the lecturer-student interface which used to be a secret domain now needs to be opened up for scrutiny by the public. Every activity of a university is run strictly on managerialistic lines. Subotzky notes that the impact of globalisation on higher education is characterised by three levels of marketisation: epistemological and organisational changes towards applications-driven or strategic forms of knowledge production and dissemination; greater responsiveness to social needs, with the dominant emphasis on meeting the interests of the private-sector market; and changes in institutional management style towards managerialism and entrepreneurial income generation.[310]

Subotzky argues that there is a general tendency, because of the bias towards applications-driven knowledge, to underplay the epistemological importance of forms of knowledge that has no obvious application to the world of work, hence differences that exist in the funding levels of different programmes, with the Humanities generally getting less subsidy than the Natural Sciences, as is shown later on in this chapter regarding the studied cases. This impact of the market seems to be pervasive in higher education where economic standards are used as performance benchmarks for faculties in many universities today. This has led to an international tendency to overemphasise the practical, technical value of higher education. University achievements have been increasingly simplified to be deemed equivalent to applied research outputs.[311] Such a tendency causes tensions

[309] Subotzky, G. (2006:1) Globalization and higher education. http://firgoa.usc.es/drupal/node/26911: (Retrieved on 18 May 2006)

[310] Subotzky, G. (2006:2) Globalization and higher education. http://firgoa.usc.es/drupal/node/26911: (Retrieved on 18 May 2006).

[311] Yang, R. (2003:277)

between what appear to be more profitable applied subjects of science and technology, and those of basic theoretical enquiry, particularly Arts and Humanities. Reference has already been made to the threat of closure facing some of the departments at Wits due to the nature of the knowledge they transmit which, according to current local and regional market trends, is considered uncompetitive.

The trend of privileging the economic rationale in making key decisions in universities, especially relating to the rationalisation of funding and faculty structures, was apparent in many instances in the cases used in this study. At the University of Zimbabwe, for instance:

> The Government in February [2006] increased allowances for university and college students by 90 per cent to enable them to meet this year's tuition fees. … Allowances for students in the humanities and social sciences departments at universities were reviewed from $6 million to $11,4 million. Students in the faculties of engineering and science got Z$13,3 million from Z$7 million, while those studying medicine and veterinary sciences received Z$17,5 million from Z$9,2 million. Treasury allocated Z$10 billion for scholarships under the national budget, a 2 500 per cent rise from Z$400 million last year.[312]

The allocation of student allowances before and after the increases of February 2006 clearly shows a consistent bias in favour of those disciplines that have an application type of knowledge. Table 5.1 shows the distributional patterns of students' allowances by discipline.

Table 5.1: Pattern of student allowances at the University of Zimbabwe

Discipline	**Allowances before February 2006 (Z$ million)**	**Allowances after February 2006 (Z$ million)**	**% Increase**
Social Sciences and Humanities	6	11.4	90
Engineering and Sciences	7	13.3	90
Medicine and Veterinary Sciences	9.2	17.5	90

Source: The Herald Tuesday, May 23, 2006

[312] The Herald Tuesday, May 23, 2006

The substantial increases in student allowances granted in February 2006 were meant to enable students cope with the hyperinflationary situation in the economy. This situation had forced all universities in the country to raise fees by more than 100 per cent while at the same time the cost of food, stationery, textbooks and transport had shot to levels beyond the reach of most students whose parents earned barely above basic minimum wage. Differences in such allowances have been maintained in spite of the fact that all students purchase their requirements from the same shops.

The trend at the University of the Witwatersrand, shown in Table 5.2, is no different from the UZ trend in terms of funding differentials according to disciplines. Information on relative funding levels for students pursuing studies in different disciplines was not available from the University of Botswana. It was clear, however, that students pursuing programmes like Medicine were allocated much more than others as they needed to do their studies in outside universities after their second year of study at UB. This is mainly because those programmes are not offered at UB.

Table 5.2: Funding grid at the University of the Witwatersrand

Funding Group	CESM* Categories included in the Funding Group**	Ratio
1	Education, Law, Psychology, Social Services, Public Administration	1.0
2	Business/Commerce, Communication, Languages, Philosophy/Religion, Social Sciences	1.5
3	Architecture/Planning, Engineering, Home Economics, Industrial Arts	2.5
4	Agriculture, Fine and Performing Arts, Health Sciences	3.5

* CESM = Classification of Educational Subject Matter.
** Only some examples are given in each category.
Source: Information supplied by the Academic Planning and Development Office, Wits University, 25 February 2005

Funding category 4, which includes disciplines like Health Sciences, Agriculture, and Fine and Performing Arts, has more than three times as much funding as category 1 which includes Education, Law and Social Sciences. The rationale underpinning these differences in funding levels across disciplines is to some extent informed by the

thinking that links the disciplines to their application value in addressing societal needs and problems, and in enhancing economic development. The worth of knowledge, in this case, is viewed in terms of its immediate use and not as an end in itself. The quality performance of an institution is also viewed in terms of how many graduates it churns out in those more valued disciplines.

Under this market discourse, entrepreneurial research, especially that on the leading edge of science and technology, is more highly prized than less marketable knowledge.[313] The quality and eminence of an institution is viewed from the same perspective. The increasingly dominant market discourse and culture of managerialism is in direct tension with the traditional collegiate culture of the academy. It is sometimes felt that conventional norms of academic freedom and curiosity-driven research are being sacrificed because of the priority placed on income-generating entrepreneurial activities. Some research indicates that faculty – especially those who do not have access to or benefit directly from entrepreneurial activities feel marginalised, alienated and frustrated by encroaching managerialism and market-oriented accountability.[314] These new dimensions of university operations brought about by market discourses affect the way individuals and institutions operate and engender a particular genre of quality assurance in institutions. This is one significant factor influencing quality assurance in the regional universities, the ability of institutions and units within those institutions to manage their knowledge generation and transmission activities in such a way that they remain financially afloat. It is also evident that such new ways of operating frustrate academic staff that has been steeped, committed to and engrossed in pure academic research for many years.

5.3.2 The controversy of mode 1 and mode 2 forms of knowledge

The argument advanced in the foregoing paragraphs is basically that the invasion of higher education in the regional universities by market discourses has resulted

[313] Subotzky, G. (2006:2) Globalization and higher education. http://firgoa.usc.es/drupal/node/26911: Retrieved on 18 May 2006

[314] Currie, J. and Vidovich, L. (1998) Globalization and Australian Universities: Policies and Practices, Paper presented at the World Congress of Comparative Education in Cape Town, 12-17 July

in the privileging of mode 2 forms of knowledge and the undervaluing of mode 1 knowledge. This aspect needs to be fleshed out in this section so as to clarify what these forms of knowledge entail.

Mode1 knowledge represents the traditional scientific approaches to new knowledge development, while mode 2 represents a more open and applied form of knowledge. In Gibbons' view:

> Mode 1 problems are set and solved in a context governed by the, largely academic, interests of a specific community. By contrast Mode 2 is carried out in the context of application. Mode 1 is disciplinary while Mode 2 is transdisciplinary. Mode 1 is characterised by homogeneity, Mode 2 by heterogeneity. Organisationally, Mode 1 is hierarchical and tends to preserve its form, while Mode 2 is more heterarchical and transient. In comparison with Mode 1, Mode 2 is socially accountable and reflexive.[315]

One impact of globalisation has been the manifestation of mode 2 knowledge production, which is viewed as being more responsive to social needs, especially within the developing African context where application knowledge is needed to support industrial growth. The puzzle in higher education today is how to balance the two forms of inquiry, and to establish the relative importance of mode 1 forms of knowledge in bringing about balanced social and economic development in the third world. While mode 2 knowledge is crucial in terms of being more responsive to immediate social needs, it responds more appropriately to contemporary needs and perhaps not so much to long-term needs. In that sense, it is not sufficient for mode 2 knowledge to form the sole basis for higher education inquiry and policy reform. The two forms of knowledge should be complementary in developing the critical skills needed for one to be both flexible and reflective of practice. Mode 1 knowledge should strongly support practice so that it equips learners with the skills, expertise and critical thinking they need to be able to deal with the plethora of emerging social challenges. At the same time, mode 2 knowledge that has not been informed by strong mode 1 analysis will lack the conceptual rigour to deal with today's and tomorrow's educational issues and challenges. The quality of university performance, therefore, should lie not so much in its bias in favour of application-based research and

[315] Gibbons, M. (1994:3) *'Innovation and the Developing System of Knowledge Production', The New Production of Knowledge: The dynamics of science and research in contemporary societies*, Sage, London.

programmes, but in its ability to impart critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are grounded on sound theoretical foundations. In this study, disciplines like Philosophy and Theology were noted to be on the decline at UZ and at UB in terms of student enrolment as well as staffing, yet their importance in such developing societies cannot be overemphasised.

Inquiry-based learning seems to be the best option for achieving excellence in terms of knowledge generation and dissemination. This type of learning derives from the complex problem-solving skills required of the twenty-first century labour force. The emergence of the knowledge-based society and the knowledge-based economy has placed new pressure on regional universities to produce a flexible and versatile workforce that is constantly learning and upgrading its skills. This requires institutions to develop courses that continually retrain and update employees on a lifelong basis, hence the emphasis on short professional courses in the case universities. Students now have to be prepared for a labour market in which they can be expected to change jobs many times, and they need to acquire appropriate skills that are transferable and portable across sectors, countries and cultures.[316] Such are the demands of the regionalised economy, the regionalised job market and the regionalised university, and not a nationalised university any more. The worth of an institution is no longer judged on the basis of national criteria, but on a regional if not international scale. Put in other words, universities in developing Africa need to be internationalised if they are to be competitive.

The knowledge experiences of other universities elsewhere on the globe form a significant basis for furthering knowledge horizons through research by any university in any locality. Maintaining adequate levels of educational quality and relevance in Sub-Saharan universities requires active and sustainable access to global knowledge through professional interchanges, library resources or joint research opportunities.[317] Strong partnerships with leading international universities in these areas are what is

[316] Subotzky, G. (2006:2) Globalization and higher education. http://firgoa.usc.es/drupal/node/26911: Retrieved on 18 May 2006

[317] The Statesman, 27 April 2007 p.6 http://www.thestatesman.net Retrieved on 5 September 2007

mostly lacking at the University of Zimbabwe. The University of Botswana and the University of the Witwatersrand enjoy such partnerships with many internationally reckoned universities, and there are many staff and student exchange visits between these universities and their partners. It is more appropriate today to talk of a globalised community of scholars in a particular discipline, and an institution scores pride by contributing members to such a community. Communities of scholars exist as academic networks that enhance exchange of information and ideas. Such intricate networks of academic linkages form critical pathways through which knowledge is disseminated across the entire breadth and length of the globe. The quality of a university and that of its academic staff should partly be judged in terms of their contribution towards the commonwealth of knowledge through such networks. The quality performance of a university is greatly enhanced by its participation in the international network of knowledge generation and dissemination. This argument underlines the importance of internationalisation and regionalisation as ways of enhancing the quality of an institution, and indeed many scholars hold this view, particularly with regard to developing universities.[318] In a sense, the project of regionalisation of higher education in the Southern African region is driven first and foremost by quality concerns. There is greater realisation within the region that while expansion has been realised in university systems in the regional countries, the benefits of such expansion are limited because quality has been compromised. This concern is forcing countries to adopt joint efforts in order to improve the quality of offerings in the institutions, hence the attention on quality assurance. The key question, however, is whether such a regional strategy works in addressing the quality needs of such a diverse higher education system within the region.

5.4 Internationalisation, regionalisation and quality assurance

5.4.1 The regionalisation of higher education

As was shown at the beginning of this chapter, globalisation and internationalisation are dealt with here within the context of regionalisation. It is necessary, however, to point out that the processes of internationalisation and globalisation are different, although they are related. It is my view that the former is a result of the latter and that

[318] See Van de Wende, M. (n.d.); Katjavivi, P.H. (2002); Altbach, P. and Ulrich, T. (2001) Barblan, A. (2001)

it includes both international and local elements – it is intercultural. Internationalisation is a response by regional institutions to the globalised society with a globalised economy that calls for a globalised labour market. Internationalisation of higher education is "…the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution".[319] The process of integration is too complex to be definable and it involves a multitude of activities aimed at providing an educational experience within an environment that truly integrates international and regional perspectives. In the studied institution, this "regional paint" is noticeable on campus through the regional mix of students and staff. As reported in Chapter 4 of this work, 29.2 per cent of the surveyed staff at UB was from the SADC countries, 8.3 per cent from the rest of the African continent, and 12.5 per cent from outside Africa. At Wits, there is an increasing number of students coming from African countries, particularly for postgraduate studies. This diversity of nationality also manifests itself through dress, language and other cultural practices in halls of residence and on cultural days on campus. The key distinction between internationalisation and globalisation is that in the former process institutions have space within which to define their policies and strategies in order for them to integrate international dimensions into their teaching and research, within a heterogeneous scope, while the latter tends to usher in convergence of policy and to favour homogeneity in terms of practice. Typical globalisation factors within the region include the advent of transnational providers in the higher education regional market, leading to stiffer competition among universities, the influence of quality assurance bodies by regional and international bodies like the Association of African Universities, the Southern African Regional Universities Association, and the International Network for Higher Education Quality Assurance Agencies. Institutions benchmark their quality standards against the standards of these regional and international bodies, and strive to align their quality assurance policies and practices with those of the same bodies. There are different views on the benefits of regionalisation for higher education in general and for quality enhancement in particular.

[319] Knight, J. and De Wit, H. (1997:8) *Internationalisation of Higher Education in Asia Pacific Countries*, EAIE, Amsterdam,

Two analytically distinct ways of viewing regionalisation of higher education can be identified in the literature – the optimistic view and the pessimistic view. On the one hand, the optimistic view takes regionalisation as a positive process with social as well as educational benefits, while the pessimistic view, on the other hand, regards the process as being neither rewarding nor detrimental as it does not necessarily yield the expected outcomes. These two perspectives are briefly discussed in the following paragraphs in terms of regionalisation processes within Southern Africa.

5.4.2 The optimistic view of regionalisation

The majority of institutions and in fact governments are converts of the optimistic school of thought, hence the effort they make to put in place policies that are aimed at enhancing regionalisation. The general convincing rationale for this persuasion is that the modern world is fast moving into an age where society, economy and knowledge are all part of a global environment and are characterised by a mix of local and global influences. As Cross and Rouhani would argue with reference to university education, all institutional business and sustenance will more and more demand the transcendence of all forms of boundaries, be they physical, cultural, real or imaginary.[320] In this regard, higher education reforms and policies cease to be shaped merely by national concerns and imperatives; rather they should respond to and should also be shaped by everything else that goes on in the regional (and global) community. Quality and standards of performance are benchmarked on international norms and criteria. Based on this rationale, the three studied universities within the Southern African region regard internationalisation of their services as a priority although they address it in very varied ways and from different conceptual standpoints.

From the optimists' point of view, there are many ways in which universities stand to benefit from regionalisation. One of the prime objects of integrating international experiences into the teaching-learning processes of an institution is to bring to the fore

[320] M Cross & Sepi Rouhani, "Vanishing Borders and New Boundaries: Student and Staff Mobility and the Internationalisation of South African Higher Education" in Paul Tiyambe Zeleza & Adebayo Olukoshi, (eds.) *African Universities in the Twenty-first Century Volume I: Liberalisation and Internationalisation*s, Council for the Development of Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA) /University of Illinois:2004 ISBN 2-86978-124-5

of the learner intercultural understanding and appreciation as well as co-operation in solving problems faced in the region and on the continent. Regionalisation of tertiary education systems helps the nation and individuals to build and maximise synergy.[321] Staff in the studied universities saw the main advantage of regionalisation of the higher education market as lying in the benefits that are to be derived from the potential that exists for collaboration. Regional integration helps to achieve economies of scale, especially for capital-intensive and highly specialised disciplines in the sciences, engineering and medicine.[322] The University of Botswana is a typical example of this, where agreements have been entered into with certain universities in other African countries, to which students pursuing certain disciplines can go and study. When they come back home after their studies, it is anticipated that they not only carry with them the knowledge and skills gained during the course of their study, but also the important cultural aspects of the society in which they obtained their degrees. Thus, the assumption underlying the optimistic view is that regionalisation imparts international perspectives and values and enhances the development of a multicultural outlook in an individual – desirable attributes that foster what Durkheim terms "organic solidarity" between and among different nations and racial groups.[323]

It is because of these perceived benefits that the case universities feel the need and desire for a variety of cultural voices to be heard in their classrooms, for their curricula to embrace regional and international perspectives and cultures, for students to learn other languages as part of their curricula, for an open recruitment policy for faculty, and for inter-university student collaborative learning and research. These efforts are what they believe constitutes internationalisation, and they are premised on the key assumption that students need to be prepared for regional and international and not just local careers and social challenges. This thinking draws from globalisation discourses which present society as being characterised by growing co-operation among nation states as countries become more and more dependent on each

[321] Taylor, 2001 cited in Katjavivi (2002:1)

[322] The Statesman, 27 April 2007 p. 5 http://www.thestatesman.net Retrieved on 5 September 2007

[323] Sporer, Z. (2000:21) Controversies of Globalization, Working Paper. University of South Australia. http://www.hsd.hr/revija/pdf/3-4-2000/04-Sporer.pdf: Retrieved on 12 December 2006.

other in addressing the complex problems which they face. (e. g. environmental ozone depletion, HIV/AIDS, global terrorism and armed conflicts). Optimists see the synergistic efforts of the regional community as being better able to enhance human development within the region than the single-handed efforts of individual nations. With specific reference to higher education, Taylor argues:

> The internationalization of tertiary education and of the tertiary education system as a whole not only assures acquisition of best practice, comparable educational standards, increased scope and opportunity to network for mutual growth, student mobility, access to comparable tertiary institutions globally, but equally strengthens curricula design, as well as skill, job and labour market relevance. Internationalization then becomes a strategic tool to reform, articulate, create and develop national and individual capacities to respond to challenges that the market and globalization convey.[324]

It was evident in this study that institutions place a great premium on establishing partnerships and working collaborations with outside universities. In some instances, these partnerships were initiated at academic unit level, like department or even discipline level. In other cases, individual academics forged their own collaborative linkages with staff in other universities, especially in the area of research. Staff interviewed was very enthusiastic about such partnerships. At the University of Botswana, for instance, staff gave the following information regarding collaborative linkages with outside universities:

> We collaborate with the University of Pennsylvania in the USA. We are a WHO collaborative centre; by the way, we were the first in Southern Africa.[325]

> Yes, we have some work with Stanford University, in Measurement and Evaluation and Guidance and Counselling. We exchange visits and research collaboration.[326]

> Oh, we have a lot of collaborations. Right now we are in the process of negotiating a joint Master of Arts programme with the University of KwaZulu-Natal which would include the University of Dar es Salaam and

[324] Taylor, S. (2000) cited in Katjavivi, P.H. (2002:1)

[325] Interview with a Head of Department, Faculty of Science, University of Botswana, 28 July 2005

326 Interview with the quality assurance coordinator in the Department of Educational Foundations, University of Botswana, 26 July, 2005.

> Makerere University. We also have collaborations with universities in Sweden and in the USA.[327]

The pattern was the same at the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Zimbabwe, although the latter is experiencing problems in taking full advantage of the linkages due to the adverse economic climate in the country. The 2003-2007 UZ strategic plan has as one of its main objectives, "to introduce Masters Degree programmes for selected subject areas using Joint Modular courses with other Universities in Zimbabwe, the Region and internationally, if necessary".[328]

It is worth noting that besides educational motives, there are also political motives behind regionalisation. More broadly, political motives probably explain why governments are in full support of regionalisation programmes in their institutions of higher learning. From a political point of view, nation states have regarded regionalisation as a way of promoting regional economic development, peace and better understanding between and among nations. To this end, higher education institutions are viewed as important cogs in the machinery of bringing about such regional development, peace and solidarity. With reference to internationalisation, Senator Fulbright of the USA spoke of educational change "from the standpoint of future world peace and order, probably the most important and potentially rewarding of our [USA] foreign policy activities".[329] George Bush echoed the same view in 1999: "International exchanges are not a great tide to sweep away all differences. But they will slowly wear away obstacles to peace as surely as water wears away a hard stone."[330] These and similar political level sentiments elsewhere had an obvious impact on higher education as the promoter of peace and development by promoting organic solidarity among people of different cultures.

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[327] Interview with a Head of Department, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Botswana,, 26 July 2005

[328] The University of Zimbabwe Five Year Plan 2003-2007.

[329] quoted in De Wit, H. (2000:3) Rationales for Internationalisation of Higher Education, http://www.ipv.pt/millenium/wit11.htm Retrieved on 5 May 2006

[330] Bush 1999 cited in de Wit, (2000:3).

Regionalisation of universities in Southern Africa becomes very critical in this respect. The International Association of University Presidents confirms this position:

> Promoting vigorously the internationalization of their institutions and the global competence and literacy of their students as being essential to the long term pursuit of a more peaceful world where international understanding and co-operation in solving problems will be increasingly critical for the quality of life and sustained economic, social and cultural development.[331]

It is my strong view that in adopting the regionalisation agenda, higher education institutions are in fact responding to political and market pressures and imperatives which themselves are informed by the optimistic philosophy. This philosophy has faith in the regionalisation process as having the capacity to shape a generally more promising future for the region. It is strongly believed that the socio-cultural dimension of regionalisation and internationalisation promotes multiculturalism and is meant to curtail cultural conflicts between and among people of different cultures. It promotes understanding of and respect for the others' culture without despising it, and instils values of cultural relativism – the ability to understand other cultures as only different from one's own culture, and not inferior. This also enables one to perceive issues from other people's cultural point of view. Thus the need to create mutual understanding, respect and appreciation of each other's cultures is a very important rationale for regionalisation, as it is believed to be fundamental to the achievement of harmony and co-operation in development. Higher education is believed to be an important instrument for enhancing such values in the region. That the regional community places importance on regionalisation matters is apparent through the efforts of regional bodies like SADC through its Protocol on higher education, and NEPAD through its various educational initiatives like the NEPAD e-schools, and lately SARUA through its efforts at building an integrated community of regional universities that addresses matters of knowledge development in the region.

5.4.3 The pessimistic view of regionalisation

Although there is a lot of preoccupation with developing policies and putting in place structures that are meant to facilitate regionalisation of universities, in many

[331] De Wit, H. (2000:3)

instances not much is invested in this dimension of university reform. It was evident through the three case studies that the result was that curriculum transformation lagged behind developments in the market, and that levels of scholarship were low in some institutions because quality assurance systems lacked adequate resource support for their effective implementation. This was particularly so in the less competitive universities where resources are scarce and where there is hardly any significant regionalisation taking place as the institutions fail to attract both international students and staff. Such institutions do not place priority on issues of regionalisation and internationalisation since their attention is focused on striving to meet the very basic minimum standards with the limited resources at hand. This scenario clearly depicts the situation this study witnessed at the University of Zimbabwe where most departments were in serious shortage of qualified academic staff, staff lacked adequate office space and essential equipment like computers, and library facilities were in a deplorable state. This situation is confirmed by the following concerns expressed by some of the interviewed deans regarding staffing in their faculties:

> We have a lot of staffing problems, particularly at higher levels. Almost all our departments are heavily understaffed. You are talking about a situation where you have vacancy rates of 40-45%. Like, I am saying the situation is bad, a lot of middle-aged lecturers have gone; we have old staff that is too old to go away and very young staff that is inexperienced. You find that a department may have 80% of the staff still on probation and so we have a pyramid kind of structure.[332]

> We are not very comfortable with staffing. I would want it to improve. I think we have suffered a real problem in the last two years, huge staff turnover because of the economic situation in the country, you know how things are.[333]

Commenting on the acute shortage of equipment to use for teaching purposes, one senior member of staff had the following to say:

> I was telling my students this morning that these two magic markers I was given in January to last me a year. Now do you expect an academic to work? You have been given two markers, you have been given one ballpoint pen and you expect that member to supplement what the government is failing to provide. I become less committed. We want resources and we want to make sure that conditions of service for academic and support staff are improved so

[332] Interview with a Faculty dean, University of Zimbabwe, 14 October 2005.

[333] Interview response from a Faculty dean, University of Zimbabwe, 15October 2005

> that they are motivated. Today I will not want to reveal to anyone that I am teaching at university, I will not want to tell anybody that I have a PhD because those with less education and those working elsewhere are performing better. They are living better quality life.[334]

Responding to a question on whether the department had computers for students, one head of department had this to say:

> Not here but at the library, but one can have work stations which are used for practicals. We have had to connect them to the net so that they are maximally used but they are just about seven for a student lot of about 200.[335]

The above interview excerpts illustrate how desperate the situation is at UZ. While this does not reflect any negative position regarding the processes of regionalisation and internationalisation, it serves to illustrate how remote the plans to invest in these processes become when an institution operates under such distressed conditions and strives to meet minimum basic pressing needs. Little remains at the institution regarding regionalisation, therefore, as many foreign staff have gone, only a handful of foreign students from other African countries are left, and staff visits to foreign universities in the region are no longer possible due to foreign currency constraints.

Apart from a shortage of resources, the reluctance by institutions to make significant investments in the area of internationalisation can probably be explained by the general lack of faith by some stakeholders in the ability of the practice to yield desired results. They are not fully convinced that it is a worthwhile venture; they are pessimistic about the ability of the process to add value to higher education.

De Wit raises quite a number of doubts some people hold about the role of internationalisation of higher education in enhancing world peace and solidarity. These pessimistic views question the capability of education as a strategy for bringing about world peace and mutual understanding, given that peace itself is a highly contested issue. "Whose peace is it and whose understanding of the world?"[336] Such sentiments cast doubts on whether regionalisation of higher education can succeed in

[334] Interview response from a senior academic member of staff in the Department of Educational Administration, University of Zimbabwe, 16 October 2005.

[335] Interview response from a Head of Department, Faculty of Medicine, University of Zimbabwe, 15 October 2005.

[336] De Wit, H. (2000:3).

enhancing human understanding that can yield regional peace. This thinking questions the whole assumption on which the optimistic school of thought is premised – that regionalisation of tertiary education promotes quality delivery and enhances organic solidarity, which in turn is a precursor for regional peace and progress.

Studies conducted in some Asia Pacific countries have shown that internationalisation strategies have led to national identity and not global identity.[337] It has also been noted that students who study abroad do not seem to change much in their attitudes towards their host countries. Research also found out that students from Peru who studied in the Soviet Union came back to South America as more convinced capitalists rather than socialists.[338] In Africa, the general trend has been that students who study abroad are not necessarily patriotic enough to return to their home countries upon completion of their studies. In fact, studying abroad is one of the major causes for brain drain on the continent, hence the feeling that domestic graduate education programmes are the solution for training future academic staff to the PhD level.[339] The examples cited above seem to suggest that some strategies of internationalisation and regionalisation, like sending students abroad, may in fact not necessarily instil the expected international values in those students. Thus in order to instil true regionalisation/internationalisation attitudes in individuals, it is necessary to explore other more comprehensive approaches that are well planned, and that involve a carefully chosen mix of strategies and not just a single strategy.

An important point to note regarding some internationalisation strategies, like establishing branches in foreign countries, is that they may not be fully embraced by the host countries, for fear of foreign domination. For this reason, stringent conditions are usually set for such foreign university branches to operate, usually under the pretext of protecting nationals against poor-quality provision. In South Africa, foreign providers of higher education go through a rigorous accreditation process before they are allowed to offer certain programmes. The process is equally rigorous and strict in

[337] Knight, J. & De Wit, H. (1997) *Internationalisation of Higher Education in Asia Pacific Countries*, EAIE, Amsterdam,

[338] De Wit, H. (2000)

[339] The Statesman, 27 April 2007 p. 6 http://www.thestatesman.net Retrieved on 5 September 2007

Zimbabwe and in Botswana. Such a trend, where foreign providers are received with some reservations, is not peculiar to Southern Africa. Claude Allegre, the former Education Minister of France, expressed concern over the establishment of American university branches in Europe in 1999: "… higher education in Europe is at risk of being dominated by American values as a result of American institutions setting up branches and degree programmes in Europe".[340] Allegre feared an American takeover of European higher education, a process that would have obvious implications for the promotion of American values and culture at the expense of the local.

5.4.4 The contested nature of the influence of regionalisation on quality assurance.

This discussion brings to the fore the contested nature of the contribution of internationalisation and regionalisation in enhancing quality delivery of developing universities. While the optimistic view gives a theoretically sound rationale for this possibility, there is no research evidence to substantiate this claim, particularly in Sub-Saharan universities. Besides lack of research evidence, systematic monitoring or evaluation of regionalisation is in general quite weak, and existing quality assurance systems in higher education in the region do not adequately address internationalisation.[341] This shortcoming can be explained by the fact that although higher education is gradually assuming a regional character, mainly in terms of student and staff mobility, it is still being assessed in the context of nationally oriented quality assurance systems. There are not yet comprehensive quality assurance systems that operate across national boundaries to a point where institutional activities are harmonised with particular regional criteria and requirements. Thus, regionalisation of higher education, as an important innovation in higher education, has not yet been subjected to any systematic quality assurance system. In this view, one can conclude that there is a paradox between the emphasis on quality as an important aim of regionalisation and internationalisation on the one hand, and the lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation of the quality impact of the process on the other.[342]

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[340] Hayward (2001:2)

[341] Van der Wende, M. (n.d.p.1)

[342] Van der Wende, M. (Op. cit)

It seems to me, however, that all three universities used in this study are very optimistic about the value regionalisation adds to the quality of their delivery. This is evidenced by efforts that the institutions make to forge partnerships and co-operative innovations with other institutions on the continent and abroad. At Wits, for instance, offering joint programmes and conducting joint research with staff in universities abroad is quite a common phenomenon. There is no doubt that such activities add to the quality of academic endeavours on the part of both students and staff. Similar collaborative activities and staff exchange programmes were also evident at the other two institutions, and staff were very positive towards such academic linkages. One head of department at UZ talked quite positively of such collaborative activities in the department:

> We had collaborative programmes with University of Bradford. Previously we had another project with Connell University in horticulture. Our lecturers sometimes go and teach at University of Zambia.[343]

While it is evident that all three institutions believed in regionalisation as a way of enhancing their quality, what is lacking are clear, institutional policies and programmes on regionalisation that should be followed by the universities. In most cases, it was noted that the establishment of collaborative linkages was left to the discretion and initiative of individuals within academic units. At the University of Zimbabwe, such individual initiatives were even constrained by the inability of the university to support them financially. Another important observation to make is the different approaches institutions used to regionalise. Wits places a lot of emphasis on, among other strategies, recruitment of international staff and students as a way of enriching the experiences of students. While UB staff is also highly internationalised, this seems to be more the result of a shortage of local human resources which is characteristic of the economy than a deliberate strategy by the institution to internationalise. As a young institution, the enrolment of international students is quite insignificant in terms of adding an international dimension to campus experiences. Internationalisation is limited to a few activities relating to collaborative linkages with other institutions and sending of some of the students abroad. In terms of what the majority of students experience, such activities are not effective enough to bring about

[343] Interview with a Head of Department, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Zimbabwe, 25 October 2005.

true regionalisation. As alluded to earlier, at UZ internationalisation is currently a very constrained dimension of the university's quality development, in spite of the optimism the university holds about the process.

In spite of the shortcomings relating mainly to lack of research evidence on the quality improvement benefits of internationalisation,[344] it remains indisputable that in the context of new political trends in Africa – approaching regional and continental problems through organisations like NEPAD, SADC, the AU and COMESA – and with the advent of the information age in which society, economy and knowledge are part of a global environment, higher education in the region cannot afford to remain national; it must go regional. At the same time, regional higher education has to go international. Given the broader discourse of international exchange and co-operation emphasised by nation states, international bodies and business today, the advent of the "universalism of learning" and "the universal- university world"[345] becomes inevitable. What seems to be of importance, in terms of the process of regionalisation giving primacy to the quality dimension of the studied institutions, are the strategies that should be adopted in order to bring about effective regionalisation that is of benefit to the universities. Development of quality delivery through partnerships is a matter of institutional strategy:

> But too often such cooperation agreements are merely expressions of academic good will or the product of transient opportunities. Their numbers are generally more impressive than the quality of the contributions they make. What most African universities need are partnerships that are few in number, strategically chosen, and equitable in the benefits provided to each partner. Such partnerships hold the potential to make an institution stronger, more competitive, and more relevant. To achieve this, these partnerships must emerge from an institution's strategic planning process.[346]

The narrow approach common in the institutions, where regionalisation is taken to be one or two activities – like staff mobility, multicultural education, area studies, study abroad or the establishment of an international office – certainly needs to be broadened so that it constitutes a comprehensive and more holistic approach that

[344] See Van der Wende, M. (n.d.)

[345] De Wit, H. (2000 p.1)

[346] The Statesman, 27th April 2007, p. 7 http://www.thestatesman.net Retrieved on 5 September 2007

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permeates every facet of university operations and that has an impact on the experiences of students. This broader and more integrated approach stands more chances of impacting more positively on the quality performance of the universities; this was clearly absent in the studied universities.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter showed how globalisation and internationalisation influence higher education reforms in general and quality assurance in particular in the Southern African context. It presented globalisation and internationalisation within the context of regionalisation of higher education in the Sub-Saharan region and tried to show how the latter process is converting separate national economies into an integrated regional economy, and national higher education systems into interconnected entities operating in resonance with each other. In the social sphere regionalisation has the effect of intensifying social relations at a distance, making it imperative for what happens in one country to resonate throughout the entire region and to affect what happens everywhere else in the region. The chapter showed deregulation of markets as one of the major effects of regionalisation, which has had the effect of blurring national boundaries in terms of both provision and consumption of higher education services. The overall impact has been the invasion of the system by a market ideology which emphasises competition, economic efficiency and consumption. Market discourses have permeated higher education and are noticeably influencing the options of the studied universities. Thus, there is competition by universities for the best clients in the regional market – a process that has been exacerbated by the advent of private providers of higher education, including those from the most advantageously placed institutions overseas. At the same time, students' choices have been broadened as they seek relevant degrees that are of international standard.

As a way of responding to the emergence of a global economy, the case institutions are increasingly placing more emphasis on regionalisation – a process that involves cultural integration in teaching and learning as well as the research activities of a university. Among other motives, regionalisation is seen as a way of enhancing the quality offerings of these universities, through providing an international experience to staff and students, through mutual exchange of ideas and through regional and

international co-operation and information sharing between agencies and institutions responsible for quality assurance. University education is being extended beyond the local in terms of curricular restructuring, so is the benchmarking of the practices and standards. The pressures of globalisation and internationalisation have extended the scope of the market, the student and staff catchment area, needs and priorities to be met in terms of research concerns, and programmes offered are well beyond national and regional boundaries. A trend that seems to be emerging in the case institutions, perhaps just like elsewhere, is the move towards benchmarking quality assurance in accordance with regional and international standards, irrespective of the level of development of the institution. This is done mainly by aligning institutional policies and practices with international trends and norms, in spite of the constraining local imperatives, and by intensifying peer reviewing processes as a key aspect of quality assurance. This need is evidenced by the extensive consultations made with outside experts on quality assurance as well as by the affiliation of institutions to regional and international quality assurance agencies like the Association of African Universities, the Southern African Regional Universities Association, and the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education.

Thus, quality assurance in the studied institutions seems to be driven by the belief that internationalised quality assurance is enhanced quality assurance. Clearly, this notion is a manifestation of globalisation and internationalisation at regional level. In this sense, one identifies some degree of convergence between the perceptions of institutions and the broader regional co-operative efforts advocated by nation states.

Thus, this chapter shows that while quality assurance policies of these developing case institutions are influenced by local imperatives, they are also heavily influenced by regional dictates. As Enders rightly argues, internationalisation and globalisation became key themes in the 1990s, both in higher education policy debates and in research on higher education.[347] Universities are both subjects as well as objects of internationalisation and globalisation; they are affected by and at the same time

[347] Yang, R. (2003:272) Globalization and Higher Education Development: A Critical Analysis. In *International Review of Education*, Vol. 49 (3) pp. 269-291

influence these processes. Quality assurance policies and practices in the studied institutions are no exception in this regard.

Chapter 6

STATE-INSTITUTION RELATIONSHIPS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to show how the relationship that prevails between the state and the studied universities is a significant dynamic that influences the operations of the institutions. The chapter shows how this relationship has enhanced as well as constrained institutional performance in general and quality enhancement in particular. As the overall planner and overseer of national development, the state is one of the key stakeholders in higher education systems of most if not all countries. In this chapter I use the notion of state modes of co-ordination to analyse the relationship that prevails between the state and each of the studied higher education institutions. The chapter shows how, in each case, this relationship constrains or enhances institutional operations.

This chapter argues that although all three universities used in this study exist in post-colonial states, they have established significantly different forms of relationship with the state. These different modes of state co-ordination have influenced the operations of the case universities differently in terms of not only their quality assurance practices but also their overall performance. Where there was state steering from a distance, the institution had room to develop quality assurance arrangements that have internal reporting requirements and that are premised on epistemic values, without any constraining factors from the state. Where state interference dominated, it stifled the academic activities of the institution. In the studied institutions, just like elsewhere on the continent, state influence is characterised by the developmental nature of post-colonial African states that were steeped in the notion of a "development university"[348] as a strategy for national and economic development.

[348] Nabudere, D.W. (2006:1) "The Developmental State, Democracy and the Global Society in Africa". A paper presented at an Education Conference on Investment Choices for Education in Africa run the Wits School of Education, Johannesburg on 19 -21 September, 2006.

This chapter is divided into eight sections. Following the chapter introduction is section two which gives, in brief, a general overview of what a developmental state is. The third section deals with the various modes of state co-ordination of higher education. These modes of co-ordination are used as a theoretical framework for analysing the nature of the state-institution relationship that prevails in each of the three case universities. A brief discussion of the South African context is given in the next section; in particular the nature of state coordination of the higher education system is highlighted. Following this section is a general discussion of how the developmental nature of the Zimbabwean state in particular has failed to sustain quality university provision. The Zimbabwean case is given particular attention in order to illustrate how changes in the state-induced political economy of a country can impact on the quality of higher education provision. This section is immediately followed by a brief expose of the University of Botswana context, which paints a very contrasting picture to that of the University of Zimbabwe, especially in terms of institutional autonomy. The three sections on institutional contexts are followed by a general overview of the developmental nature of postcolonial states in Africa. This section is an attempt at locating the three case contexts within a broader African context. The last section of the chapter is the conclusion of the chapter.

6.2 The developmental state

Debates on the origins, nature and purpose of the state in general and the post-colonial state in particular have been exhausted in the literature.[349] Currently, the focus is on the developmental state, and many scholars have analysed African states from this perspective.[350] The notion of a developmental state is significant in this study because such states have adopted a different notion of a university – a "development university"[351] – that has been used as a strategy for national and economic

[349] See Kenneth Waltz (1979) *Theory of International Politics, Reading*, MA: Addi-son-Wesley.

Robert D. (1961) *Who governs? Democracy and Power in an American City:* New Haven, Yale University Press.

Engels, (1884), cited in *State Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State, p6. (Retrieved on 2 May 2006)

[350] See Nabudere, D.W. (2006) Op cit.

Mkandawire, T (2001) Thinking about developmental states in Africa. In *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Vol. 25; pp.289-313

[351] Nabudere, D.W. (2006:1) Op cit.

development. A particular type of state-university relationship has emerged as a result of this positioning, and in most African states this relationship has been characterised by varying levels of state presence in university business.

It is not the aim of this chapter to engage in the discourse of a developmental state. For purposes of analytical clarity, however, I choose to mention, just in passing, some of the qualities of a developmental state. Mkandawire argues that a developmental state has two components; one ideological and the other structural.[352] He further argues that it is this "ideology-structure nexus that distinguishes developmental states from other forms of states".[353]

From an ideological point of view, a developmental state should have its ideology underpinned by "developmentalism" and its mission should be to achieve economic development. A developmental state should therefore have the ability and commitment to "… promote sustained development, understanding by development the steady high rates of economic growth and structural change in the productive system, both domestically and in its relationship to the international economy".[354] For a state to achieve this, it must evidently be a "strong state" and not a "soft state".

The structure dimension of a developmental state entails the capacity to implement envisioned economic policies effectively and efficiently enough for them to have a positive impact on the economy. In this sense, institutional, technical, administrative and political factors are central for the realisation of such a goal. To avoid a narrow economic agenda, I reconceptualise the developmental state as a state able to pursue its economic agenda while at the same time anticipating the possible social costs likely to emanate from it and preparing itself adequately enough to address them.

In a nutshell, the ideology-structure nexus that characterises a developmental state should enable the latter to:

[352] Mkandawire, T. (2001:290)

[353] Ibid.

[354] Castells, (1992:55) in Mkandawire, T. (2001) Op. cit.

- stabilise the economy;
- institute good governance;
- be democratic and foster democratic principles and values in the society at large; and
- create an enabling environment for the entirety of its social institutions to deliver quality services.

A developmental state should be able to meaningfully regulate the markets and create an enabling environment through its depoliticised quest for technocratic governance. Such control and regulation of markets by a strong state forestalls the market failure so prevalent in developing economies. As the case of the Asian "Four Tigers" demonstrates, state-governed markets can actually yield "… high levels of accumulation, technology absorption and conquest of foreign markets".[355] Thus a developmental state should be strong enough to regulate markets and in the process protect them from collapse and create an environment where states and markets are not rivals but mutually supportive in the process of development.

With regard to higher education, the state must ensure that the system serves the public interest, provides at least those elements of higher education that would not be adequately supplied if left to the devices of the market, promotes equity and quality, and supports those areas of basic research relevant to the country's needs.[356]Clearly, it is how a given state interprets this function in the context of a particular social and politico-economic milieu that gives rise to the particular type of governance mode it develops with the institution of a university.

In Mkandawire's view, Africa has had states that were "developmental" in both their aspirations and economic performance.[357] A developmental state has its ideological principles underpinned first and foremost by developmental concerns and is committed to making the right political and administrative investments in order to realise social and economic development, "interpreted to mean high rates of

[355] Mkandawire, T. (1999:3).

[356] Task Force on Higher Education and Society (2000:53) *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise*, World Bank. New York

[357] Mkandawire Op cit. p289

accumulation and industrialization".[358] Such a state is committed to bringing about sustainable economic growth and, accordingly, places due emphasis on capacity to "implement economic policies sagaciously and effectively"[359] by adopting appropriate institutional, technical, administrative and political strictures.

It is argued in the literature that most African states have, in fact, failed to realise desired levels of economic growth and structural change in their productive systems "due to hard times that brought the economic expansion of their countries to a halt".[360] Comparing them to the successful Asian states, Lewis and Stein argue that the extensive co-ordinated economic interventions of the East Asian states are well beyond the administrative faculties of most African governments.[361] Thus, due to a number of economic, political, and historical factors, most African states have failed to realise meaningful development and sustain university functions at globally competitive levels.

The anti-developmental character of the African post-colonial state has attracted lack of trust and state criticism even at the local level. "At the domestic level, the association of state interventionism with authoritarian rule has tarnished virtually every involvement of the state in the economy".[362] This claim seems to be true of university institutions even within some of the SADC countries where, in the main, institutions perceive state involvement in university activities as unbridled intervention. A clear example of this is that of the University of Zimbabwe where, in his graduation speech, the university's first black vice-chancellor gave the reason for his sudden resignation in 1991 as too much government interference that was making the university impossible to lead.[363]

[358] Mkanadwire, T. (2001:291)

[359] Mkandawire, T. (2001:290)

[360] Mkandawire. T. (2001:291)

[361] Lewsi and Stein, (1997) cited in Mkandawire, (2001:293)

[362] Mkandawire, T. (2001:294)

363 Center for higher education transformation (CHET) *July newsletter*, 2007, Issue no.1 p2

6.3 Modes of co-ordination in higher education

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, state modes of co-ordination are employed as a framework for analysing the kinds of relationships that prevail between the state and the different universities used for this study. In this section, I start by giving an outline of alternative theoretical models that explain the role of the state in the running of higher education institutions.

Van Vught argues that there are only two policy models in the governance of higher education institutions: state control and state supervision.[364] Between these two models lies a range of other models that are variants of these two dominant models. The state control model (also known as the continental model) characterised the higher education systems of Continental Europe.[365] This model is based on the assumption that the higher education system is a project of the state and is almost wholly funded from the fiscus. As is the trend in former socialist countries like Russia and Poland, as well as in some western democracies like France and Sweden, key aspects of the higher education system are managed by government bureaucrats rather than by institutions.[366] Thus, state control operates where there is strong government bureaucracy, weak institutional administration and a strong professoriate.[367] The prime objective of such state control is harmonisation and standardisation of the system in order to meet national development priorities. The university system is used as an instrument for realising social and economic development. Saint aptly captures this thinking from an African context:

> … whatever the position in the more developed countries, the university in Africa occupies too critical a position of importance to be left alone to determine its own priorities. The university is generally set up on the initiative and at the expense of the government, to meet certain objectives. The government … seems the best placed to determine the priorities for the universities. The African university should, in normal circumstances, therefore accept the hegemony of the government.[368]

[364] Van Vught 1993 cited in Moja, T., Muller, J. & Cloete, N. (1996) Towards new forms of regulation in higher education: the case of South Africa. In *Higher Education*, Vol. 32 (2) pp. 129-155.

[365] Op cit:144

[366] Op cit

[367] Op cit

[368] Saint, 1992 cited in Moja, T., Muller, J. & Cloete, N. (1996:145) Towards new forms of regulation in higher education: the case of South Africa. In *Higher Education*, Vol. 32 (2) pp.129-155

State supervision, unlike state control, involves decentralisation of decision making. The role of the state is to monitor and influence the framework of the rules that guide the behaviour of institutions.[369] There is respect for the autonomy of institutions, and the state encourages the self-regulating capabilities of institutions, hence the divergence of institutional cultures this approach promotes. In state supervision,

> … the state sees its task as supervising the higher education system to ensure academic quality and maintain a certain level of accountability. In terms of regulatory theory, this model is based on a cybernetic perspective on decision making, recruiting the self-regulatory capacities of decentralised decision-making units. The government sets the overall policy objectives of the system, monitors the achievement of these objectives, and influences the rules that guide the behaviour of the actors so as to maximise the chances of achieving the objectives.[370]

A distinctive feature of state supervision is the replacement of detailed higher education laws with an incentive framework.[371] Institutions are rewarded through an incentive system for behaving in accordance with expected targets. In some instances there is a mixture of such incentives running alongside punitive measures – the carrot and stick approach.

A third distinctive model that other scholars identify as a variant of the state control model is state intervention,[372] also referred to as state interference. This model is based neither on central control nor on framework regulation; rather, as the same authorities suggest, it is based on crisis intervention by the state. Thus, state interventions are "either sporadic or they can be an ongoing attempt to control through a fairly narrow and rather crude set of measures aimed at establishing political quiescence".[373] An important feature distinguishing state control from state intervention is that in the latter neither political nor bureaucratic control is a national

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[369] Moja, T., Muller, J. & Cloete, N. (1996: 147) Towards new forms of regulation in higher education: the case of South Africa. In *Higher Education*, Vol. 32 (2) pp.129-155

[370] The NCHE report cited in Olivier, N. (2001:3) The Relationship between the State and Higher Education Institutions with Reference to Higher Education Policy Documentation and the Legislative Framework: Commissioned papers.

[371] Moja, T., Muller, J. & Cloete, N. (1996:148) Towards new forms of regulation in higher education: the case of South Africa. In *Higher Education*, Vol. 32 (2) pp.129-155

[372] Op cit

[373] Op cit :148

policy. State intervention occurs despite the fact that official policy may uphold institutional autonomy. The National Council on Higher Education (NCHE) describes this mode of coordination thus:

> … the term interference is used to signify that it is not a systematic control or intervention policy model. Rather, interference occurs when higher education institutions become sites of opposition to the state's development path. In state control the intention is either political or bureaucratic control while in state interference autonomy is the official policy. Examples include Zimbabwe and the former South Africa.[374]

The above-outlined modes of higher education governance are used as a basis for analysing the nature of state-institution relationships that prevails in the universities used in this study. The significance of these state modes of governance is that they reflect the degree of autonomy institutions exercise in pursuing their academic business, and the creation of environment that allows institutions to develop high levels of scholarship.

6.4 The South African context

In the South African context, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, clearly spells out the nature of the relationship that should prevail between the state and higher education institutions. In Olivier's view, the Constitution provides for higher education to be the functional domain of the national sphere of government.[375] What this spells out is that, on the whole, the state has to be responsible for whatever happens within the system and therefore answerable to the public on matters of higher education. It acts on behalf of the public in the area of higher education and therefore has to be responsible for planning and directing the national system.

> In view of the fact of Higher Education institutions being public bodies, established in terms of legislation and performing public functions, the Constitution categorises them as organs of state. Within this context, the

[374] The NCHE report cited in Olivier, N. (2001:4) The Relationship between the State and Higher Education Institutions with Reference to Higher Education Policy Documentation and the Legislative Framework: Commissioned papers

[375] Olivier, N. (2001:9) The Relationship between the State and Higher Education Institutions with Reference to Higher Education Policy Documentation and the Legislative Framework: Commissioned papers

> relevant constitutional provisions dealing with co-operative government (Chapter 3) and public administration (Chapter 10) apply to all HE institutions.[376]

What this entails, in Olivier's interpretation, is that there has to be strict compliance with constitutional provisions regarding the relationship between the national sphere of government and higher education institutions like the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). This constitutional position upholds sound relationships between the Minister, the Department of Education, the Council on Higher Education (CHE), and higher education institutions.[377] Any conflict between institutions and the state is to be resolved amicably, possibly through the mediation of the CHE.

It is important to note that co-operative governance, which forms the hallmark of sate-institution relations in the country, assumes a proactive, guiding and constructive role for the government, and this calls for a strong and efficient bureaucracy. It also assumes a co-operative relationship between the state and higher education institutions.[378] The South African notion of co-operative governance of higher education institutions is unique in that while it gives government powers to steer the system and control the behaviour of actors within the institutions, it emphasises the partnership between government, institutions and civil society constituencies.

> Co-operative governance offers a strong steering model with a planning role and a strong coordinating role, which provides for increased and stronger government and stakeholder participation, as well as expert input from the sector. The model allows for the mobilisation of policy and implementation capacity located outside government. A fundamental tenet is that stakeholders will participate in policy development and that structures and mechanisms should be put into place to give effect to this.[379]

Thus, within the arrangement of co-operative governance, issues of institutional freedom and autonomy are viewed within the context of public accountability. In this sense, universities can exercise conditional autonomy. As the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 states, institutional freedom and autonomy in the higher education institutions' relationship with the state are circumscribed by the need for public

[376] Olivier, N. (2001:9)

[377] Ibid

[378] Cloete, N. (2002:423) New South African Realities. In Cloete, N. et al (2002) Transformation in Higher Education: Global Pressures and Local Realities in South Africa, Juta, pp.414 -445

[379] Olivier, N. (2001:5)

accountability, advanced skills and scientific knowledge.[380] Thus, while Wits has the freedom for academic exercise, its activities have to be monitored by the state through which it has to be accountable to the public. In pursuance of its academic project, the university can develop academic courses using its academic expertise but they have to be accredited by the Department before they are implemented. It can develop its own quality assurance arrangements, but they have to be audited by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) to ensure that they meet the so-called minimum requirements of this body. Its overall performance is equally subjected to periodic audits in order to allow the state an opportunity to ascertain that the institution is towing the boat in the desired direction, as per state plans and goals for the entire national higher education system. In short, Wits observes the national policy framework laid down by the state in its exercise of freedom and autonomy. For example, in developing the institutional quality assurance policy, specific guidelines and requirements stipulated in the HEQC quality assurance policy documents had to be complied with. The self-audit reports, which are an internal dimension of the quality assurance process, have to cover the prescribed criteria.

Of significance in the South African higher education system was the amendment of the Higher Education Act in 1999 and 2000. These amendments effectively strengthened the Minister's interventionist powers and the Department of Education's powers and discretion in respect of the registration and scope of operations of private higher education providers.[381] The amendment of the Act moved the state's position from steering from a distance to an intervention approach, where the government can get directly involved in the running of institutions as and when it feels necessary. For instance,

> … the new powers allowed government to determine the scope and range of public and private institutions and to appoint an administrator to manage institutions with serious financial problems. Ministerial approval is required for taking loans and the construction of immovable infrastructure, and all institutions are required to submit an annual report on governance and financial administration.[382]

[380] Olivier, N. (2001:10)

[381] Ibid

[382] Cloete, N. (2001:424)

Thus according to the same authority cited above, the post-1999 governance approach is characterised by the incorporation of additional aspects of a strong steering model, resulting in an increase in the role and powers of the Minister in the governance and regulation of higher education institutions.

Another way the government increased its regulation of the higher education system was through its new funding formula. This entailed government determining the total funds to be spent in any given year as well as what the key policy goals should be for the year. Institutions were required to report on such plans to the state. Thus, whatever priorities an institution wanted to make had to be in line with the overall state plans and had, to a large extent, to be within the funding limits. The post-2000 period saw a shift in the mode of state co-ordination of the higher education system, from a consultative and highly participatory process of policy formulation typical of the mid to late 1990s to a much stronger state steering, driven by government's frustration at the lack of progress made towards achieving transformation goals.[383] Thus, the prevailing mode of governance is basically a mixed mode, with an increasingly state steering aspect as well as interventionist elements.

6.5 The Zimbabwean context

In Zimbabwe, policy has it that universities, whether public or private, have freedom of academic exercise. The situation on the ground has changed over the years, however, as the state assumed a new character. From a more development-oriented and democratic state that relied primarily on policy development through consultative processes to a less hegemonic and more centralised governance system, the nature of the relationship created between the state and higher education institutions has changed over years.

Like Botswana and South Africa, and indeed the majority of Southern African countries, the state in Zimbabwe is a post-colonial state that emerged from bitter social struggles that were associated with the worst bloodshed and suffering of people. It therefore had a lot of mandates to fulfil, not least of which was social and economic emancipation of its people. Among other strategies, such emancipation was to be

[383] Ibid

realised through empowering people with relevant education so they could play a meaningful role in the process of economic advancement. Thus, in the first decade of political independence, the post-colonial Zimbabwean state claimed to be a developmental state with a mission to enhance sustainable economic development, "interpreted to mean high rates of accumulation and industrialization".[384] As shown at the beginning of this chapter, a developmental state is "one whose ideological underpinnings are developmental and one that seriously attempts to deploy its administrative and political resources to the task of economic development".[385] Such a state is committed to bringing about sustainable economic growth and, accordingly, places due emphasis on capacity to "implement economic policies sagaciously and effectively"[386] by adopting appropriate institutional, technical, administrative and political structures. That this was the true nature of the Zimbabwean state in the first decade of independence is illustrated in the following paragraph.

In the early 1980s corrupt senior government officials were not spared the wrath of the law, as is exemplified by the firing of several Cabinet ministers who had abused the car facility at the local Willowvale Car Assembly Company, an event that is commonly dubbed the Willowgate Motor Scandal. This incident demonstrated zero tolerance for corrupt behaviour in the public service by the president of the country. In education, great strides were made at all levels of the system by investing in efficient and effective teacher training programmes as well as improving the quality and quantity of educational provision. In 1980, for instance, the enrolment at the University of Zimbabwe was under 2 000,[387] and by 2005 this figure had soared to 12 000.[388] At the 2004 graduation ceremony alone, 2 950 graduands were conferred with undergraduate and postgraduate degrees.[389] The student numbers cited above were also matched by substantial investments in infrastructure on campus in order to

[384] Mkandawire, T (2001:291) Thinking about developmental states in Africa. In *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Vol. 25; pp.289-313

[385] Ibid.

[386] Ibid (2001:290)

[387] Kamba, W. (2000) Leadership strategies for institutional change: The case of the University of Zimbabwe. In Cloete, N.,Kulati, T. & Phala, M. (eds.) *Leadership and institutional change in higher education*, CHET, Pretoria. pp.41-48

[388] The University of Zimbabwe Five Year Plan 2003-2007

[389] Nyagura, L.M. (2004:4) Speech by the Vice Chancellor: Special events, UZ

maintain high academic standards. Systematic staff development programmes were guided by well-defined policies, and this gave the university space to effectively address issues of institutional quality delivery. This conducive environment in which the institution prevailed is confirmed by the first black Vice-Chancellor of the university:

> We recruited people from outside the University; we recruited graduates from the University and sent them on training seminars (*and for doctoral studies overseas*); we did everything to balance the composition of the University. We did not lower our appointment qualifications, which would have adversely affected the quality of the University. One of the guarantees that I gave to professors was that they would remain academic leaders, they would maintain all their privileges except for the right to be heads of departments. When I left the University of Zimbabwe,[390] we had raised the proportion of blacks to 60%, partly by gathering those who had returned from exile, and partly from the comprehensive academic staff development scheme.[391] (Emphasis is my own.)

In these early years of independence, the relationship that prevailed between the university and the state can best be described as state supervision, a relationship that promoted the thriving of sound scholarship at the institution. There was respect for the autonomy of the university, and the state encouraged the self-regulating capabilities of the institution. Like in the South African context, the state lay down national policy frameworks within which the institution operated and steered from a distance. The university exercised considerable autonomy and freedom, with minimum constraints from state interference. As alluded to earlier on, the state also managed the economy through positive development-oriented policies, and economic growth was realised. In terms of support for the institution and students who enrolled with the university, the state was a welfare state. Every student who came to study at the university was assured of getting a public grant that fully covered tuition, accommodation and stationary fees, as long as they were Zimbabwean nationals. Students also enjoyed a stipend that was meant to cater for their other day-to-day needs. Campus life was much more relaxed and less stressful for students, and it promoted academic vibrancy on the part of both students and staff. There was a lot of trust by both the state and the

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[390] Professor Walter Kamba made his unexpected announcement of resignation at the 1991 graduation ceremony, citing government interference as the main reason.

[391] Kamba, W. (2000:47) Leadership strategies for institutional change: The case of the University of Zimbabwe. In Cloete, N.,Kulati, T. and Phala, M. (eds.) *Leadership and institutional change in higher education*, CHET, Pretoria. pp41-48

public on the activities and capacity of the university to deliver. The university was required to make annual submissions of its plans to the government only for planning purposes. This trend changed in the post-2000 period, which is characterised by a radical change in state policy on matters of social and economic development.

The turning point for this change was marked by the refusal by the state to accept the people's verdict on the February 2000 referendum, which sought, among other things, to redress the land issue and to increase presidential powers. The results of the referendum, itself a democratic process, showed an overwhelming expression by the electorate to stop government from expropriating commercial farming land from white farmers. Frustrated by the results of the referendum, government made a unilateral decision to proceed with the unplanned land reform programme that marked the beginning of the collapse of a previously vibrant economy. It is important to note that this policy decision was, unlike in the past, undemocratic as it was unilateral and against popular opinion and defeated the very essence of holding the referendum. From this period onwards, the state had to resort to using political muscle instead of consultative and democratic strategies in order to force the civic society to swallow bitter policy decisions. Amid a declining economy and state legitimacy, it focused its attention more on protecting itself from growing criticism from both within and outside the country than on nipping the problem of flawed policies in the bud, curtailing growing corruption in the public service, and listening to the voices of the electorate so as to salvage the nation from an already fledgling democracy.

The significance of the developments described briefly above is to illustrate how the state transformed from a democratic state bent on forging progressive policies and strategies by mobilising public support into a non-hegemonic, less democratic, and anti-developmental state that attracted lack of trust and criticism. The post-2000 period is marked by growing tensions between the state and the civil society in general, and more specifically between the state and the university community. Thus, the gradual process of change of state that occurred in the 1990s, marked by the turning point in 2000, resulted in different forms of relationship setting in between the government and civil society, as well as between the state and higher education. As Mkandawire would argue with reference to anti-developmental African states in general, at the domestic level, the association of state interventionism with

authoritarian rule has tarnished virtually every involvement of the (Zimbabwean) state in the economy.[392] A spirit of mistrust of the university community and university activities began to grow within government circles and this triggered closer monitoring of university activities. Student uprisings and mobilisation against corruption in government[393] were treated with heavy-handedness, as this was viewed as criticism of the state. Violation of both student and staff rights to freedom of speech on campus became common; student beatings on campus by the military forces became rampant. Appointments to senior positions in the university had to be sanctioned by the state and political intolerance was on the increase. A series of state intervention measures characterised the new relationship between the state and the university – commission of enquiry, resignation of the Vice-Chancellor, appointment of a new council and a new principal, and legislation to control access.[394] The type of relationship that prevailed between the state and the university in the first decade changed from state supervision to state intervention or interference. The university community, especially lecturers and students, viewed this as unbridled state intervention, an undesirable development that worked against academic freedom and that thwarted sound scholarship on campus. In Neave's view,

> … it is not State control per se which is the source of disquiet so much as what is perceived as reinforcing State control beyond established bounds. One is never so conscious of State control as when it assumes a dynamic which obliges central authority to take initiatives and … go where it has never gone before.[395]

The prevailing type of relationship between the state and the university does not promote academic excellence in the institution; neither does it comply with the policy ideals of institutional autonomy espoused by the same government through the Ministry of Higher Education policy.

The type of relationship that prevails between UZ and the state constrains rather than promotes academic excellence. This study clearly found that in the post-2000 period,

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[392] Mkandawire, T. (2001:294)

[393] Mojah, T., Muller, J. and Cloete, N. (1996:149)

[394] UDUSA News 1992 cited in Mojah, T., Muller, J. and Cloete, N. (1996:149)

[395] Neave, G. (1998:270) The Evaluative State Reconsidered. In *European Journal of Education*, Vol.33 (3) pp.206-283

the state has dismally failed to sustain the institution at a reasonable level of academic performance. This has severely impacted the quality of teaching and research in the university. The following interview response from one member of staff is re-cited here in order to illustrate the extent of state failure to support some semblance of quality in the university:

> I was telling my students this morning that these two magic markers I was given in January to last me a year. Now do you expect an academic to work? You have been given two markers, you have been given one ballpoint pen and you expect that member to supplement what the government is failing to provide. I become less committed. We want resources and we want to make sure that conditions of service for academic and support staff are improved so that they are motivated. Today I will not want to reveal to anyone that I am teaching at university, I will not want to tell anybody that I have a PhD because those with less education and those working elsewhere are performing better. They are living better quality life.[396]

The inability of the changed Zimbabwean state to support university functions is worsened by the fact that the very same state has positioned itself very unfavourably with the international community, particularly the west. As a result, most of the funding organisations that used to support the university have withdrawn their funds, and this has left the university in a very desperate position. This study revealed that many of the staff exchange programmes with overseas institutions were financed by multinational organisations; after their withdrawal, staff can hardly afford to visit outside institutions, even for the purpose of attending international conferences. Some departments had their research activities and exchange programmes severely affected after the funding organisations withdrew their support. Responding to a question on how the department was faring in terms of research publications and collaboration with outside universities, one head of a department had this to say:

> I would say we are fortunate because we had programmes that allowed us to access funds, the research output has been quite good. We had funds from Rockefeller Fellowship and the Forum Project. So at one point, I think about last year, we had about 10 or so projects running at the same time, each project worth about US$65 000, so it was quite a lot of money. Almost every member of staff had a project….
>
> Yes, I mean some of these projects we do are collaborative projects. We had a big DfID project which we had in collaboration with Silosoe University in

[396] Interview response from a senior academic member of staff in the Department of Educational Administration, University of Zimbabwe, 16 October 2005.

> Bradford, I think, and then the Natural Resources Leadership at the University of Princeton. ... Previously we had had another project with Connell University in horticulture. Our lecturers sometimes go and teach at university of Zambia.[397]

This head of department, however, lamented that all these organisations were no longer going to support any of the research programmes from the following year, and this was going to be a big blow to the academic development of the department.

Thus, the Zimbabwean state has not only assumed a new relationship with the local higher education institutions, as is evidenced by the interview responses above, it has also established a new relationship with the international community, something that has direct consequences for the University of Zimbabwe. The decision by the state to withdraw the country from the Commonwealth also cut the university's umbilical cord from a nourishing international network of academic institutions that collaborate in knowledge building and dissemination. It is worth noting that the phenomenon of donor dependency, common in macro-national development projects in developing countries, is also expressed in the case of the University of Zimbabwe. A number of key research projects, including purchase of essential teaching-learning equipment like computers, laboratory equipment and books, were supported by donors, and after their withdrawal departments find it hard to function.

The argument advanced by some scholars – that African states have failed to realise desired levels of economic growth and structural change in their productive systems "due to hard times that brought the economic expansion of their countries to a halt"[398] – holds true for Zimbabwe. Not only has the state become dysfunctional in terms of management of social institutions, higher education included, but also a real nuisance in the daily lives of citizens.[399] New relationships have been established between the state and the higher education system, as well as between the state and civil society. Thus, due to a number of factors, including poor policy decisions, administrative inefficiencies, corruption, civil strife and sheer misfortune arising from devastating

[397] Interview response from a Head of Department, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Zimbabwe, 25 October 2005

[398] Mkandawire, T. (2001:291)

[399] Chazan, 1998; Rothchild, 1994 cited in Mkandawire, T. (2001:293)

natural disasters like drought, the post-colonial Zimbabwean state has become anti-developmental. Its failure to sustain social institutions like universities at a reasonable level of performance has resulted in equally non-developmental higher education institutions.

6.6 The University of Botswana context

The national context within which the University of Botswana operates is clearly different from the Wits and UZ contexts, in terms of the socio-political goals, social expectations of the institution and the reporting requirements of the university to the government. Until recently, the University of Botswana was the only university in the country, and everybody in the country had to apply for local university education. With regard to the higher education system as a whole, the government formerly took it upon itself to regulate and fund the tertiary education system. It also had the responsibility to take care of the public interest in university education, hence the capitalisation of P1.2 billion for the expansion of UB and establishment of the Medical School and a second university in 2004.[400] This investment and several other government initiatives like the establishment of the Department of Student Placement and Welfare, demonstrated government's commitment to meet public demand for higher education by expanding the system.

In terms of quality assurance, the University of Botswana was given the responsibility of quality assuring the entire tertiary education system in the country, through a system of affiliation. This is a clear demonstration of the trust government had in the university and its ability to deliver. Before the establishment of the Tertiary Education Council (TEC) in 1999, there was a much centralised state control model of the tertiary education system, "with the exception of UB which is directed at arm's length through a self-regulating governing council, albeit funded solely by the government and with the head of state as chancellor".[401] Thus, state regulation of the University of Botswana is mainly through funding, a mechanism that has a direct influence on student enrolment. Through state welfare policy in so far as university education is concerned, unprecedented pressure is placed on the institution, leading to over-

[400] Tertiary Education Policy of Botswana: Challenges and Choices, p10

[401] Ibid, p.10

enrolment. Student-demand-driven higher education in Botswana has resulted in the university being forced to come out from its ivory towers and engage in a new form of relationship with society.

It appears that the government of Botswana has drawn lessons from international trends in terms of its role in university education, and how such institutions should be steered. As the Tertiary Education Council points out, government steering through the 1980s and 1990s reflected that direct state control and state monopolistic hold of universities are not favourable for the proper functioning of such institutions.[402] The government saw the need to establish a more even-handed interrelationship between the university, government and society. It is in the light of such lessons that the Tertiary Education Council was formed. The TEC is responsible for advising the government on policy development, funding mechanisms, and system-wide co-ordination, standards and quality assurance of the expanding university system.[403] Thus, like in the South African case, a notable change in the higher education system in Botswana was the establishment of a buffer mechanism meant to ensure that government does not directly deal with the university in the process of reforming the national higher education system, and therefore avoids unnecessary interference with university activities.

> The establishment of the Tertiary Education Council in 1999 represents the clearest manifestation of such a change in this country and the first signal of the unfolding reform agenda to better position Botswana's tertiary education system to respond to the challenge of change.[404]

Thus, because of the awareness of the detrimental effects of strict government control of university systems, gained mainly from the experiences of other countries, the Botswana government is repositioning itself in relation to higher education institutions, thereby allowing more autonomy and freedom of practice on the part of the university. There is a very high degree of autonomy and freedom of decision making on the part of the university in so far as quality assurance is concerned. As

[402] Tertiary Education Policy of Botswana: Challenges and Choices, p11

[403] Tertiary Education Policy of Botswana: Challenges and Choices, p11

[404] Tertiary Education Policy of Botswana: Challenges and Choices, p11

was highlighted earlier in this thesis, the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) directorate confirmed this position during interviews.

Asked whether the university does any reporting on their quality assurance arrangements to the government, the same deputy director for CAD responded:

> No, we are very autonomous. We get money from government but we are considered a parastatal. Our students also get funding from government but that's about all. We really don't have to report to anybody.[405]

Apart from funding university education and influencing enrolment numbers in order to try to meet the demand for both university education and labour requirements for the national economy, state interference with university business is almost non-existent. The government requires submission of university reports for the purpose of its overall planning of the higher education system. All students who enrol at the University of Botswana, and indeed in any of the newly registered private universities, receive public funding. Although such government subsidy is on the decline, the university is still well-funded. There is mutual trust and harmony between the institution and the state.

Clearly the social transformational role of university education is quite different from the South African case, where the legacy of apartheid makes it necessary for the state to use higher education as an apparatus to engender a new social order which prioritises values of equity, equality, redress and tolerance. Thus social expectations of university education in Botswana are arguably not identical with those of the South African higher education system and this has implications for the notions of quality the institution holds and the vested interests the state has in what goes on in university institutions. This study holds that state influence in university governance and in the day-to-day business of the university is non-conspicuous in Botswana; it steers from a distance and is influenced by values of making the university system more efficient, competitive and responsive to the demands of the local labour market.

[405] Interview with CAD Deputy Director, University of Botswana, 25 July 2005.

6.7 The developmental agenda of African post-colonial states

While the foregoing paragraphs attempt to explain the nature of the state and the type of relationship established with each of the three studied universities, this section looks at the relationship that prevails between a university institution and a post-colonial state within the Southern African region in general. Such a relationship is peculiar by virtue of the unique nature of interference (or ubiquity)[406] of the post-colonial state in higher education systems, with pressing interests and mandates to fulfil. The purpose of this broader review is to try to locate what has been described in the three universities within patterns and trends in the broader region.

It is pertinent to understand the discourse of state-university relationships within the context of the nature of the post-colonial state in Africa and its efforts at bringing about economic development. Emerging from bitter social struggles that were associated with the worst bloodshed and suffering of their people, most post-colonial states in Africa had many mandates to fulfil, not least of which was social and economic emancipation of their peoples. Among other strategies, such emancipation was to be realised through empowering people with relevant education so they could all play a meaningful role in the process of economic advancement. Thus most post-colonial African states claimed to be developmental states with a mission to enhance sustainable economic development,

The post-colonial states in some of the countries within the SADC region, like Zimbabwe, have interfered with university systems using a development agenda, and yet some of them are in fact not developmental states, at least according to the definition given in the foregoing paragraphs. The Zimbabwean state emerged as a popular replacement of a colonial, repressive and undemocratic governance system that took years of struggle and sacrifice to exterminate. The popular post-colonial state that came into power carried the electorate's hopes, vision, trust and confidence, hence the argument that the Zimbabwean post-colonial state had a legitimate mandate from the electorate. Its interference with the university was therefore meant to influence the institution of higher learning to produce manpower skills for the so-

[406] Mkandawire, T (2001) Thinking about developmental states in Africa. In *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Vol. 25; pp.289-313

called key sectors of the local economy and to provide access to higher education by previously disadvantaged social groups. The institution was also expected to impart qualities that were considered to be in the interests of a developing society – sound ideological orientation, patriotism and consolidation of national solidarity. As a way of arbitrating societal interests and expectations of the university institution, the government urged the university to open its doors to the masses and even to lower entry requirements for students. The state also advocated for university education and a university institution that was relevant to their developmental concerns and plans. Thus, the notion of running a "relevant university" was a guiding principle in reforming university education in the country.

A conspicuous consequence of this "developmentalist mission" exerted on university education by the state was the mushrooming of not only more university institutions with greater enrolments, but also the birth of many programmes and even schools of development studies in the universities. These developments were perceived as significant multiplier factors in the process of national development. The state was clearly more preoccupied with welfare provision than with economic growth and, as Edigheji puts it, hence public enterprises were intended to provide basic services to the people.[407] While this was positive, it was unfortunately pursued at the expense of wealth accumulation and sustainable economic growth. The experiences of the industrialising countries of Asia show that strategies bent on raising standards of living of the masses through welfare spending rather than through employment creation are flawed in that they are not sustainable.[408] Development in these countries was realised through increasing employment and productivity levels, which in turn raised the general standards of living without necessarily increasing welfare spending. I equate the post-colonial states of Zimbabwe to what Gramsci refers to as a situation of the pessimism of the diagnosis and the optimism of the prescription to redress the diagnosed problem of underdevelopment.[409] Thus no meaningful development could be achieved by the state because of its inability to diagnose accurately the necessary

[407] Edigheji, O. (2005) A democratic developmental state in Africa? Research report 105. Centre for policy studies, Johannesburg

[408] Schneider, B. N. (1999) "The desarrollista state in Brazil and Mexico," in Meredith Woo- Cumings, (ed.*) The developmental state*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP.

[409] Gramci cited in Mukandawire, T. (2001:289) Thinking about developmental states in Africa. In *Cambridge Journal of Economics, Vol. 25 pp.289-313*

fundamentals of national development and lack of capacity to implement the policies, practices and processes that can enhance true development. The need for creating and sustaining a strong economic base in order to support a sound higher education system should have been obvious to the Zimbabwean state. There was no point in creating a myriad of new public universities where the economy was too weak to support them at a reasonable level of performance. The dire consequence of this policy was serious compromise on the quality of delivery of these universities. The claim that SADC post-colonial states, like the Zimbabwean state, carried a developmental agenda and yet they were not developmental states is precisely based on this fact. Indeed, the true attributes of a developmental state were lacking in most of these states, perhaps with the exception of South Africa and Botswana.

The Zimbabwean case is a clear example of a situation in which the state has failed to nurture a positive ideological-structure environment that could withstand the economic and political challenges that confronted the country over the last decade. As Mkandawire notes, in Africa there are many examples of states "… which now seem anti-developmental because the hard times brought the economic expansion of their countries to a halt".[410] This argument seems to be true of Zimbabwe where, at the time of the study, inflation stood at more than 1 000% and economic growth was reportedly negative. Thus, using Mkandawire's analysis, the state could no longer stabilise the economy, democratic governance was highly contested both locally and internationally, and although there was commitment and political will by the state to support university institutions, there was lack of capacity to create an enabling environment for the entirety of the social institutions in the country due to lack of adequate financial resources.

The significance of the debate on the developmental state and university institutions lies in the kind of relationships states should establish with the university institutions studied – that of negotiated partnership where the state plays a facilitating role while universities still retain their autonomy to reform their systems, guided by academic concerns but at the same time conscious of the broad national development goals and plans. In this scenario, the responsibility for introducing and developing standards of

[410] Mkandawire Op cit

performance and quality assurance systems should remain with the universities, but be fully supported by the state in order to enhance effective implementation of the systems. Institutions should develop their quality assurance systems without any external constraints. The state, by virtue of its mandate from the people, sets broad frameworks within which such institutions operate and it plays the supervisory role. It also creates a favourable environment in which institutions operate, by allowing them the autonomy and academic freedom they need and by providing resources that are commensurate with the increased enrolments and the new demands of universities in terms of generating knowledge through research.

The three countries that were used as cases in this study very well identify with this developmental position, at least in terms of policy, most probably because they are all developing nations. What seems to be the biggest challenge is the effective implementation of policies that are supposed to bring about meaningful transformation and develop adequate capacity to support institutional functions at reasonable levels of scholarship. All the three institutions studied are public universities which get the bulk of their funding from the state. The basis of state-institution relationships, particularly accountability-led modes of co-ordination, lies partly in this funding arrangement but also heavily in the fact that universities are perceived as part of the wider state machinery for bringing about social and economic development and for meeting some of the demands of civil society. It is clear, however, that in some cases, like in the case of UB and Wits, the state recognises the importance of allowing universities the freedom and autonomy they need to develop and maintain sound academic standards. State policy mainly provides a broad policy framework that acts as guidance to institutions.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter focused on state-university relationships as one of the key factors shaping institutional performance. Drawing from theory on modes of co-ordination, the chapter showed the different forms of state prevailing in the three studied contexts, and the way the state has positioned itself in relation to higher education in each of the three cases. In doing so, the chapter has demonstrated that although all the

three studied cases operate under post-colonial states, they have assumed different relationships with the state.

In the South African higher education system, "… an interesting mixture of traditional state control and arm's length government steering approaches can be observed in the system".[411] The nature of such state control, however, is predominantly administrative rather than political, and the quality assurance policy of Wits was developed within the framework of shared governance. Thus the Wits quality assurance policy is both internal and external. In Botswana, state steering from a distance characterises the nature of the relationship between the state and the university. The latter enjoys a lot of autonomy in terms of developing its quality assurance systems. The existence of the Tertiary Education Council has not had any influence on the development of the quality assurance policy of the University of Botswana. In Zimbabwe, there is significant state intervention in university activities, despite official policy stipulating otherwise. Regular state intervention – in the form of thwarting freedom of critical politics by students, appointment of executive management personnel considered to be "politically right", and controlling the level of fees – has impacted on how the university is run and the students who enrol in it. At the University of Zimbabwe, there is significant state control of the institution, and the overall planning of the institution's reform activities is not only co-ordinated centrally from the relevant Ministry, it is also heavily influenced by state funding levels that are currently constrained by the ailing economy.

An important point brought out in this chapter is the way states are repositioning themselves in response to globalisation factors. Recent international trends show that the state is no longer the sole controller of university institutions. Corporate-pluralist models of university-society relationship clearly show that the state has lost its monopoly over financing, power and control of universities.[412] The notion of a multi-stakeholder university has replaced state control of university affairs in many contexts, including all three studied contexts. Some of these stakeholders include student and staff unions, professional associations, industry and business, academic

[411] Op. cit. p.20

[412] Olsen, J. (1988) cited by Maasen. P. and Cloete, N. (2002:24)

peers and local and regional agencies. Thus, there is strong reflection of a constellation of interests of different stakeholders in the studied universities, particularly in terms of quality assurance and curriculum reform. In South Africa, for instance, planners at national level recognise the significance of the complexity of multi-stakeholder participation in the higher education system:

> The Ministry [of Education] is well aware that governance in higher education institutions continues to be characterised by struggles for control, lack of consensus and even conflict over differing interpretations of higher education transformation. Among employers, past students, parents, and other members of the wider community, many different views and expectations about higher education abound. Among those currently involved directly in the process of higher education – in particular, students, academic staff, administrative staff, service staff, and institutional managers – there are often competing views and priorities which give rise to tensions and sometimes to turmoil.[413]

It is also true that because of so many stakeholder interests, power relations play themselves out in very significant ways when it comes to decision making on university policy matters, hence the tensions that were identified in all three institutions regarding the development of institutional quality assurance polices. These tensions are discussed more explicitly in the next chapter. While it is admissible that there are many stakeholders, the government still plays a central role in shaping the structure of higher education systems, although other players also have their fingers in the pie. In all the studied cases, public interests and expectations of higher education institutions are negotiated through the state. Governments therefore demand accountability on the part of university institutions. The state is repositioning itself and forging new forms of relationships with university institutions in order to continue to ensure some degree of harmony between national development goals and the operations of higher education. Thus, state modes of co-ordination are a significant factor affecting institutional autonomy in terms of reforms.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 dealt primarily with the various forces that influence quality assurance in the studied universities. These forces were perceived as being contextual, regional and international as well as related to the way institutions relate to the state. Apart from these factors that are exogenous to the institution, there are also key

[413]DoE (1997:29) (Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, Department of Education, Pretoria.

factors that are endogenous to the university itself that have an equally profound influence on the types and effectiveness of quality assurance approaches used in the three institutions. Chapter 7 focuses specifically on the policy dynamics that have influenced quality assurance policy implementation in the three universities.

Chapter 7

MAKING POLICY FOR QUALITY: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with policy processes that were followed by the studied universities in order to bring about the current quality assurance policies operative in the institutions. The chapter brings out the approaches that were used in quality assurance policy development, the key parties that were involved, the main motivating factors behind the policies, the objectives for the development of such quality assurance policies in the institutions, and structures that were put in place in order to facilitate implementation of such policies. In dealing with these seemingly technical nuances, the chapter aims to bring out some of the shortcomings inherent in the quality assurance policies of these institutions.

The key argument that is pursued in this chapter is that quality assurance policies in the studied universities were developed without taking into account the specific country and institutional contexts. In all three universities, there seems to have been too much preoccupation with the development of policies and putting in place quality assurance structures meant to enhance policy development but without addressing the relevant contextual factors that constrain effective implementation. The result of underplaying the importance of the contextual specificities of institutions is two-fold; the first is that at institutional level, quality assurance policies are perceived differently by different stakeholders; the second is that there are a number of constraints faced in implementing those policies. Thus, while as text the policies are very sound, in practice there are many constraints relating to staffing, student numbers, resource availability and, most importantly, staff motivation which remain unaddressed. At the same time, quality assurance policy implementation in all three institutions is replete with tensions that are articulated in the contradictory perceptions of stakeholders. These tensions arise mainly from the policy processes that were followed in developing institutional quality assurance policies – where there was extensive consultation of international experts at the expense of local staff, and

driving of policy development and implementation by management, there is lack of ownership of policies by university staff. At institutional level, the quality assurance policies are perceived from two different perspectives – as internal and mainly improvement-oriented by university management, and as externally driven and managerial by the academic collegiate. This dichotomy in policy perception arises directly from the policy development processes themselves which were highly contested. On the one hand there are claims of highly consultative processes having been followed in policy development by management, yet, on the other hand, academic staff feels that consultation was mainly with external experts at the expense of their involvement. The latter feel that their participation in the policy process was very negligible.

These are some of the pertinent issues impacting negatively on the quality delivery of institutions. Unless they are addressed, effective implementation of the newly developed quality assurance policies may remain a dream in some of the institutions.

7.2 Quality assurance policy: the concept

Before dealing with models of policy formulation used in the different universities, it is important to clarify the understanding of policy used in this study. What constitutes policy in a given context is not necessarily obvious. Indeed policy is sometimes conceived so generally as to mean everything that goes on in an organisation. Such definitions of policy as "what government chooses to do or not to do" make the subject of policy too elusive for analytical purposes. It is important in this chapter to clearly delimit the term policy if subsequent discussions on the subject are to be meaningful.

Cunningham suggests that "…policy is a bit like an elephant – you recognize one when you see it, but it is somewhat more difficult to define".[414] Policy can be conceived of as "a label for a field of activity" or "as a general expression of general purpose or desired state of affairs" or "as a programme" or indeed "as a process".[415] In Harman's view policy is:

[414] Cunningham, 1963: 229 cited in Taylor, et al p.23).

[415] Taylor et al p. 23).

> ... the implicit or explicit specification of courses of purposive action being followed or to be followed in dealing with a recognized problem or matter of concern, and directed towards the accomplishment of some intended or desired set of goals. Policy also can be thought of as a position or stance developed in response to a problem or issue of conflict, and directed towards a particular objective.[416]

While the concept of policy is elusive, as the definitions above illustrate, even more elusive is the concept of quality assurance policy. What makes this specific concept more elusive is that it is related to quality, a concept that is highly contested. There is hardly any consensus on what really constitutes quality in any aspect of university operations; this is mainly because of the different perceptions stakeholders hold about the role of a university and how it should function. Quality assurance is about trying to assure excellence in the way institutions choose to operate, rather than how quality assurors want them to operate. It is this complexity that is associated with the terms "quality" and "quality assurance" that makes quality assurance policy a uniquely elusive term.

In spite of this difficulty, it is important to try to find some understanding of the concept to work with. In this study institutional quality assurance policies were discernable in terms of policy texts, or in terms of practice, or both. To analyse institutional policy simply in terms of the words written in formal policy documents is to overlook the nuances and subtleties of the real context which shape those polices and which also give them significance. My analysis of institutional quality assurance policies focused on documents as well as action on the ground. Thus, policy in this study is viewed as written expressions of general purpose meant to address identified problems which have become a matter of concern and directed towards the accomplishment of some specified goals. This entails browsing through documents and getting to understand institutional set goals and actions that are planned in order to achieve those goals. Policy is also understood as a course of purposive action followed by both students and staff.

[416] Harman's (1984: 13)

To understand institutional policies on quality assurance, I had to analyse quality assurance policy documents, strategic plans, ordinances, rules and regulations laid down by universities and national quality agencies guiding the conduct of institutions in matters of quality assurance. I also had to interact with management and academic staff in formal interviews on their practices and procedures in quality assuring their work. In this study, policy consists of both practice and text.

7.3 Changing quality assurance policies: key drivers and context

As pointed out earlier on in this chapter, quality assurance policy development is a new phenomenon in all three case institutions. In spite of the complexities involved in developing quality assurance policies and systems for an institution, these processes are taking place in the case universities because of a number of internal and external pressures institutions are facing to develop such systems. There is an apparent new thrust in the area of quality assurance, and this seems to be premised on new thinking on the best approaches to enhancing quality in the institutions. It is worthwhile, in this context, to analyse why there is such renewed emphasis on quality assurance in institutions and what the quality assurance policies are meant to achieve.

An important observation from the literature on quality assurance practices in the developed world is that there is apparent tension regarding the benefits of quality assurance programmes adopted by university institutions. It is highly contested whether the adoption of quality assurance polices has really added any value to practice by staff or whether it has simply been popular practice by institutions to do so. Lim argues that:

> … it is not universally accepted that the adoption of quality assurance has produced the desired effect in universities in developed countries. While there are those who argue that, in spite of problems, the net effect has been positive, there are those who point out that quality assurance is a passing fad which has produced no substantial and long-lasting effect. It is more concerned with processes than results, and data and bureaucratic requirements, together with unnecessary obtrusive government intervention, have diverted institutions from their core activities.[417]

[417] Lim, D. (1999:380) Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Developing Countries: In *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, Vol.24 (4) pp. 379-390*

The same author also asserts that one reason for the introduction of quality assurance programmes in the developing world is "…simply that it is the fashionable thing to do".[418] There are several reasons why institutions are adopting explicit quality assurance policies and practices. These reasons range from epistemic ones that aim at enhancing excellence in university practice to political ones that mainly serve the interests of external stakeholders in the higher education system. Quality assurance arrangements premised on the epistemic rationale are primarily meant to improve the quality and relevance of programmes offered so that they can impact positively on the socio-economic development of the nation while at the same time they enable institutions to continually align their practices with international trends and thus remain competitive. This motive is central to the three case universities as it underlines the need for an institution to remain an active competitor in the regional higher education market. Pursuing the new discourse on quality assurance at the three case institutions from the points of view raised above was most revealing in terms of the possible benefits current quality assurance efforts are likely to yield to the relevant institutions. This study tried to source evidence on why institutions have a new thrust, backed by an explicit policy, on quality assurance issues. While there were common motives for quality assurance policy development across the three institutions, there were other motives that were unique to the particular contexts of the institutions.

Data from policy documents and interviews strongly suggest that quality assurance policies at the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Zimbabwe are being driven by the need for institutional improvement as much as they are by the need for transparency, accountability and control. As far as Wits is concerned, at national level government policy position on institutional accountability is very clear: "The principle of public accountability implies that institutions are answerable for their actions and decisions not only to their own governing bodies and the institutional community but also to the broader society".[419] It is clear that Wits has to dance to the national tune and shift from its traditional practice of an implicit quality assurance arrangement that was mainly internal to having an explicit quality assurance policy against which its performance can be objectively judged by outside stakeholders,

[418] Op cit: p.380

[419] DoE ((1997:8) Education White Paper 3 of 1997, Department of Education, Pretoria

especially the state. Unlike the old practice, the new quality assurance policy has a very strong external dimension in which the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) plays a very significant role. The state, through the HEQC, steers the system and aims at establishing an efficient, effective, well co-ordinated single system of higher education that can contribute towards the achievement of broad national development goals. To achieve this, funding, quality assurance and co-ordinated planning are used as the main steering mechanisms. "At a macro level, the national quality assurance (QA) system forms a crucial component of the steering mechanisms that will be used for systems development and monitoring".[420] In this context, institutional quality assurance policies and practices have to be in keeping with the overarching national policy and requirements on quality, which clearly privilege both the internal and the external dimensions.

The spirit and values of national policy on institutional quality assurance policy and practice are enshrined in the university's quality assurance policy document: "Quality assurance and management …. is thus a values position in that it is a commitment to excellence which is demonstrable, defendable and externally verifiable".[421] The policy document further states, "The quality assurance policy aims to make explicit what has been the implicit view of the University on quality and quality assurance and in so doing present a common understanding of quality assurance and the responsibility for it".[422] The document clearly places emphasis on transparency as a way of convincing external stakeholders of the worth of the institution's activities. This policy position was confirmed by the director for the Academic Planning and Development Office during an interview:

> They are trying to say that we have a lot of good practice in the university, but it's not necessarily written down…. So what we are trying to do with the policy statement is to try and make it explicit. We are trying to say implicitly we know our standards and we want to better them and explicitly we want other people to scrutinise what we do.[423]

[420] HEQC Institutional Audit Framework, p.3.

[421] Quality Assurance Policy Document; S2005: p.18.

[422] Ibid p. 18.

[423] Interview with CAD deputy director, University of Botswana, 25 July 2005

Thus, the shift from implicit quality assurance arrangements to adopting more explicit practices that can be seen by outside stakeholders seems to be primarily a response to external stakeholder requirements, especially government. While the approach brings about institutional improvement, the primary motive behind the new quality assurance policy and practices is to enable the state and other relevant external stakeholders to understand and keep track of how the institution is performing. Quality assurance is strongly anchored in accountability values. There is increasing demand from the state for accountability on the expenditure of public funds in an environment where greater accountability and openness on the part of institutions has become the norm. This position seems to be quite in keeping with higher education practices in the developed world where, as Pierce would argue, people have become more critical of authority and are no longer willing to place total confidence in the "ivory tower" image of tertiary institutions, but they do expect evidence that higher education is providing good quality and value for money.[424]

As indicated earlier on in this chapter, apart from serving accountability purposes, aligning local university practices with international trends was a major preoccupation in the process of developing the new quality assurance policy, not only at Wits but also in the country as a whole. This explains why, at national level, there was so much consultation of international experts on quality assurance policy development in particular and on higher education transformation in South Africa in general. This over-consultation and policy borrowing is aptly captured by scholars in quality assurance:

> It is within this context that it might be accurate to claim that there is hardly another country that has received as much advice from external agents regarding how to transform higher education and how to set up mechanisms of improving quality as South Africa has in recent years. Honest, reflective and sensitive interactions were accompanied by large numbers of 'quality experts' who acted as missionaries of the quality assurance systems of their own countries, aiming to superimpose their own recognized systems on this context.[425]

[424] Pierce 1995: 2 in Tam, M. (1999: 216) Quality assurance policies in higher education in Hong Kong: In *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management; Vol.21 (2) pp.215-222*

[425] Van der Westhuizen, L. and Fourie, M. (2002:28) "Quality assurance in International, African and Southern African contexts". In Griesel, H. (ed) *Quality Assurance in a Transforming University System: Lessons and Challenges*. Bloemfontein: CLF Printers, pp.1-35

It is evident that efforts are being made to steer the South African higher education system so as to align it with international trends, where accountability and transparency form the main pillars of institutional governance. Institutions need to be transparent in the way they enrol students, in the appointment of staff, in their expenditure of funds and in their quality assurance practices. The Wits scenario, where both external and internal dimensions of quality assurance are upheld, is generally considered to be a sound approach to enhancing institutional improvement as well as creating a positive image of the institution to the outside world. It is international trend, particularly in the developed world, to view internal and external quality assurance as being complementary rather than contradictory. There is a strong belief that external evaluation of institutions ultimately leads to improved capability for self-evaluation and self-improvement. Woodhouse captures this assumption when he asserts:

> … most agencies require the HEI [higher education institution] to provide some information about itself, perhaps with some evaluation comment. At the other end of the spectrum, the best EQA [external quality assurance] agencies stress self- review as the basis for the external review. Here the HEI is expected to carry out a full self-review, indicating the state of quality in the HEI and, in some cases, also how the HEI informs itself about the state of quality. The agency then validates the results of this review.[426]

Woodhouse's description depicts quite accurately the Wits quality assurance arrangements, where self-audit reports form the basis for external audits by the HEQC. The major role of the HEQC, in this case, is to audit and simply endorse the quality assurance policies and procedures developed by the institution, and not to audit quality itself. As Pretorius notes, such auditing does not seek to measure the actual outcomes of the quality assurance arrangements of the institution, but to validate the effectiveness of these arrangements.[427] Thus HEQC reviews are a form of meta-evaluation, whose primary purpose is to assist the institution to develop effective internal evaluation processes that provide information to the institution for purposes of self-improvement as well as for achieving transparency.

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[426] Woodhouse, D. (2000:21) External Quality Assurance: National and International aspects. In *South African Journal of Higher Education,* Vol.14 (2), pp 20-27

[427] Pretorius, R. (2003:131) Quality enhancement in higher education in South Africa: why a paradigm shift is necessary: In *South African Journal for Higher Education (SAJHE), Vol. 17(3) pp.129-136*

It is my view that, while it is important to be cognisant of these two dimensions of assuring institutional quality delivery, what is critical is for the institution to strike a balance between internal and external quality assurance, since the two may be complementary in bringing about institutional improvement. This view is echoed by some scholars would argue that:

> National quality assessment and assurance systems should balance the internal and external needs of the higher education, both to create an improvement-oriented climate within universities and colleges, as well as to gain legitimacy from actors outside higher education.[428]

Thus, at Wits, there is no one motivating factor behind the current quality assurance policy and practices. One identifies the interplay of the need for accountability, transparency and epistemic motives in the shaping of the quality assurance arrangements. Policy is formulated because it is an essential requirement at national level and because quality assurance is part of the state steering mechanisms. At the same time institutions also need to keep abreast with international practice where university institutions operate on the basis of transparency, be it in appointment of staff, financial management, assessment systems or quality assurance. Over and above aligning with international practice, the ability of an institution to convince the public that it offers high-quality services gives it premium in terms of competitiveness. Transparency and accountability are broad discourses that form the hallmark of institutional performance globally. The perceived benefits of such an explicit quality assurance policy to the institution are that it ultimately encourages the university to reflect on its long-standing tradition of quality assurance practices while at the same time it facilitates the creation of an environment where quality assurance efforts by different faculties and schools in the university become better co-ordinated.

The situation at the University of Zimbabwe is in some way similar to that at Wits. Quality assurance is fast shifting from being the preserve of the university to being a national issue of central concern by the state. This is partly the reason why the university is now taking steps to put in place a coherent and explicit institutional quality

[428] Van der Westhuizen and Fourie (2002:18) "Quality assurance in International, African and Southern African contexts". In Griesel, H. (ed) *Quality Assurance in a Transforming University System: Lessons and Challenges.* Bloemfontein: CLF Printers, 1-35

assurance policy. What distinguishes UZ from Wits is the approach that is being used to develop an institutional quality assurance system – commissioning an eminent academic to do the groundwork that will ultimately inform policy. This practice is well in line with common tradition in educational reform in Zimbabwe, where commissions are usually appointed to undertake consultative processes that eventually feed into reform policy. At the time of this study, a retired professor and prominent educationist had been tasked with the responsibility of doing research in the university with a view to designing a framework for a quality assurance policy for the university. There is an apparent movement by the institution from reliance on quality assurance guidelines dotted throughout several senate and other university documents to a situation where faculty and administration alike are guided by a coherent quality assurance policy that can be easily interpreted for implementation purposes while at the same time it can be subjected to regular reviews by outside stakeholders. According to the 2003-2007 strategic plan, this policy should be in place before the end of the current planning period.

At the same time, at national level, the Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education (ZCHE), a statutory body that is meant to oversee quality assurance issues in all universities in the country, was in the process of being created during the period of this study. The exact mandate of the ZCHE was explained by an official in the Ministry of Higher Education:

> It will be overseeing higher education. What happens with respect to other matters is that it will play an advising role. But when it comes to quality assurance, yes, it assumes executive powers. It means it will then be able to accredit both institutions and their programmes, what are the things in place to guarantee that the output of those programmes is generally of minimum standards.[429]

Thus a national quality assurance policy resembling that of the South African higher education system is in the pipeline in Zimbabwe. This process is mainly being driven by the government through the relevant Ministry and signifies part of tightened state-control mechanisms of the expanding higher education system in the country. This development could have been triggered by the need for the state to address public

[429] Interview with a Ministry of Education official, Zimbabwe, 13 October 2005

concerns regarding the quality of education offered by the increasing number of both state and private universities in the country. It is interesting to note that even in this context, there is a trend where quality assurance arrangements are becoming more and more undergirded by accountability discourses. To be accountable to the public, the state has to regulate quality assurance in universities. Once the policy comes into effect, all universities will be subjected to periodic quality reviews by the national agency and it will be mandatory for them to have explicit institutional policies and arrangements for quality assurance. The current internal reporting system in universities is likely to be accompanied by a much more demanding external accountability system, and quality assurance will cease to be the concern of just the academic community, but of other significant external stakeholders as well, particularly the state. This signifies a move towards making quality assurance more transparent, more objective and used not only for institutional improvement but also for control of the higher education system by the state. The new quality assurance thrust of the university is captured in the institutional vision which reads: "Our vision is to be (*and be recognized by others as*) a leading university working for the purpose of prosperity, peace and dignity in Zimbabwe and beyond". [430] Thus, just like the Wits quality assurance policy, the University of Zimbabwe also places emphasis on transparency – enabling others to recognise what the institution is doing.

While the situations at UZ and Wits bear close resemblance in terms of the accountability nature of their quality assurance arrangements, the situation is slightly different at the University of Botswana. Here, there is no national policy framework within which university policy is cast. Rather, the university itself has the responsibility of developing and monitoring quality assurance policy for all the other tertiary institutions in the country. The university has hardly any external accountability requirements in so far as its quality assurance policy and meeting of quality assurance policy objectives are concerned. State steering of university education system is not as significant as in the other two cases, and this is mainly because currently it is the only university in the country.[431] The phenomenon of

[430] University of Zimbabwe Five –Year Strategic Plan: 2003-2007, p.8. Emphasis added.

[431] This position may change in future due to the creation of the Tertiary Education Council (TEC) by the government. Currently, the TEC's main responsibility is to register tertiary institutions and ultimately to accredit programmes offered by those institutions. There is a very high likelihood that

Neave's "evaluative state"[432] is absent at the University of Botswana, unlike in South Africa where it is present through buffer mechanisms like the Council on Higher Education (CHE). Thus, to use Barnett's terminology, "ownership and control" of the quality assurance policy and process at the University of Botswana is wholly internal.[433] Drawing from the literature, one can argue that the proactive approach to quality assurance adopted by the institution is probably the best way of avoiding intrusive forms of managerialism from external stakeholders, especially the state. As some scholars note, "In our opinion, postsecondary institutions would benefit more, and perhaps suffer less, if they took the initiative to devise and implement a valid set of performance indicators rather than wait for someone else to impose a less appropriate set of measures."[434]

The main motivation behind the development of the quality assurance policy at the University of Botswana was the change from the old system to a semester arrangement in 2002, which needed the institution to continue upholding excellence through self-evaluation. This position was confirmed by the deputy director of the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) during an interview:

> When we semesterised in 2002 we realised that we needed to have some internal quality assurance system. Before that we just had external examination. That's why we came up with the policy.[435]

Clearly, the University of Botswana quality assurance policy is a self-initiated and self-driven policy. The policy was developed out of a perceived need by the institution as a way of ensuring regional and international competitiveness through a culture of good practice in academia. As the institution witnessed significant changes in many spheres of its operations – like semesterisation in 2002, increasing student

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in future external reporting by the university to this council may be a requirement, especially if a second university that is in the pipeline takes off.

[432] Neave, G. (1998) The Evaluative State Reconsidered. In *European Journal of Education, Vol. 33 (3) pp.265-283*

[433] Barnett, R. (1994) Power, Enlightenment and Quality Evaluation. In *European Journal of Education, Vol.29 (2) pp.165-179*

[434] Krahn, H. and Silzer, J. (1995: 13) A Study of Exit Survey: The Graduand Survey at the University of Alberta. In *College and University, Vol. 71:* pp.12-23.

[435] Interview with CAD deputy director, University of Botswana, 25 July 2005.

enrolments, expansion of degree programmes offered, and diminishing government subsidy – the need to adopt systematic and well co-ordinated quality assurance measures that are regulated by explicit policy became necessary. However, this does not necessarily mean that the policy is in any way more effective than at Wits, as many other factors affect policy implementation. All it shows is how different the quality assurance systems are in the two contexts, particularly in terms of reporting requirements to external stakeholders.

So important was this perceived need that a separate structure was established within the university – the Centre for Academic Development – whose responsibility was to develop an institutional quality assurance policy, to devise mechanisms of implementation within the entire university and to make regular policy implementation reviews across all the faculties. Thus CAD, in consultation with faculties and departments, developed the Academic Quality Management Policy (AQMP), policy number UB-CAD/001. Although both internal and external quality assurance mechanisms are upheld, the former is given far more credence than the latter, a significant departure from previous quality assurance arrangements. Policy emphasis is on the continuous nature of internal quality assurance mechanisms that are subject to regular internal audits in order to ensure effective policy implementation. The deputy director for CAD (academic programme review) emphasised that "the unique thing about our policy is that we are taking a developmental approach to quality assurance". This meant that the university was taking the initiative to capacity build staff in academic units on quality assurance issues, starting from where they were and building upon existing strengths until the desired quality benchmarks are achieved.

Thus, across the three case institutions, quality assurance policy is a multi-purpose instrument. On the one hand, it is used as a mechanism to control university activities, keep clients informed, and shape the higher education system by the state, among other purposes. On the other hand, it is primarily used as a way of achieving excellence that keeps the institution fairly competitive in the higher education market. At the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Zimbabwe the new quality assurance systems are driven by both the state's need for control and the excellence rationales, while at the University of Botswana the quest for institutional

improvement tends to be the overriding purpose. At Wits, for instance, the traditional practices of external examination procedures which involve peer reviews, internal departmental and school reviews, and regular programme reviews are still practiced alongside the new external dimensions of institutional audits and programme accreditation by the HEQC. In all cases, however, it needs to be pointed out that quality assurance policies serve not one but several purposes. Accountability policies do carry the improvement goal as well, as in the process of meeting the accountability requirements, and institutions reflect upon their long-standing practices and try to improve themselves. In all three cases, the quality assurance policies do have both the external as well as internal dimensions. There is emphasis on self-review that is enhanced by periodic peer reviews. There are also regular reviews by a national quality assurance agency at Wits, and this will probably begin at the University of Zimbabwe very shortly.

7.4 Institutional approaches to quality assurance policy development

Three models of policy development are identifiable in the literature, and different contexts use different models, depending on their culture, underlying values and political orientation. In some instances, policy is viewed as a prerogative of government and its bureaucracy. In such cases, policy development is based on the educated guesses of government on what the needs and interests of the public are, and policy-planning processes are centralised. In such centralised systems, policy is announced to stakeholders and handed down for implementation, and not necessarily for contestation and debate. The second approach is where policy is developed through a consultative process with all stakeholders. This model is premised on democratic principles, and its fundamental tenet is that stakeholders should participate in policy development and that structures and mechanisms should be put into place to give effect to this.[436] Apart from requiring substantial resources to facilitate the consultative process, the approach to policy development is time-consuming and calls for a great deal of tolerance, acknowledgement of different interests, and recognition of mutual interdependence and responsibilities for the attainment of a common

[436] Olivier, N. (2001:5)

goal.[437] The third approach to policy making is the use of experts, usually commissioned by the government under specific terms of reference. Such experts can be external or local, and they usually hold few meetings around the country with different stakeholders (like experienced educationists, managers of higher education institutions, professional bodies, and other relevant civic organisations), study existing relevant documents, cross-relate local conditions to similar outside contexts, and compile policy recommendation reports. They sit with relevant government authorities and present their recommendations, which may be adopted in full or with some minor alterations. The three models of policy development briefly outlined above normally typify how quality assurance policy is generated at national level.

A common phenomenon in the case institutions was an attempt to use the consultative approach to quality assurance policy development. At all three institutions, committees were formed at various levels in order to facilitate participation by academic staff in the policy process. At Wits, for instance, there are quality assurance committees at school, faculty and institutional level. These committees consulted their constituencies, deliberated on specific quality assurance issues relating to their activities, and fed into the institutional policy process. A series of workshops was also run in faculties in order to discuss the translation of the national HEQC policy framework into a coherent institutional policy that aligned with the mission and vision of the university, and how it would be implemented. The workshops were also meant to create a common understanding of the new quality assurance requirements among the different players in the university. Communication on policy requirements, expectations and recommendations from the HEQC were relayed from the Academic Planning and Development Office (APDO) to academics through the same committee structures. Thus, the committee structures provided a forum for deliberating on the Wits quality assurance policy during its formation, hence providing staff with an opportunity to make their input and to buy into the new quality assurance arrangements of the institution.

While quality assurance policy development was the responsibility of the Academic Planning and Development Committee (APDC), interviews with quality assurance

[437] Ibid

committee representatives at faculty and department levels confirmed that academic units and faculties fed into the policy development activities of the APDC. Asked if their unit participated in the quality assurance policy development process, one faculty representative had this to say during an interview:

> Yes, we did because the Academic Planning and Development Committee rely on the input from the various faculties, through their committees. On many occasions I participated in the Academic Planning Office meetings and discussions on quality assurance policy. Sometimes there are policies that come from outside the university, like from the HEQC. We look at them and see how we can implement them or modify them or respond to say we don't think they are suitable for us.[438]

On whether ordinary academic members of staff within academic units, who are not necessarily representatives on the APDC, participate in policy development, an academic member of staff had this to say:

> They do. For example, if there is a decision to be made, within every school there is a committee for quality assurance. Each school is represented in the Teaching and Learning Committee.[439]

Respondents from all faculties confirmed that the quality assurance policy was developed through a consultative process. This democratic process mirrors the policy model that was used at national level in developing higher education policy from the groundwork of the National Council on Higher Education (NCHE) to the passing of the Higher Education Act. Although at every stage the policy process was driven by influential policy elites who ensured that the policies passed were in line with the vision and goals of the ruling party,[440] various policy actors were involved in the process. These stakeholders included: the NCHE; the executive arm of government, in the form of the Department of Education led by the Minister of Education; the legislators, in the form of the parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Education; the public, in the form of civil society organisations; higher education institutions; staff

438 Interview response from the quality assurance representative in the Faculty of Engineering, Wits University, 7 April 2005.

[439] Interview response from an academic member of staff, Wits University, 12 April 2005.

[440] Sehoole, M.T. (2002:217) The process of policy development in higher education in post apartheid South Africa: The case of the Higher Education Act. An upublished PhD thesis submitted to the School of Education, University of the Witwatersrand

and student organisations.[441] Thus policy development was undergirded by values of democracy, transparency and co-operation. Such processes were meant to ensure the successful implementation of the policy. At Wits, it was quite evident that processes through which the quality assurance policy was developed were sensitive to the very same values that guided policy processes at national level. As underscored above, apart from various committee meetings held at School level to discuss the policy and invite suggestions from staff, several meetings were held between the APDC and faculties. It is noteworthy, however, that APDC meetings mainly involved representatives from faculties who were believed to be feeding inputs from their constituencies into the policy process. This representation system was the basis for the consultative component of the policy process.

Investment in consultative policy development was not only meant to familiarise staff with the new policy, it was also meant to improve buy-in from university constituencies that would be responsible for its ultimate implementation.

At the University of Zimbabwe, the quality assurance policy is manifested in several separate documents like Senate regulations and ordinances, rules and procedures that are laid down for the purpose of providing guidance and regulating various academic activities of the university. In addition to these guiding regulations, the university of late has started the practice of developing strategic plans that also provide the institution with a roadmap to follow over a five-year period. Collectively, all these documents constitute the unwritten quality assurance policy of the university which, interestingly, seems to be well shared by all faculties and departments. Quality assurance policy is embedded in the University Five Year Development Plan, 2003-2007, which clearly spells out the quality assurance thrust of the university. In developing the plan and its quality assurance component, management believed that a university-wide consultative process was used. Committees at department level were asked to draw up their departmental strategic plans that included quality assurance arrangements. These were tabled at faculty committee level where suggestions were made and faculty plans were drawn up. The faculty plans then fed into the university

[441] Sehoole, M.T. (2002:217) The process of policy development in higher education in post apartheid South Africa: The case of the Higher Education Act. An unpublished PhD thesis submitted to the School of Education, University of the Witwatersrand.

strategic plan, through the machinery of the Strategic Plan Sub-Committee (SPSC). The university strategic plan was developed through an iterative process between the SPSC and the faculty and department committees, as well as through the SPSC and external stakeholders. The plan document itself attests to this claim:

> The strategic planning process was launched in the second half of 2001 with the appointment of a 2003-2007 Strategic Plan Sub-Committee (SPSC) with the mandate to consult with, and solicit inputs from all segments of the University community and other stakeholders.
>
> With regards to the consultation process, each member of the SPSC was assigned to several units in the University to collect necessary inputs from U.Z. members. The inputs collected were discussed in several meetings of the SPSC, and also at Chairpersons' and Deans' workshops. Thereafter, a first draft strategic plan was prepared, as a working document for further discussion within the University, and also with external stakeholders. The comments and contributions received from both the University community and external stakeholders were later considered by the SPSC and relevant aspects incorporated into the drafts to produce the final version of the 2003-2007 strategic plan.[442]

The sentiments raised in the strategic plan regarding consultation in the development of the plan document were echoed by one of the executive deans who was directly involved in the development of the Five Year Strategic Plan. Asked whether academic staff participated in the policy process, the dean had the following to say:

> Staff participation, I think, is a personal question. This is the second strategic plan; the last one ended in 2002. I was one of the committee members who developed this, we asked them to write whatever they think and most of them said there was lack of consultation. Then we had a stakeholder meeting with chairpersons of departments. That's when they were involved; each department came up with a list of what they wanted included, even when it came to definitions, we had to say, yes, can you define what you understand by this. So they were involved and it was launched in the university and everybody was invited including the minister.[443]

There was some significant level of consultation with the university academic community and outside stakeholders that is suggested in the interview response with the dean and in the plan document. Other faculty deans interviewed confirmed that there was wide consultation of staff and other stakeholders in the development of the

[442] University of Zimbabwe Strategic Plan 2003-2007 document, p.4.

[443] Interview with a Faculty dean, University of Zimbabwe, 15 October 2005

policy document. The outside stakeholders referred to include, among others, the Ministry of Higher Education, the University Council, the corporate world and consultants on strategic planning. Thus, in terms of buy-in, management feels there is adequate ownership of the policy by staff to facilitate implementation. Again, as at Wits, staff involvement in the policy process was through committee representation.

At the University of Botswana, similar structures to those identified at Wits were developed at various levels within the institution in order to enhance the consultative process. The Deputy Vice-chancellor (Academic) was the overseer of quality assurance in the university. Under this office, the Centre for Academic Development was established and is headed by a director. There are five deputy directors under the director, and each is responsible for upholding quality in a particular area. Chapter 8 gives more detail on these quality assurance areas. At faculty and department levels, quality assurance committee structures were established in order to create an opportunity for all academic staff to make contributions during the policy process. The faculty committee has a faculty quality assurance co-ordinator who sits in meetings with CAD to deliberate on quality assurance issues. The same co-ordinator also convened meetings at faculty level to get members to make their inputs on the evolving policy, and to discuss the best ways of implementing the new quality assurance system in the faculty. Similarly, at department level, there are department quality assurance co-ordinators who acted as link persons between CAD, faculty committees and staff in departments. Through these structures, the CAD argues, there was wide consultation in the quality assurance policy process. According to the CAD, a series of workshops were run with academic staff in departments, through the above-mentioned committees, in order to get them to understand the new quality assurance policy the university was introducing, and to give them an opportunity to make their input. Responding to a question on whether the university had a quality assurance policy and how it was developed, one of the CAD deputy directors had this to say:

> Yes, there is a quality assurance policy in the university; it was approved by senate in 2003… I think the unique thing about our policy is that we are taking a developmental approach to quality assurance. Part of our policy is that the

> responsibility for quality assurance lies with the departments. That's why we involved all staff in the departments when we developed the policy.[444]

The same deputy director was convinced that because of the consultative processes that were used in developing the policy, staff in academic units feel they own the policy and they implement it as their own product. The following interview response shows the confidence she had in the way the policy was being implemented:

> The department quality assurance system that we use shows the priority that we place on quality assurance in the university. I feel good about the approach that we used; the devolution of responsibilities to departments. … When I do audits, I really do feel they are not making up staff, they are really concerned with self-improvement. So that kind of collegial approach is very good, people feel it's their thing and they don't have to please any outsider.[445]

Interviews with faculty deans and some of the heads of department also confirmed that the institutional quality assurance policy was developed through a consultative approach. One head of department in the Faculty of Science, for instance, had this to say regarding staff participation in the policy process:

> We have what you call the department quality assurance committee. This committee actually liaises with CAD, CAD organises workshops on quality assurance and members of the committee attend the workshops, so that is the way we make inputs or we contribute to policy on quality assurance.[446]

The head of one of the departments in the Faculty of Humanities had the following to say in response to whether staff in her department was involved in the policy process:

> Yes, as a department I would say we do [get involved] in the sense that whatever is proposed would come to the department for us to comment and then go to the various committees within the faculty and so on. I think that would be our contribution in shaping the policy.[447]

It is evident in the foregoing paragraphs that common structures were put in place in all three institutions in order to facilitate a consultative process in the development of

[444] Interview with the deputy director of CAD, University of Botswana, 25 July 2005

[445] Interview with CAD deputy director, University of Botswana, 25 July 2005

[446] Interview with head of department in the Faculty of Science, University of Botswana, 28 July 2005.

[447] Interview with head of department in the Faculty of Humanities, University of Botswana, 26 July 2005.

institutional quality assurance policies. Apart from committees at departmental and faculty levels meant to provide academics with a forum for participation in the policy process, an overarching committee was set up at institutional level at each of the universities. This committee co-ordinated the policy process within the institution, engaged with relevant external stakeholders and, in each case, was responsible for the ultimate production of the policy document. The same committee was also tasked with the responsibility of seeing to the implementation of the policy in the university.

Quality assurance processes at the three case universities were premised on democratic and consultative values that were meant to provide as wide a spectrum of university stakeholder community as possible. Another common element cutting across the three institutions was the use of external experts in the policy process. In all three universities, there was consultation by external (international) experts, a process that was meant to enrich the outcome of the processes. All three universities aspire to be leading institutions in the Southern African region as well as on the continent. The input of external experts with experience in quality assurance was regarded as a key element in the development of policies and systems that could place these embryonic institutions at a comparative position internationally. Key experts from countries like Australia, the United Kingdom and India were consulted in the development of the quality assurance policies, in some instance at the expense of local academic staff. The result was the development of policies that did not interface with the local contexts and priorities of the implementers. This was one of the constraints in the implementation of the process.

It is important to point out here that while the policy development structures and processes were similar from institution to institution, there were substantial differences in terms of the level of engagement by academic staff. Staff that had experience and a reasonable level of expertise in quality assurance issues had more meaningful engagement with policy issues at department and faculty levels. Their input into the final policy was much more significant than that of staff members who lacked such experience. Thus the effectiveness of the consultative approach in the policy process rests squarely with the quality of staff that is involved. In this regard, this study established that at UZ much of the consultation with academic staff was confined to academics who had a fair amount of experience and expertise in the field,

and in the main these were faculty deans. The contribution of junior academic staff with no experience in working in university environments was clearly minimal. On the contrary, at Wits committees at School and at faculty levels were noted to have been very influential in terms of shaping institutional quality assurance policy.

A significant observation in all three universities is the ironic contradiction in perceptions of the nature of the quality assurance policies between academics and management. Despite the consultative structures and processes outlined above, the general feeling among academic staff was that the new quality assurance system in their universities was not in keeping with their expectations, and was external rather than internal. This dichotomous position between academic staff and management was common at all three institutions, and because of this the former did not feel they owned the policies. At the University of the Witwatersrand, the new quality assurance arrangements were initiated and strongly steered by the HEQC as a national strategy for enhancing institutional improvement and steering the national higher education system as a whole. Because the policy initiative originated from outside the institution, and the policy was to be developed within the specific frameworks laid down by the HEQC, staff felt that they did not own the policy. Another contributory factor to this type of thinking was the external reporting that is associated with the quality assurance system. As pointed out in the previous chapter, it was very clear during this study that academic staff viewed the policy as external rather than internal. Thus, just like in the development of the Higher Education Act, the quality assurance policy process was replete with contestations among the different stakeholders. I will revisit these policy tensions later on in this chapter, after highlighting the policy approaches used in the other two case institutions.

At the University of Zimbabwe most of the staff interviewed was of the opinion that although a consultative model had been used in the policy process, they were not consulted enough in developing the university's strategic plan; it was a document that was merely handed to them from the top. One of the interviewed heads of departments at the university expressed the following views regarding the department's participation in the development of the strategic plan document:

> We do not [participate in policy development] but what happens is that university administration comes up with a university plan, they bring it down to the deans, the deans bring it down to the departments and then they say, using this strategic plan document of the university, can you now come up with your own strategic plan for the department. So it's not like the grand plan is a culmination of small plans from departments, but that's the one that guides small plans. So it's more of a top-down approach.[448]

Academic staff felt that a top-down approach is generally used in policy development. It would appear from the evidence that policy is generally developed by management, and then passed on to committees in faculties and departments for mere endorsement. Thus, the argument by academic staff suggests that the approach used was more bureaucratic than consultative. Staff was of the opinion that policy has to develop organically rather than from the top.

At the University of Botswana, the following were some of the responses given by lecturers on the extent to which they were consulted in the policy process:

> Well, we were sent the document, we had a department meeting but in the end we were not very happy with what we saw.[449]

> This policy was developed by CAD and was circulated to all faculties.[450]

> Well, that policy came from the top. For me, I know even the CAD people tried to invite us; we have had time conflict. It's a policy that emanated from people who looked at Australian universities, UK universities; definitely we can learn from those. I mean quality is quality wherever you learn it from. In the end we have to have our own concept of quality.[451]

Several other members of staff in departments across the university gave similarly contrasting views to what management said regarding staff consultation. Like in the other two cases, interviews with staff at UB revealed that the process of consultation was replete with tensions. The dominant view among staff in academic units was that the new policy ultimately emanated from top management, a view that sharply contradicts the perceptions of management itself. While it is evident that the CAD

[448] Interview with a Head of Department in the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Zimbabwe, 14 October 2005

[449] Interview with an academic member of staff in the Department of Educational Foundations, University of Botswana, 26 July, 2005.

[450] Interview with a member of staff in the Faculty of Commerce, University of Botswana, 27 July 2005

[451] Interview with a Head of Department, Faculty of Education, University of Botswana, 26 July, 2005

held workshops with staff and availed policy documents to academic units through the committee structures, what seems to have put off the majority of academic staff was the fact that an already-conceptualised policy was handed to them from the top. As a result they viewed the policy as a top-down initiative rather than an organically developed initiative. To them, consultation was more symbolic than real.

Thus, there were contestations in the policy processes at all three universities used in this study. The process of consultation was mixed with a top-down approach and this created tensions between management and academic staff. This process is typical of policy making, which is always an untidy process where the interests of the different players play themselves out, with some emerging as losers while others become winners. Although they were consultative, quality assurance policy processes at all three institutions were undergirded by power struggles between and among different stakeholders. The differences in opinion between staff and management show that at the centre of policy making are struggles for power. It was evident that department plans and quality assurance activities are informed by institutional macro-plans, and as discussed in the chapter on regionalisation, such macro-plans are often more informed by market discourses and international trends and experts than by the epistemic priorities of the institutions. In any case, top-down approaches to innovations do not seem to work well in universities where staff cherish academic freedom. In terms of quality assurance policy development, the environment at the three universities did not seem to give staff sufficient leverage to be creative and innovative in their practice, and to assume full ownership of the emerging quality assurance arrangements. Staff members feel they are pressed to comply with particular forms of quality assuring their work and with meeting deadlines for submitting documents or evidence of what they do. Lecturers expressed concern about the amount of time they take in perfecting their records and pushing paperwork and other administrative formalities in order to objectify their practice, but all at the expense of improving their research and teaching activities. In an interview conversation with one of the staff members at Wits, the following concern was raised:

> Every little thing has to be documented. I tell you the amount of paperwork I do is unbelievable.[452]

[452] Interview response from an academic member of staff, Wits University, 14 May 2005

The literature shows that academic staff regards whatever comes down from the top as managerialism,[453] a practice that is commonly associated with the corporate world. Managerialism translates into the dominance in power and authority of managers over academics, and it is a top-down style of management that privileges economic rationalism above all other concerns, including academic leadership.[454] Often academic staff take such top-down innovations with resentment because they give more priority to management convenience than to the epistemic concerns of staff. Adoption of such top-down initiatives by academics is done as mere compliance rather than as a serious aspect that adds real value to the mission of the organisation and to the day-to-day practices of the individuals. Due to the creeping in of compliance culture, policy implementation for real self-improvement was very remote in all three institutions, and power tensions between management and academic staff was always felt.

It was evident in this study that quality assurance has been given a new thrust in the three studied universities, with explicit quality assurance policies having been developed fairly recently. It is appropriate in this sense to view the new quality initiatives as innovations within the institutions, requiring the adoption of appropriate change strategies for the policies to succeed. According to Rogers, innovation diffusion theory provides a general explanation for the manner in which new entities and ideas diffuse through social systems over time.[455] Innovation diffusion theory is essentially a bottom-up approach to bringing about desired change in an organisation and is premised on the principle that maximum buy-in of innovations from implementers at the grassroots enhances best chances for successful implementation of innovations. Although Rogers reviewed studies concerning the diffusion of

[453] Vidovich, L. and Slee, R. (2001) Bringing universities to account? Exploring some global and local policy options: *Journal of Education Policy, Vol.16 (5) pp.431- 453*

Griessel, H. (2002) Quality Assurance in a Transforming University System; Lessons and Challenges, CLF Printers, Bloemfontein

[454] Johnson, B. J. (2005:5) Towards Post-Managerialism in Higher Education: The Case of Management Change at the University of the Witwatersrand; 1999 -2004. An unpublished Doctoral Thesis submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand

[455] Rogers 1995 cited in Uys, P. M. (2003:3) Critical success factors in the infusion of instructional technologies for open learning in development settings: The case of the University of Botswana: In *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning* (*http://www.irrodl.org/content/v4.2/uys.html* (Retrieved on 8 June 2006)

technological innovations in different institutional contexts, his model for the adoption of innovations describes the key roles and desired behaviours that typically occur during the adoption of new innovations and it has meaningful relevance to quite a broad range of innovations, quality assurance included. One key tenet of his model is that organic approaches give implementers at the grassroots a sense of importance in an organisation and encourages them to integrate any new innovations with their day-to-day practices. Adoption of the model reduces the inherent power tensions in the policy processes, and engenders a sense of ownership among practitioners. Thus, apart from assuming full ownership of the innovation, implementers develop a positive perception of the innovation in terms of the value it adds to their practice.

It is important to note that where Rogers' model is employed, particularly in matters regarding quality assurance, it needs to be augmented with clear vision from management, a top-down component that includes the support of both senior and middle management in order to accomplish the effective diffusion of the innovation within a given higher educational setting.[456] This is particularly important because successful quality assurance policy implementation in a higher education institution can only be possible through the concerted effort of different internal stakeholders like management, academic staff and students. Thus a combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches as argued out in Uys' Leadership, Academic and Student Ownership and Readiness (LASOR) model[457] seems to be necessary in the development of the quality assurance policies of the studied institutions. Interviews with academic staff showed that the approach was lacking in all three institutions.

Several reasons can be cited for the alleged poor participation in policy development by academic staff. One of the commonly cited reasons is that although green papers were sent to academic units for input by staff, there seemed to be a general lack of confidence by staff in the political will of management to implement suggestions from

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[456] Uys, P. M. (2003:3) Critical success factors in the infusion of instructional technologies for open learning in development settings: The case of the University of Botswana: In *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning* http://www.irrodl.org/content/v4.2/uys.html *(Retrieved on 8June 2006)*

[457] Uys, P. M. (2001) Leadership, Academic and Student Ownership and Readiness (LASOR) Model for Technological Transformation in Tertiary Education. http://www.globe-online.com/philip.Uys/LASOmodel.htm *(Retrieved on 8 June 2006)*

below. At the University of Botswana, quite a number of the interviewed heads of departments expressed this lack of confidence by staff in management. One of them expressed the following concern:

> Well, we were sent the document, we had a department meeting but in the end we were not very happy with what we saw.[458]

The respondent suggested that staff views were not adequately incorporated into the final policy document, thus making staff contributions in the shaping of policy very insignificant. He maintained that what staff suggested in terms of areas to be prioritised in order to address their academic concerns was not taken into account when the final document was compiled. Instead, the respondent suggested that the policy was mainly informed from Australia and the UK in terms of university values, standards, practices and even the conception of quality that informed the policy. To him the policy remains alien and there is a need to recast both the policy and the conception of quality in more local terms. The respondent was sceptical about the appropriateness of the policy to the local context, a position that is quite contrary to that of the CAD directorate.

Apathy by staff in matters of policy development was similarly expressed in departments at the University of Zimbabwe. Responding to a question on the department's role in the policy process, one head of department responded thus:

> We see it [the University Strategic Plan] being launched. Of course it comes through the faculty board but the problem is that it's so unrealistic, people don't give credence to it because they know there are no resources and sometimes even the will to implement it. So you find people are reluctant to participate. As of now I am trying to write a strategic plan for the department based on the university plan. But the level at which people are participating is almost zero. We are trying to do a participatory strategic plan but you can see the resistance because people don't believe in the plans.[459]

Thus, failure by management to develop institutional policies from the grassroots and to commit the requisite resources towards the effective implementation of quality

[458] Interview with academic member of staff in the Department of Educational Foundations, University of Botswana, 26 July, 2005

[459] Interview with a Head of Department in the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Zimbabwe, 26 October, 2005

assurance policies are some of the reasons why staff members become apathetic about playing a meaningful role in policy development. The consultative nature of quality assurance policy development is therefore a problematic issue in the three universities. The shear realisation that such sweet-sounding policies may be nothing more than symbolic discourages staff from taking the policy process seriously. It sounds like tradition in most institutions that not all policies and plans developed are really meant for implementation. There is a culture of investing in developing impressive business-like institutional plans and policies, sometimes through outsourcing expertise from management companies, but at the expense of addressing key contextual factors that promote effective implementation of those policies.

7.5 Power tensions in the policy process

Universities within the Southern African region, just like others the world over, struggle with repositioning themselves in the fast-changing global and local environment. As was highlighted in Chapter 5, the challenges posed by regionalisation and internationalisation for higher education systems require universities to take full account of the multiple transformations called for by these forces. This is particularly true of universities in developing Africa, which have to address the myriad of problems arising mainly from their colonial legacies – problems of inadequate access, equity, relevance and quality – while at the same time they struggle to close the gap between them and their counterparts in the developed world.

Given this challenging situation, it is apparent that developing universities have tried to come up with many reform policies in an attempt to deal with the numerous demands at hand. It is also true that in developing the reform policies and strategies, institutions have listened to the voices of many of their stakeholders and these include the state, politicians, civil society, business groups, donors and external partners. In the process of policy development, some stakeholders exercise more power than others, and hence their ideas and interests dominate the outcome of the process. This is what makes policy making quite a messy process, often characterised by a great deal of tension and dissatisfaction between and among those who participate in the process. In the case study universities, The different stakeholders pursued different self-interests in higher education, and these differences played themselves out in the

shaping of quality assurance policies. The process of policy making was a struggle for power, and the product was policy that is highly contested, lacking consensus and representing the interests of those exercising more power over others. Hence some interview responses – like this one: "Well, it's more like a top-down approach because … things are rushed, you see. It's like dreams come today and they have to be implemented tomorrow."[460] – show that certain sectors of the university used their position power to push the policy through. The policy process was mediated by interest-driven, power-based interactions of actors, holding diverse views about problems and priorities, which compete as well as co-operate to influence decisions and outcomes through bargaining, negotiations and compromises.[461] At UB, for instance, the CAD ran workshops for staff in faculties, held several meetings with faculty representatives, and circulated green papers for staff to comment on the emerging quality assurance policy. At the end of the day, however, academic staff do not appear to be happy with the policy that eventually came out of these seemingly participative processes. Academic staff perceived the university quality assurance policy differently from management. The interplay of different interests and ideologies underpinned the complex nature and dynamics of policy formulation and implementation in the institutions.

In this study, tensions at the policy implementation level due to the processes that were followed in developing institutional quality assurance policies were identified in all three case universities. At the University of Botswana, academic departments regarded the institutional policy as managerial and not something that would add much value to their practice because they felt that their participation in the process had been very minimal. At the same institution, management was very enthusiastic about the policy because they felt that it had been developed internally, without any external push. It is clear in this case that the quality assurance policy was driven more by management and not by academic staff, and drew from external expertise more than from local actors, although it was grounded on epistemic concerns. There was also some notable variance between practice and the policy text.

[460] Interview response from an academic member of staff in the faculty of Science, University of Botswana, 28 July 2005

[461] Knapp and Malen (1997: 428).

At the University of the Witwatersrand, policy was developed within the institution, but with a very strong external drive. Thus, due to external pressure, the policy processes were not given adequate time for stakeholder participation, hence consultation was very limited. In this case, it is also evident that the institution had no alternative but to develop a quality assurance policy that was in line with prescribed national requirements. Here, there was less dissonance between practice and policy text, as institutional site evaluations by the external agency were based on the policy as stipulated in the documents.

In the third institution, the University of Zimbabwe, policy processes focused more on management convenience than on epistemic concerns. Academic improvement concerns were subsumed in managerial priorities and this created tensions at the policy implementation level. There was significant dissonance between policy text and the actual practice on the ground. These differences were not only due to different stakeholder interests; they were also due to lack of commitment of resources to support effective policy implementation. For instance, while the policy emphasised postgraduate training, envisaging that by the end of 2006 at least 25 per cent of the student population would consist of masters and doctoral students,[462] this study showed that in many faculties there was an acute shortage of academic staff by the end of 2005. As was revealed through interviews with deans and heads of departments, most programmes were being sustained by graduate teaching assistants (GTAs). The same strategic plan emphasised ICT competence on the part of students and staff, yet there were academic members of staff who operated with no dedicated computers in their offices, let alone Internet facilities.

It has emerged in this study that quality assurance policy development in the case institutions was undergirded by power struggles which manifested themselves in the way the policies were developed, the key players involved in the decision-making processes and the perceptions of the various stakeholders about the ultimate policies implemented in the institutions. Interestingly enough, such power struggles existed between stakeholders within the university itself as well as between university

[462] 2003 – 2007 University of Zimbabwe Strategic Plan, p.5

academics and external stakeholders. Staff perceptions of the quality assurance policies they implemented were highly influenced by their perceptions of who the dominant players were in the policy process.

7.6 Different actors, different perceptions of the same policy

An important argument running through the literature on quality assurance in higher education is the internal-external dichotomy, with many debates being in favour of internal systems.[463] These debates, however, do not problematise the internal complexities of such quality assurance policies and the differentiated nature of the collegiality. It was evident in this study that, by virtue of the complicated nature of the university collegiality, policies that are internal to university institutions are not necessarily internal to the academic collegiality and this collegiality is not a homogeneous but a highly heterogeneous entity. Drawing from the theoretical framework of this study on power dynamics in quality assurance policy, it is clear that policies that are developed within institutions can, in fact, be steered by outside stakeholders, especially the state. The latter can insist that the former develop policies that can be used more in the interest of the external stakeholders than inside players. At Wits, for instance, the institutional policy was developed within the institution but within the frameworks laid down by the HEQC, including the quality criteria to be used. The actual quality assurance practices that give expression to the policy are also subjected to audit processes by the same national agency. There is an external reporting requirement in the quality assurance system of the institution. There is, therefore, a sense in which it can be argued that the institution's quality assurance system is steered from outside. Such internally developed policies can still be perceived as bureaucratic and not necessarily self-improvement and self-policing by the academy. In such instances, the policies remain external to the academic community.

[463] See: Barnett, R. (1994) Power, Enlightenment and Quality Evaluation. In *European Journal of Education, Vol.29 (2) pp.165-179*

Luckett, K. (2005) A Critical Policy Analysis of the Proposed National Quality Assurance System for South African Higher Education. In Smout, M. (ed) *The Decade Ahead: Challenges for Quality Assurance in South African Higher Education*, SAUVCA, Pretoria

Lategan, L. (1999) State of the Art and Quality Assurance at South African Universities. In Strydom, A.H, Lategan, L. O. K, & Muller,A. (eds*) Quality Assurance in South African Higher Education: National and International Perspectives:* Bloemfontein, University of Orange Free State

In all three case institutions in this study, the quality assurance policies were found to be internal, at least according to university management. This perception of policy is aptly captured by one of the CAD deputy directors at the University of Botswana during an interview:

> The department quality assurance system that we use shows the priority that we place on quality assurance in the university. I feel good about the approach that we used, the devolution of responsibilities to departments. You look at quality assurance systems used in other countries like the UK and I think it could be coming up soon, even in South Africa as well, because of the bureaucracy, it all has to do with window dressing. When I do audits, I really do feel they are not making up stuff, they are really concerned with self-improvement.[464]

Thus, management was confident that the quality assurance policy was department-based and therefore enjoyed full ownership by academic staff in those departments. Power and control of the policy in this case are vested in academia and hence the policy is internal. This was the common view by management in the three universities. Voices from staff in departments and schools, however, suggested differently – "This policy was developed by CAD and was circulated to all faculties."[465] "Well, that policy came from the top."[466] "We see it being launched."[467] "I mean the university in the past used their own quality assurance system that included external examiners, but I think with this new quality assurance policy, it's really external."[468]

It is clear from the responses of staff at the various institutions that the institutional quality assurance policies originate within the universities but staff do not have control over them. Power is vested in stakeholders external to the academy. It is interesting, however, to note that

[464] Interview with CAD deputy director, University of Botswana, 25 July 2005

[465] Interview with a member of staff in the Faculty of Engineering, University of Botswana, 26 July 2005

[466] Interview response from academic member of staff at University of Botswana, 26 July 2005.

[467] Interview response from academic member of staff in the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Zimbabwe, 26 July, 2005.

[468] Interview response from academic member of staff in the School of Human and Community Development , Wits University, 29 September 2005

in all three institutions, academic staff believe that their institutional quality assurance policies originated within their universities. With the exception of the University of the Witwatersrand, where the HEQC has an interest in terms of the kind of policy the institution pursues, quality assurance policies are controlled by the universities. Table 7.1 shows the convergence of opinion among surveyed staff in the three universities regarding the perceived origins of the quality assurance policies in their institutions.

Table 7.1: Staff perceptions of the origins of institutional quality assurance policy (responses in % figures)

Source of Policy	University of the Witwatersrand	University of Zimbabwe	University of Botswana
Government	9	6	4
National agency	9	0	0
Professional organisations	9	6	0
Within the university	31	63	83
Within my specific faculty	31	63	0
Other	11	8	0

N.B. *Percentage figures do not necessarily add up to 100% because surveyed respondents had the option to choose more than one option.*

Despite staff views that the quality assurance policies in their institutions were not controlled by academics, the general perception was that the policies originated mainly within the universities and therefore were internal to institutions. At Wits and UZ, staff held the strong feeling that even their faculty deans played a central role in policy development. An important point to note is that staff perceives the quality assurance policies in their institutions as managerialistic and bureaucratic because they were primarily developed by management and passed on to academic units for implementation. Thus, power is a much more complicated phenomenon than portrayed in Barnett's work, which was discussed in Chapter 2.[469] Instead of assuming the polarised nature shown in Barnett's framework, the internal-external dimension of the power and control axis can sit internally within the institution where role

[469] Barnett (1994).

differentiation defines the different power bases for different internal stakeholders. It is clear from this study that one of the major aspects influencing the successful implementation of quality assurance policies in institutions is the way internal stakeholders identify with the policy because of the different forms of power they yield. Power is so multi-layered within the academic community that those with legitimate power, like management, relate differently to matters of policy from those with referent and epistemic power. It would appear from the findings of the study that while quality assurance policies are primarily internal to institutions, they are external to academic communities within those institutions. This is mainly because of the way power relations played themselves out in the policy process and partly because of the nature of control and policing of the same policies within the institutions. There are stringent reporting requirements, either to senior management within the institution or to external parties that have motives other than epistemic ones. Staff gets bogged down in compiling reports, in gathering evidence and in pushing paperwork at the expense of what they believe to be quality delivery that benefits students. Thus quality assurance practices are characterised by academic staff striving to meet external requirements rather than improving their practice. Such policies are therefore perceived by staff as external to the academic members of staff, non-collegial, and premised more on the accountability needs of management than the self-improvement values of the academy.

7.7 Policy implementation constraints

The main business of a university is to develop knowledge through research and to transmit that knowledge in such a way as to develop the intellectual capacities of learners. This function can only be possible where adequate resources are allocated to the critical functions of the university. Indeed, quality university performance is a direct function of the type and amount of resources availed to staff in order for it to perform its duties with minimum constraints. An important finding of this study was the mismatch between the sound quality assurance policies developed by case institutions, with very noble goals, and the actual quality assurance practices on the ground. It was apparent, particularly at the University of Botswana and the University of Zimbabwe, that effective implementation of the quality assurance policies is seriously constrained by lack of resources.

One of the major resource constraints identified at the University of Zimbabwe is staffing. While one of the quality thrusts of the university given in the second strategic plan is to recruit academic staff that is best qualified, experienced and committed,[470] it was quite saddening to note that just two years before the end of the plan period, many faculties and departments were still severely understaffed and were operating with under-qualified and inexperienced staff. At the time of the study, the staffing profile at the University of Zimbabwe was such that there were more than twice as many staff members with a master's qualification than with a doctoral qualification. Figure 7.1 shows the relative qualification patterns of surveyed staff at UZ as compared to the other two case institutions. In all three universities, the surveyed samples were randomly selected. Although the surveyed samples were not big enough to be statistically representative of the staff population, the results still give a fairly accurate pattern of trends within the universities, especially given that the survey data is augmented by data from interviews.

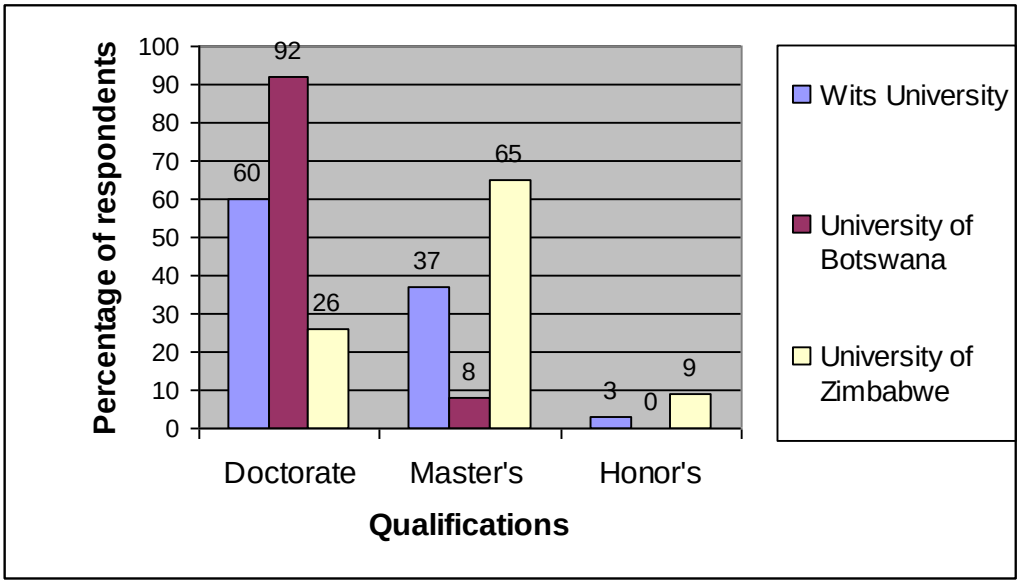


Figure 7.1

Qualification profiles of surveyed staff in the three case institutions

[470] University of Zimbabwe Five-Year Strategic Plan 2003-2007 p.12

It is clear from the survey data that the staffing position at the University of Zimbabwe compares very badly with that of the other two institutions. Indeed, staff quality as reflected by qualifications and experience is a proxy measure of quality in a university. Great concern was raised by deans and heads of departments across the university during interviews about the unchecked brain drain that is threatening the quality of staff at the institution. The following interview responses corroborate survey data on the staffing constraints that are experienced in faculties and departments:

> We have a lot of staffing problems, particularly at higher levels. Almost all our departments are heavily understaffed. You are talking about a situation where you have vacancy rates of 40-45%. Like, I am saying the situation is bad, a lot of middle-aged lecturers have gone; we have old staff that is too old to go away and very young staff that is inexperienced. You find that a department may have 80% of the staff still on probation and so we have a pyramid kind of structure.[471]
>
> We are not very comfortable with staffing. I would want it to improve. I think we have suffered a real problem in the last two years, huge staff turnover because of the economic situation in the country, you know how things are.[472]
>
> No, we are not comfortable with staffing levels in the department. Our establishment is 15, the people in post are 10. So we have a vacancy rate of 5/15, almost 33%. Some of the staff in post, I think about three, are temporary.[473]
>
> Oh, oh, we are not comfortable at all with our staffing. Like now, I have just been talking to personnel that the whole Plant Pathology section, the Bacteriology, the Virology sections, we have lost staff. We are left with three horticulturalists, two of them have gone, we had two agronomists, and we are left with only one now. When we advertise the posts we find that the people who apply may not be suitable, they are barely appointable. We are forced to appoint some barely appointable people just to fill in the posts because we can't find the right people. At the moment our staffing complement is 17, but full-time lecturers in post are nine, the rest are temporary staff. Temporary staff because in most cases they don't fit for what we require for the posts, or teaching assistants.[474]

It is evident that the biggest threat to quality teaching and quality research at the University of Zimbabwe is the poor quality of staff. Staff quality is a function of

[471] Interview with a Faculty dean, University of Zimbabwe, 14 October 2005

[472] Interview with a Faculty dean, University of Zimbabwe, 15 October 2005.

[473] Interview with Head of Department in the Faculty of Medicine, University of Zimbabwe, 15 October 2005.

[474] Interview with Head of Department in the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Zimbabwe, 25 October 2005.

many factors that include, among others, academic qualifications, teaching and research experience, and collaborative linkages with international communities of practice in one's field of specialisation. Most departments are operating not only with young, inexperienced staff that has no doctorates, but also with extreme staff shortages. The university has adopted the Graduate Research and Teaching Assistant Schemes as a way of alleviating the problem of brain drain and ensuring that academic programmes continue to run. As one of the interviewed deans explained:

> So we have created positions which we call graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) and graduate research assistants (GRAs). These are students who are doing their postgraduate studies and able also to give an input in teaching, research and marking of assignments. Each of the departments is required to take those GTAs and train them, facilitate ease entry of GTAs into the system. I am sure given the numbers, time constraints and the lack of resources, that might not be done to our satisfaction. People are doing it but not to a point where they would really feel that is what they would have wanted. Lecturers need to have more time with the GTAs, to monitor them, to coach, to assist, but sometimes it's not possible.[475]

While these were innovative schemes meant to keep current programmes running, the quality of the offerings is obviously compromised. Developing teaching assistants to become competent in teaching and learning will obviously take a long time. It would also appear that unless the fundamental problems of staff conditions of service are addressed, any efforts at developing academic expertise from young graduates would be to no avail, as they would continue to move away as soon as they become better-qualified, better-experienced and more marketable.

One of the major shortcomings of relying so heavily on under-qualified and inexperienced staff is that staff members are unable to benchmark their performance and that of their students with reference to international standards. Staff with wide experience of working in a diversity of university environments are generally assumed to be more competent and well-versed with research, course development and teaching methods. Such staff also have a better chance of getting more networked and having opportunities for sharing ideas at an international level. Experience in teaching elsewhere helps to bring a diversity of academic cultures into the university, apart from improving practice through exchange of ideas. Academic collaborative activities

[475] Interview with a Faculty dean, University of Zimbabwe, 14 October, 2005

enable academics to view issues of knowledge and knowledge dissemination from a multiple perspective, and have the overall effect of adding value to staff practice. Over-reliance on "green sticks" at the University of Zimbabwe evidently militates against the achievement of sound scholarship by the university generally and the attainment of the quality goals of the second strategic plan in particular.

Figure 7.2 shows the relative teaching experience of surveyed staff in institutions other than the current ones. Again here, the limitations of sample size are borne in mind and the survey data is only used to support interview data.

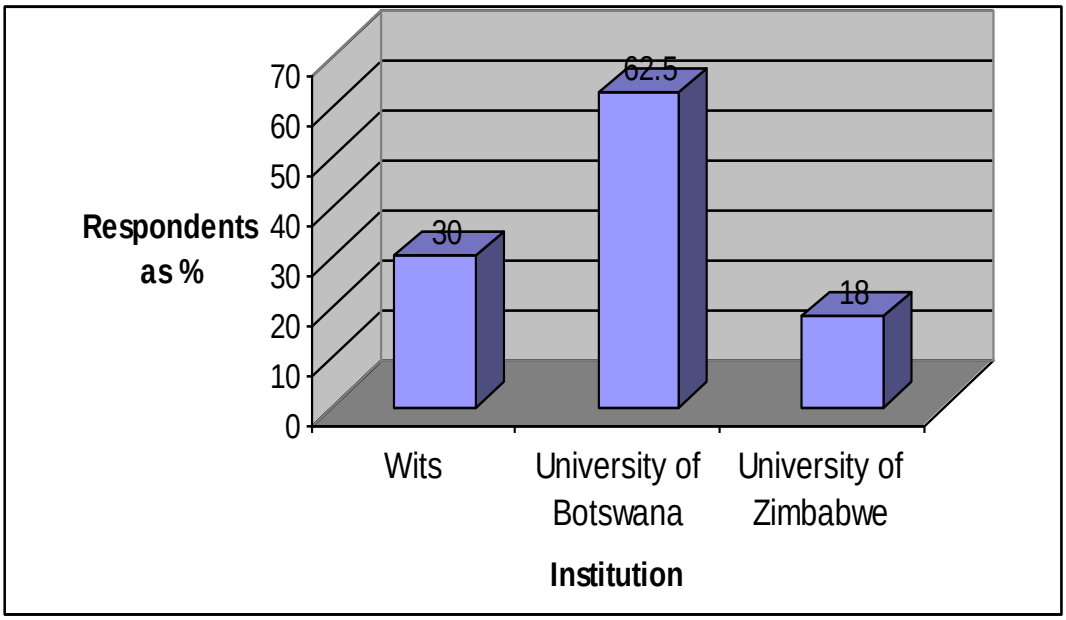


Fig. 7.2
Percentage of surveyed staff with more than four years of teaching experience in another university

As opposed to the other two institutions, only a very small percentage of the surveyed staff at the University of Zimbabwe had more than four years of teaching experience at institutions other than the one in which they were currently employed. This data on teaching experience in other universities corresponds well with survey data on academic collaborative linkages staff had over the past five years shown. Figure 7.3 clearly shows that in terms of collaborative linkages in academic matters, the University of Zimbabwe compares very badly with the other two universities, with

only 41 per cent of the surveyed respondents reporting having had linkages with academics abroad in the past five years. The majority of staff members (56 per cent) had such working collaborations with colleagues abroad. This can be explained by the fact that the bulk of the staff has very little experience of teaching at university level, and their chances of establishing such linkages have further been made bleak by the freezing of contact and sabbatical visits to overseas institutions due to foreign currency constraints.

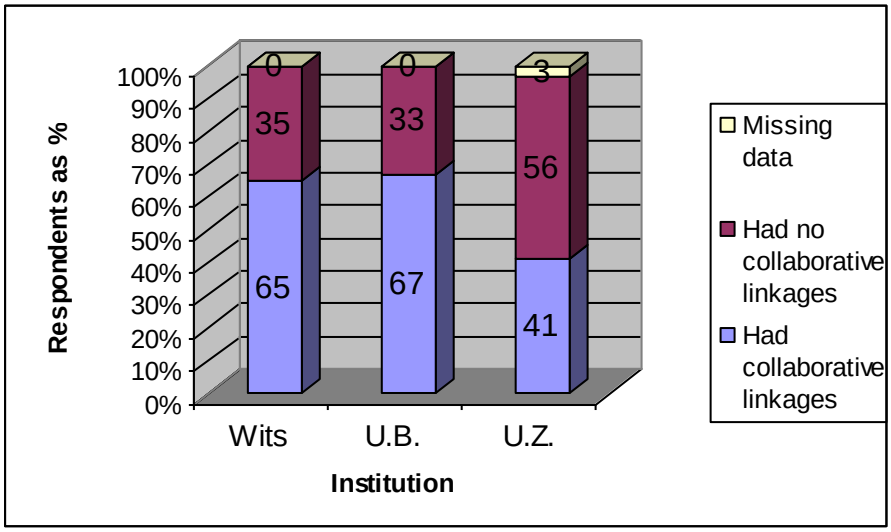


Figure 7.3
Staff collaborative linkages with colleagues in universities abroad in the last five years

The significance of academic collaborative linkages by university staff is aptly explained by Gibbons:

> In the 21st century the main change that will take place as far as universities are concerned is that knowledge production and dissemination … research and teaching … will no longer be self-contained activities, carried out in relative isolation. They will involve a variety of other knowledge producers.[476]

This change makes it necessary for university academics to work in collaboration with their counterparts in other knowledge-generating institutions all over the world so as to maximise the cross-pollination of ideas. It is on this basis that collaborative research

[476] Gibbons in Katjavivi, P.H. (2002:2) A talk on Internationalisation of Higher Education: Policy and Practice: Paper presented at the International Association of Universities (IAU) in Lyons-Rhone Alpes- France, 12-13 April 2002

and teaching by university staff is arguably an example of good practice and a significant measure of quality.

The problem of poor staff quality at the University of Zimbabwe is compounded by the general low morale of the few qualified staff members that have remained at the institution, a direct result of the poor working conditions. Interview evidence shows that generally staff commitment to academic duties is very limited and this has adverse effects on quality delivery. Staff apathy is aptly described by one of the interviewed heads of department in the university:

> The most important thing is to ensure that staff is motivated. The environment in terms of the conditions of service, remuneration, management and the academic environment needs to allow people to concentrate on teaching, research and university service, not bothering about where to get the next meal, not bothering about how to get home after work. The conditions are so poor that at the moment it's very difficult to motivate staff. At the moment things are very difficult, I am sure you are aware of that. Yah, I hope so [that the staff conditions are going to be looked into soon] because we have all these dedicated people who work so hard but for some reason or the other, people are not bothered about the welfare of these people. They are frustrated, they are angry, of course they leave at the stroke of a hand and this disrupts the quality of the programmes.[477]

The above interview response depicts a situation where it is rather difficult for academic staff to commit itself fully to the implementation of the quality assurance policy. No matter how well-designed the policy is, it stands to suffer at the implementation stage because of the adverse environmental conditions. There is general apathy among staff arising mainly from poor salaries and general poor conditions of service. Staff has to do without enough basic teaching resources. Salaries are too low to sustain a reasonable standard of living. University lecturers can hardly afford to buy a car on the meagre salaries, let alone a house. It is not uncommon to find a university lecturer renting a backyard cottage in a congested high-density residential area where conditions are not conducive for private academic work outside office hours. University staff has to jostle for transport to and from work every day. During interviews with academic staff in departments, it became evident that most of them did not have any computers in their offices and had to go to

[477] Interview with a Head of Department in the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Zimbabwe, 25 October 2005.

computer labs to access the Internet. The social status of what used to be a highly esteemed profession has now been reduced to an embarrassing level; hence lecturers find it embarrassing to disclose their profession. They have to spend most of their time moonlighting in order to augment their meagre salaries, and this leaves them with no time to think about their academic commitments.

Staffing conditions at the other two institutions are much more conducive for quality delivery. The major constraint at the University of Botswana relates to low staff morale and poor classroom facilities. During this study, expressions of discontentment with conditions of service, especially with regard to promotion, were raised by some foreign staff at UB. Because of their working conditions, foreign staff are usually less committed and "foot-loose". This is quite a problem at the University of Botswana as the institution heavily relies on expatriate staff. Survey data showed that about 50 per cent of the academic staff at UB is foreign. This position was corroborated through interviews with heads of department. Responding to an interview question on whether there was any international staff in the department, one head of department's response showed that among the 14 academic members of staff in the department, there were two Nigerians, two Zambians, one English person, seven Tswanas, one Chinese and one Bulgarian. Thus in one department alone, one could find staff of six different nationalities, and 50 per cent were expatriate staff. It is important in such a context to ensure that conditions of service for such foreign staff are motivating enough for them to remain committed to their academic work.

It was also evident during this study that not only expatriate but also local staff members are not happy about salaries and related conditions of service. The following is a response from one interviewee on what he perceived to be the major constraint to achieving the department's quality benchmarks:

> Ah, well, it depends which aspect of quality you are looking at. But overall, I feel the main constraint is the reward system. The rewards are not so good, so staff do other things to make up.[478]

[478] Interview with an academic member of staff in the Faculty of Commerce and Law, University of Botswana, 27 July 2005

As at the University of Zimbabwe, although on a lesser scale, effective quality assurance policy implementation is adversely affected by lack of commitment by academic staff. Both local and expatriate staff expressed concern over the problem of low salaries. In spite of diminishing government subvention, it may be necessary for the institution to review staff conditions of service if it is to remain competitive in the region. The challenge the institution currently faces is to motivate and retain its academic staff, which is its most important single asset in its quest to achieve excellence in the region.

Apart from low staff morale, the University of Botswana is seriously constrained by the large student numbers that do not match the resource capacity of the institution. While 88 per cent of the surveyed academic staff indicated that they had mechanisms in place for quality assuring their teaching, 42 per cent of them felt that the mechanisms were not effective enough to enhance the quality of teaching in the university. Interviews with heads of department were most revealing in terms of the major constraints teaching departments faced when it came to quality teaching. The following sentiments expressed by staff from different departments highlight some of the most common threats to quality teaching and learning in the university:

> Of course, meagre resources: resources, resources, resources!! The teaching and learning environment is very critical, apart from quality assuring your programmes. Even when you evaluate performance of staff, the environment is very critical, anything you touch, the environment has to be of standard. The environment that we teach in does not tally the requirements and the expectations of how we should perform. Both material and manpower resources are a major constraint.[479]

> At the moment the main constraint, I would say, is facilities. Our lecture rooms are bursting to the seams. This is a university-wide cry and we continue to say that for us to really arrive at our [quality] goal, some of these things have to be taken care of. [480]

> … the other thing is facilities. Sometimes you find you have a class of 300 and the classroom can only take 150, so we have that problem. And you see if students find themselves congested in classrooms, they use that as a reason for not attending lectures. So you have what I sometimes call telephone students,

[479] Interview with Head of Department in the Faculty of Science, University of Botswana, 28 July 2005.

[480] Interview with an academic member of staff from the Faculty of Education, University of Botswana, 25 July 2005

> absentee students who will only appear when you give a test because the class will be packed. We have a situation where an instructor went to a class with 150 scripts only to realise that the class size was 250, yah, these are some of the stumbling blocks.[481]

There is evidently the generic problem of large class sizes that are not compatible with lecture room facilities in the university. Most staff reported that they handle classes that are generally too big for the available lecture rooms and, in some cases, students spill out of the small rooms during lectures; clearly this has a demotivating effect on the students. Most departments reported undergraduate class sizes of between 100 and 300 students. Thus, the general view of staff is that class size is an essential variable militating against quality teaching and learning at the University of Botswana and requires urgent attention if the newly developed quality assurance policy is to yield the desired results.

The other constraint raised by academic staff is inadequate support from the university administration, especially in terms of increasing staffing establishments. Many departments were happy that they played a key role in the appointment of new staff, but they were unhappy about the fact that they did not determine the staff establishment. There is apparent tension between the economic rationale used by management in determining staff establishment and the purely academic rationale used by academics in departments and faculties. It is necessary to reconcile the two rationales, taking into account the goals the institution has set itself in terms of its new quality assurance arrangements. Quite a number of respondents felt that they were overloaded in terms of teaching and marking because they were too few for the large numbers of students they handled.

Evidence from interviews at the University of Botswana as well as at the University of the Witwatersrand also showed that staff felt they did not get enough support from university management, not necessarily in terms of offering more remuneration but "in terms of really appreciating how much work staff has".[482] This point brings to the fore the importance of professional management skills and expertise on the part of

[481] Interview with Head of Department from the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Botswana, 26 July 2005

[482] Interview response from an academic member of staff in the Faculty of Commerce, University of Botswana, 27 July 2005

university management. Management theory places great emphasis on employee motivation, as one of the most critical variables affecting productivity in an organisation,[483] and induction of management staff into such management principles appears to be an absolute necessity for university management. Thus, apart from financial resources, staff gets demoralised by simple day-to-day processes like processing documents. Institutional quality assurance policies have to embrace all processes and activities of non-academic staff if the broader quality academic goals are to be achieved. There is a tendency for quality assurance efforts to focus mainly on academic staff and academic activities at the expense of other essential though non-academic support staff and services that facilitate the success of the former. Quality assurance has to be a holistic approach in an institution, and is an innovation that needs to be understood and supported by everybody in an organisation.

7.8 The significance of contextualising policy

Effective policy implementation is partly enhanced by policy buy-in from implementers at the grassroots. In any organisation participative policy development does not only reflect a democratic culture; even more importantly it helps build a sense of ownership of the policy by all involved. One of the key advantages of participative policy development is that it promotes understanding of the newly developed policy and its aims. It also inculcates a sense of ownership of the policy among staff, and this is a key aspect facilitating policy buy-in in any organisation. This is particularly so with university institutions where academic staff cherish their academic freedom and professional autonomy, and the freedom and autonomy to decide on matters relating to their practice. In developing successful quality assurance systems in the universities, it was necessary for the responsible authorities to work with and through academic staff who are the ultimate implementers of the systems.

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[483] See: Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson (1996)

Oosthuizen, TFJ(2002) in Nieman & Bennett, (eds) *Business management: A value chain approach*, Pretoria, Van Schaik

Mintzberg, H. (1973) *The nature of managerial work*. Harper & Row: New York.

It is also evident in the interview responses that there is the tendency by institutional management to develop policies that do not quite match the realities on the ground in terms of institutional cultures, staffing levels, resource availability and level of institutional development. Standards, performance benchmarks, values and best practices are based on institutions abroad, and institutional missions, plans and policies are developed that are in line with those institutions and the ideas of experts from those foreign contexts. Much to the disappointment of academia, these imported policies fail to yield desired results in developing contexts. This is the reason why the head of a department quality assurance committee at the University of Botswana had to acknowledge: "In the end we have to have our own concept of quality".[484] Here, the respondent meant quality assurance arrangements and expectations that are in tandem with the resources available, the perceptions of staff, the staffing levels, student capabilities, and the culture and current level of development of the institution. In as much as it is good to emulate what goes on elsewhere in the process of striving for excellence, quality will always have a contextual dimension because of the above-named factors. The social expectations of the institution and its graduates will always display a contextual identity that gives particular uniqueness to an institution. In this case, a critical contextual factor impacting on policy implementation was the limited ownership of the quality assurance arrangements by the academic staff that was responsible for translating that very policy into action. This demonstrates the importance of always ensuring that any policies that are developed take full cognizance of the contextual constraints and strengths, and maximise stakeholder participation in the processes rather than just prioritise the structures. Establishing structures is necessary but not sufficient to ensure participation levels that lead to full ownership of innovations.

The need to contextualise quality assurance policies in order to suit conditions in the embryonic universities is emphasised by other scholars in the field of quality assurance. Lim strongly suggests that "quality assurance programmes must be modified to suit the conditions prevailing in developing countries, by being simple in

[484] Interview with a Head of Department in the Faculty of Education, University of Botswana, 26 July, 2005

design, modest in expectations, and realistic in requirements".[485] This requires, in the first place, that the introduction of such quality assurance systems be "preceded by an even greater commitment on the part of university leaders and managers to continuous quality improvement. Compared to the situation in developed countries, there is much less awareness of quality assurance and of the requirements needed to make it work".[486] Secondly, the institution's mission, the functions carried out to fulfil this, and the objectives for each function should not duplicate those found in universities in developed countries. Like their counterparts in developed countries, universities in developing countries aspire to serve their countries, their geo-political regions and the international market. In Lim's view, such a mission is far too ambitious given the limited resources at the disposal of most of them. "For most, serving the regions of the country where they are located should be the main priority and the conduct of undergraduate programmes the main activity".[487]

Indeed, some of the studied institutions have mission statements that do not match their current capacities. The University of Botswana vision and mission statements, for instance, read:

> **Vision:** The University of Botswana will be a leading academic centre of excellence in Africa and the world.
>
> **Mission:** To advance the intellectual and human resource capacity of the nation and the international community.

The University of Zimbabwe vision and mission statements read:

> **Vision:** To be (and be recognized by others) as a leading University working for prosperity, peace and dignity in Zimbabwe and beyond.
>
> **Mission:** Enabling our clients and customers to make meaningful contributions to sustainable development in Zimbabwe. To this end we provide high quality education, training and advisory services on a need oriented basis. We guarantee the above by maintaining excellence in Teaching, Learning, Research and Service to the community.

The vision and mission statements of the University of the Witwatersrand read:

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[485] Lim, D. *(1999:379)* Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Developing Countries. In *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, Vol.24 (4) pp.379-390*

[486] Op cit p. 386

[487] *Op cit.p.358.*

> **Vision:** By 2015 Wits will have consolidated its status as an intellectual powerhouse in the developing world. To this end, Wits will seek systematically to enhance its status in the world rankings of universities. We aim to be ranked in the top one hundred universities in the world by 2020.
>
> **Mission:** The fundamental role of any university is to promote freedom of enquiry and the search for knowledge and truth. Wits has built a reputation for itself in this role, establishing itself at the industrial and commercial heart of South Africa as a centre for education and research of the highest quality. Wits' mission is to build on this foundation in a way that takes account of its responsibilities within South Africa today; and to maintain and enhance its position as a leading university in the Republic, in Africa, and in the world by sustaining globally competitive standards of excellence in learning, teaching and research.

Of the three institutions, the Wits mission statement of maintaining and enhancing a leading position in South Africa, on the continent and in the world sounds much more realistic and matches what goes on in practice in terms of research, teaching and community service. There is commitment of resources towards achieving these goals. On the contrary, the chances for UZ to realise its mission of providing high quality education and advisory services by maintaining excellence in teaching, learning and community service are very remote under the current conditions. There is a very wide gap between this noble mission and what is actually prevailing on the ground – lack of support for research, brain drain, severely strained library resources, campus disturbances leading to frequent disruption of lessons, dilapidating residential and catering facilities for students, and low morale on the part of staff and students. The UB mission of advancing the intellectual capacity of the international community would probably be more realistic if the focus was on the regional and continental community. Given the quality constraints the institution is facing, it is difficult to envisage how the young institution will achieve this ambitious mission.

In Lim's view, the institution's aspirations to be a "leading academic centre of excellence in Africa and the world" and "to advance the intellectual and human resource capacity of the international community" sound a bit out of reach of the young and still-growing university. While there may be nothing wrong with developing such ambitious visions and missions, it is critical that they be consistently matched by sound rolling plans that are implemented in a prudent manner if they are to be realised. Much as these mission and vision goals sound quite impressive from a

quality point of view, the resources committed towards their achievement and the capacity of the institution did not seem to put the university on track in terms of effectively serving more than the needs of the region where the institution is located. The deputy director of the CAD, the main architects and drivers of the quality assurance policy in the university, also alluded to this shortcoming during interviews:

> I think we are doing a disservice in a way to the academic staff by making them 100% responsible for the quality of what they do when they can't get some of the resources that they need.[488]

Thus, clearly the quality assurance policy targets cease to be realistic and this may have demoralising effects on the academic staff expected to implement that policy.

7.9 Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the quality assurance policy processes in the three studied universities. The chapter showed that in all the three universities quality assurance policies were replete with tensions between and among the different stakeholders within the universities. While the policies were developed within the institutions, academic staff perceived them as largely external, bureaucratic and not very appropriate for the contexts. This view sharply contrasted that of management, who maintained that the quality assurance policies were internal and therefore addressed the improvement needs of institutions. The chapter brings out the complexity of the internal-external dichotomy of quality assurance systems that runs through most of the literature on the subject. Policies that were developed within the case institutions do not necessarily enjoy ownership by the collegiate because they are perceived to be external to that group. The policy processes followed did not sufficiently involve the academic collegiate who are the key implementers of those policies. As a result their implementation is not yielding much by way of institutional improvement.

[488] Interview with the CAD deputy director, University of Botswana, 25 July 2005.

Chapter 8

QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AS PRACTICE

8.1 Introduction

Quality assurance efforts in the three institutions are concentrated on four core areas of academic activity: course development, teaching and learning, student assessment procedures, and research and publications. The data collected on these four areas points to interesting patterns which will be the main subject of discussion in this chapter. The first pattern is that the three institutions use similar approaches and strategies in their quality assurance practices concerning these activities. There are, however, significant differences concerning the rigour and the effectiveness of these. The second is the considerable variation of institutional commitment in the provision of resources and support to quality assurance. This has an obvious effect on the effectiveness of the quality assurance systems implemented in the universities. The third is that the form and content of contestation of quality assurance revolves around several issues, but have in common concerns with the negative effects of the lack of ownership, participation and consultation on quality assurance practice. The chapter argues that too much emphasis on standardisation of approaches and strategies without taking into consideration the peculiarities of each institution (social, economic and academic traditions and specificities) and their unique geo-political locations militates against the effectiveness of their quality assurance practices.

8.2 Quality assuring academic programmes

One of the most crucial elements determining the quality of student learning is the quality of the academic programmes that students go through. In all three case institutions, due emphasis is placed on quality assuring course development activities. Various mechanisms and processes are undertaken to ensure that quality programmes that give students international competitiveness are offered, and a significant amount of convergence was noted among the three institutions in terms of the policies, practices and structures that have been put in place to take care of this aspect. Quite

substantial differences were observed, however, among the institutions with regard to the actual programme vetting processes undertaken.

Generally, the process of course approval involves academic committee structures that operate at different levels within the universities. At the University of the Witwatersrand, for instance, there are clear procedures and guidelines that are followed in the approval of newly developed courses or modules. A newly developed course goes through various committee structures before it can be approved. After developing a course proposal, an academic submits it to the relevant sub-committee in the School. The School sub-committee reviews the proposed course and may recommend that the academic amend, expand or modify the proposal. The Head of School also plays a part in this review process, as the person ultimately accountable for what goes on in the School. Once the School sub-committee and the Head of School have approved the proposal, it is sent to the Academic Planning Office (APO) through the APO faculty representative. The APO makes comments and recommendations and sends the proposal back to the responsible academic, who incorporates the comments into the proposal. The proposal is then sent to the relevant faculty sub-committee for approval. After this stage, the proposal is sent to the Faculty Board which may further require the academic to reconsider, modify or expand the proposal before it can be approved. From the Faculty Board, the proposal is sent to the Academic Planning and Development Committee (APDC) for noting. The APDC can override the approval given by the Faculty Board if it has concerns regarding the proposal, although this is very rare as most proposals are well refined by the time they get to this last stage. Once the proposal is approved by the APDC, the rules and relevant syllabus are updated.

The brief description given above serves to illustrate the rigour involved in academic programme development at Wits and the various committee structures that are involved in the process. This is a key quality assurance structure that guards against offering poorly designed and poorly conceived academic programmes. These various vetting processes motivate academics to invest sufficient thought into course development processes. They have to be clear on a number of issues regarding the proposed course, like the rationale for introducing the course, the value it adds to the students, how it articulates with other courses, the resources needed for its effective

implementation, and how students will be assessed. Unless all these elements are clearly thought out and given in coherent form, the proposed course or module is not approved.

The relevant committees and processes highlighted above are captured by the following two interview responses by academic staff in the institution:

> Schools come up with programmes. They are discussed at undergraduate (for undergraduate programmes) and postgraduate (for postgraduate programmes) before they go to the Teaching and Learning Committee. From there they go to the Faculty Board. Once approved at faculty level they go to Senate.[489]

> Proposals for new programmes go through quite a rigorous process. We have a timetable where we ask schools and course co-ordinators to start the process in about November, say, of last year, and all proposals have already gone through all committees and the dean. Heads of schools also look at those proposals. They go to the Faculty Board, then to the Academic Planning and Development Committee before they are forwarded by the university through the normal channels to the DoE and to SAQA. So there is a clearly defined process.[490]

Of significance is that apart from the internal quality assurance measures, external stakeholders like the Department of Education (DoE) and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) also play a very significant role in quality assuring programme development.

In addition to going through the above-named processes, the institution stresses the need for:

> ... programme planning and approval arrangements to be linked to the operationalisation of the institution's/academic unit's mission and goals … and the HEQC's criteria for programme accreditation. These are used to guide the internal approval of new programmes.[491]

Thus quality assuring academic programmes at Wits has both an internal dimension, which involves committees assessing programmes before they are introduced, and an

[489] Interview with a quality assurance representative in one Faculty, Wits University, 18 March 2005

[490] Interview with a quality assurance representative in a different Faculty, Wits University, 22nd March 2005

[491] Wits HEQC Self-Evaluation Report, p.156

external dimension, where the HEQC comes in to accredit the same programmes. The process of ensuring that quality programmes are developed is admittedly a rigorous one. As is the case with quality assuring teaching, different academic disciplines also have additional mechanisms to the generic ones outlined above, so that the actual practices vary quite significantly from School to School. Depending on the specific requirements of a discipline and as pointed out in the foregoing paragraphs, there is active involvement of external stakeholders in quality assuring programmes. After developing a programme, departments invite external stakeholders, like professional bodies in the case of nursing and engineering, and ask them to look at the proposed courses and give their input. They are also asked to make suggestions on the best forms of assessment. External stakeholders make their own suggestions based on their experience and expectations as well as on international trends. The involvement of external stakeholders in quality assuring programme development is evidenced by the following interview response from one of the Heads of School on the methods they use in quality assuring programme development in the School:

> One of those would be the professional accreditation. If, for instance, we introduce a professional programme in Psychology, it has to be approved by the professional body. If it's academic it follows university channels; it goes to faculty and then from there it goes to the Faculty Board, then to Academic Planning and Development Office (APDO), so they use the university routes. If it's a completely new programme, it will be sent to the other universities, FORTIM, I am sure you might have heard about it now. In that case they will send it to the other universities in the region. For instance, we have a new master's degree programme in Social Development; they sent it to University of Johannesburg, to UNISA and to University of Pretoria for comment. Basically what they will be asking is whether it should be offered and whether it is not duplicating another programme in the region. But the comments that you get are an indication of whether it's a good programme or not. So that is another quality assurance also.[492]

Thus, apart from using the traditional university channels consisting of academic committees, quality assurance of academic programmes at Wits also makes use of external peer reviews, where academics in other universities evaluate programmes that are being developed. In addition to such peer reviews, there is also use of criteria from the Department of Education and from SAQA, over and above external accreditation of programmes by the HEQC.

[492] Interview with a Head of School in the Faculty of Humanities, Wits University, 29 September 2005.

The structures for programme approval at the University of Zimbabwe bear a lot of resemblance to those at Wits. These include department, faculty and then Senate committees. Previously, these internal processes used to be complemented by a very regular external peer review component, which is no longer tenable under the current economic environment. All interviewed staff indicated that course outlines for any developed programmes used to be subjected to external examination by visiting examiners at the end of each year. Now that such visits are irregular, departments have to rely mostly on the internal structures which, as shown in Chapter 4, have been seriously weakened because of brain drain. While university policy still reflects external examination of programmes as an important component of quality assurance, in practice only internal structures and processes are used to approve new programmes. Although the internal programme approval process involves various committee structures, just like at Wits, the academic rigour through which those programmes are vetted has changed due to drastic changes in the calibre of staff. This is the major distinguishing factor between UZ and Wits in terms of the process of quality assuring academic programmes. While the structures and processes for programme approval are similar, the rigour of the approval processes is definitely different. Internal programme development and programme review processes are heavily dependent on the professional and academic grounding of staff.

The absence of external reviews is indeed a major setback in terms of quality assuring academic programmes at UZ. Within the institution academic members of staff feel very strongly about their inability to draw on this important facility in order to enhance the quality of their work. The following interview responses from a faculty dean and a Head of Department show the concerns academics have about this issue:

> The only problem is that while we are examining per semester, funds don't permit us to have an external examiner every semester. So we have to appoint them annually; and we may not even have the liberty of appointing them annually as we used to do; we may end up appointing them every two years. Then the catchment area is also limited; we no longer have the luxury of appointing external examiners from overseas. We are encouraged to draw them mostly from the region.[493]

[493] Interview with a Faculty dean, University of Zimbabwe, 14 October 2005

> So we are under obligation to invite external examiners to look at our work perhaps in comparison to students in institutions elsewhere. However, I must hasten to mention that of late we have problems with external examiners possibly because of our current foreign currency situation where you would like to pay external examiners in foreign currency. We are a bit constrained. So we are looking at possible ways of going round that problem by identifying scholars from within Zimbabwe, scholars who can be paid in local currency. But we would very much be keen to go beyond Zimbabwe so we can compare our standards internationally.[494]

It was evident from the interviews that for most faculties, even appointing external examiners every two years is actually not possible any more, as was the case in the past. The idea of forfeiting the input of academics from the international academic community is quite harmful to an institution that strives for international reputation. It is important for the university to be able to align its academic programmes with international trends and standards if it is to compete favourably internationally, and arranging external reviews by international scholars is one of the best ways of achieving this. The current trend where much of the quality assurance is an in-house practice is seriously eroding the reputation of the institution, particularly in terms of the academic programmes offered. This is particularly so given the poor staffing conditions in the institution. While policy acknowledges the importance of external review, practice on the ground takes a completely different form.

The Academic Quality Management Policy[495] at the University of Botswana places due emphasis on external examination and review of academic programmes as an important aspect of quality assuring programmes. This is over and above the internal channels through which new programmes are approved, which are no different from those at UZ. At the University of Botswana structures for programme approval include department, faculty and Senate committees. At department level, academic courses are developed by individual academics. They are tabled before a departmental academic board for discussion and improvement. The elements considered include the relevance of the proposed course, the appropriateness of the course objectives and content, the alignment of the new course with departmental and institutional plans, as well as the assessment procedures. At Faculty Board level, the same aspects of the

[494] Interview with a Head of Department, Faculty of Education, University of Zimbabwe, 16 October 2005

[495] This is the University Quality Assurance Policy.

courses are discussed. In addition to the committees, the Centre for Academic Development's Academic Programme Review Unit also plays an important role in programme approval processes. It vets the proposed programme against the same criteria used by the academic committees and makes recommendations which have to be incorporated by the academic concerned before the programme enjoys approval. As at the University of Zimbabwe, there is a very rigorous internal process of programme approval at the University of Botswana, which used to be supported by a very strong external peer review dimension. This external review process involved vetting of newly developed courses by carefully selected professors from outside institutions. Experienced professors with expertise in the relevant areas were also invited as external examiners to critically examine, among other things, the alignment of the examination questions with the course objectives, and the appropriateness of the benchmarking of the examination questions. Regrettably, as one Head of Department expressed, this external examination process seems to have been reduced to quite insignificant levels after semesterisation in 2002, mainly due to financial constraints. In responding to an interview question on whether there is any external input into the programme development and teaching activities of the department, one member of staff responded thus:

> No, we used to have external examiners but that has been stopped now. Now we have after three to five years an external team that comes in to do external examination. These come and look at courses, course outlines and everything else, because it was felt that the external team may come after exams and they would just do a quick rushed job.[496]

Like at UZ, there has been over-reliance on internal mechanisms of programme approval at UB since 2002. While the interview response cited above suggests that external examiners are now appointed after three to five years, indications from other interviewees suggest that the system of external examination has almost been stopped at the university. Thus, the responsibility for quality assuring academic programmes at the institution now rests, almost exclusively, with the various academic committees of the university, like the Department Academic Board, the Faculty Board and Senate. The prime activities of these various boards have been highlighted above. As at Wits,

[496] Interview with academic member of staff in the Faculty of Humanities, University of Botswana, 26 July 2005.

there is also significant involvement of some external professional bodies in quality assuring new programmes in some of the disciplines. Explaining how they assure quality in programme development, one of the interviewed academic members of staff in the Faculty of Engineering clearly brought out how influential some of these external professional bodies are when it comes to programme development:

> With the development of courses, again there we have, you could call it checks and balances because what then happens is that there is a group of people that develop a course outline for a certain course. Then it's sent over to someone at BPC Telecoms and they look at it and see whether we are up to date with what is currently on the market. Then they add or subtract and so on, and then we go by that.[497]

The Department of Nursing Sciences also has active involvement of relevant professional councils in quality assuring the nursing programmes through accreditation processes. Interviews with the Head of Department showed evidence of the profound influence that professional organisations have on the Department's curricula:

> The Nursing and Midwifery Council of Botswana (NMCB) influence our programmes very much. Like I said, after developing a curriculum, it has to go the Council. ---, even the [University] Act says that the UB together with the Council will be the validating authorities for the nursing programmes in the country. So there are committees that they go through where the Council is represented.

Thus, institutions have generic practices of quality assuring academic programmes, but there are great variations that are noticeable from discipline to discipline within a given institution. For example, while some disciplines are aligned to certain professions and involve the relevant professional bodies in quality assuring programmes (like Engineering, Nursing Science, Law), others do not enjoy such external input in so far as quality assurance is concerned (like Language and Literature Studies). Quality assuring academic programmes is an activity that entails balancing the epistemic goals of academics and the specific requirements and values of the market and other significant external stakeholders. The irresistible encroachment of market values, as discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis is, once again,

[497] Interview with academic member of staff in the Faculty of Engineering, University of Botswana, 27 July 2005

clearly visible in the quality assurance practices of the institutions. Institutions tend to listen to the voice of the market when they develop academic programmes and when they benchmark student performance. What is clear in this study, particularly in the cases of the University of Botswana and the University of Zimbabwe, is the decreasing significance of the external dimension of quality assuring the core activities of the institutions in terms of the actual practices on the ground. This is very contrary to the documented quality assurance policies of the institutions, which place a great deal of emphasis on external forms of quality assurance. The exception to this disparity is the University of the Witwatersrand, where the culture of external examination is still very active and forms a central component of quality assuring not only the development of academic programmes, but also, as will be shown below, student assessment processes. Of significance is the common practice of using academic committees in the internal quality assurance of academic programmes in all the three institutions, but with very different levels of rigour because of the different nature of the quality of staff from institution to institution. The effectiveness of internal quality assurance of programmes depends very heavily on the qualifications, the experience and motivation of academic staff. It also depends on the amount of resources that are committed to the process, particularly in terms of securing professorial staff from other institutions to peer review an institution's offerings. Where such resources are not available, as is the case at UZ and of late at UB, the process of quality assuring programme development is compromised.

In all three institutions, it was also noted that student evaluation of teaching and of the programmes they go through is an integral aspect of the quality assurance processes. This involves students expressing their views, in writing, on the courses they go through – what they enjoyed about the course, the difficulties they faced, the appropriateness and adequacy of readings provided, and time allocated to the course. Such student views, usually presented at the end of a semester, are used for evaluating various aspects of the course and for planning improvement. What seemed problematic, however, was the absence of a definite guiding template that could be used by the different academic units in each university, so that students in the evaluation process focus on definite aspects of a programme. While this may be a strength in so far as it provides staff with flexibility to focus on aspects considered important in their particular disciplines, it can also be a weakness in that staff may

develop evaluation instruments that do not necessarily address some important aspects of a course, deliberately or by mistake. This can be particularly so with new and inexperienced staff. Student evaluation of academic programmes, as a quality assurance measure, is supposed to provide important feedback that is used for continual course improvement. The quality of the feedback data is therefore a very critical aspect of the process.

8.3 Quality assuring teaching and learning

Apart from quality assuring programme development, the rigour of the teaching and learning practices of an institution determine quality of delivery. This is considered the cutting edge of an educational institution because that is what impacts on students' learning. The studied institutions place a lot of emphasis on this aspect of university activities, with some stating quite explicitly in their mission statements their thrust on quality teaching. Part of the mission statement of the University of Zimbabwe, for instance, states:

> … we provide high quality education, training and advisory services on a need oriented basis. We guarantee the above by maintaining excellence in Teaching, Learning, Research and Service to the community.[498]

Wits' emphasis on knowledge transmission is aptly captured in its mission statement:

> Wits' mission is to build on this foundation in a way that takes account of its responsibilities within South Africa today; and to maintain and enhance its position as a leading university in the Republic, in Africa, and in the world by sustaining globally competitive standards of excellence in learning, teaching and research.[499]

To achieve this mission, various committee structures are in place at various levels to see to it that acceptable quality teaching takes place in the academic units, departments and faculties of the universities. At Wits, for instance:

> The responsibility for the academic leadership of teaching and learning at the University rests with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic). The responsibility for decision-making rests ultimately with Senate. The Executive

[498] University of Zimbabwe Five-Year Strategic Plan, 2003-2007, p.9

[499] Wits HEQC Quality Audit 2006 Self-Evaluation Report, p.12

> Deans and the Faculty Boards play key roles in the decentralised structure and *Academic Aims and Values* clarifies the transfer of responsibility for academic practice as well as accountability for implementing the University's principles to the five faculties which encompass 34 schools. Schools are the key structures responsible for teaching and the importance of schools accounting for their role in teaching and learning is evident in the review mechanism used for schools, namely the Periodic or Quinquennial Review of Schools in which teaching and learning is a prominent area for review.[500]

This approach, where teaching and learning is monitored by academic committee structures at the various levels within a university system, is a common feature of all the three institutions, with Deputy Vice-Chancellors for academic affairs and university Senates playing an important monitoring role. In all cases, responsibility is given to faculties, departments and schools to ensure that they implement policy on quality assuring teaching. What is unique about Wits is the practice of undertaking periodical reviews of schools in order to ensure that these academic entities, where the actual teaching takes place, are performing to acceptable standards. The same academic units must also benchmark their standards of performance, which in most cases, should obviously be in line with broad institutional frameworks. The review exercise is a self-evaluation exercise, normally involving a peer-review component where an outsider is invited to review the activities of a school and provide an objective report. It is important to note that the process is a critical component of the internal quality assurance arrangements of schools, and a heavy premium is placed on the aspect of teaching and learning. Among other things relating to teaching and learning, the reviews take into account the staffing conditions in the school, academic programmes offered, resources provided to support teaching and learning activities, and student throughput rates.[501] Schools use the Quinquennial Reviews as a mirror for identifying areas that need improvement.

At the other two institutions, the reviews are not necessarily quinquennial and do not always have a peer-review component as at Wits. They mainly take the form of departmental self-reviews that are conducted internally on an annual basis and are submitted to management. Although they are used for planning purposes, academic units also use them for improving themselves. The self-review includes the status of

[500] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report, 2006,p. 95

[501] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report, 2006, p.96

staffing in the department over the review period, student assessment methods used, teaching loads, assessment of teaching and learning environments, and the availability of resources for supporting teaching activities.

There is, however, a significant amount of flexibility in terms of what academic units can do to enhance quality in their teaching, over and above generic requirements like meeting standard contact hours for a programme, having in place minimum recommended reading materials for students and the credentials of staff handling particular courses. This study showed that most of the academic units place emphasis on processes and mechanisms for monitoring the quality of teaching rather than putting together policies in the form of documents. Interview responses from some of the academic members of staff show this thrust as well as the flexibility given to academic units to use their professional expertise to ensure that quality teaching takes place:

> The Faculty doesn't have a policy of its own. We have processes and mechanisms rather than policy and I am sure you are aware the University has a policy to which all faculties have to conform. [502]

The respondent's view of policy is something that is written and which acts as guideline to staff. His view was that the university policy, as spelled out in the relevant standing orders and ordinances, provides guidance on how teaching should be quality assured at Wits. He distinguishes such documented guidelines from the actual processes and transactions that occur in the faculty. Another respondent in a different faculty alluded to the importance of schools as the main drivers of quality assuring the teaching activities of staff. In her view, the quality assurance "policy" of her faculty is expressed in the activities of the schools.

> We don't really have an overall policy for the faculty, but each school has got a quality assurance policy and they are almost oriented towards certain stakeholder demands. The policies vary from school to school. At faculty there is an overall quality assurance system but such systems are more clearly defined at school level.[503]

[502] Interview with academic member of staff in the Faculty of Health Sciences, Wits University, 17 March 2005.

[503] Interview with academic member of staff, Faculty of Engineering, Wits University, 7 April 2005.

On the exact quality assurance activities undertaken, one respondent indicated:

> There are several mechanisms. We don't have a specific plan, we have lecturer evaluation, course evaluation is not on a regular basis, and so we need to improve on that.[504]

Thus, apart from the generic Senate standing orders and regulations governing the conduct of teaching, there are many other measures that academic units put in place in order to ensure that high standards of teaching are maintained. In some programmes, for instance, there is integration of traditional with e-learning modes of delivery; in the process of learning students acquire many other skills like computer literacy and the ability to search for information on the Internet. In others, students' learning experiences are enriched through collaborative learning with students from other partner institutions within the country and abroad. Thus quality assuring teaching and learning is much the responsibility of academic units like schools. The professional innovativeness of staff in the academic units counts heavily in terms of the processes undertaken.

The practice of evaluating lecturing staff by heads of units and students is also a common method of monitoring the quality of teaching at the Universities of Botswana and Zimbabwe. At the University of Botswana, for instance,

> Assessment of quality in teaching and learning shall include but not be limited to: use of well established tools such as the Head of Department's assessment, Student Evaluation of Courses and Teaching (SECAT), teaching portfolios and peer reviews. Individual performance management goals and Appointments and Promotions Procedures that pertain to teaching shall be included in the assessment of quality in teaching.[505]

Similarly, at the University of Zimbabwe, the practice of quality assuring teaching and learning is aptly captured in the interview response given by one of the Head of Department. In response to whether they had any measures in place to quality assure teaching in his department, the Head of Department responded:

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[504] Interview with academic member of staff in the Faculty of Health Sciences, Wits University, 16 March 2005.

[505] University of Botswana Academic Quality Management Policy, p.9

> Yes, we do and I will address this issue at department level. I will start with the teaching itself. We have in place a system that we call peer review where lecturers are obliged to invite a colleague to sit in their lectures and evaluate their teaching and provide a report. This report is very useful in terms of appraisals. You may be aware that once a year we appraise our lecturers and indeed all members of staff. This is done for bonus purposes because bonus is performance-–related. So that instrument, peer evaluation, assists us determine whether one is doing the teaching properly. In addition to peer evaluation, we have got also student evaluation where we require a lecturer to have their courses evaluated by students at the end. Once a lecturer has done the teaching we ask a colleague to go and administer an instrument on the students on what has been taught. So the students evaluate the lecturer's performance and actually rate him/her on a scale. So in terms of the teaching, basically that's what we have, formally, in terms of quality assurance.[506]

It is clear that common approaches employed in quality assuring teaching and learning entail monitoring and assessment of staff by department and school heads as well as student evaluation. In some cases, these common trends are augmented by external reviews of the actual teaching processes, where the external reviewer observes classroom teaching, laboratory work and counselling.[507] At all three institutions, there are also induction courses for academic staff, ongoing professional development programmes as well as incentives like Teaching Improvement Grants and Teaching Excellence Awards, meant to encourage good practice in terms of teaching.

It is worth noting from the cases studied that quality assuring teaching draws substantially from other disciplines, particularly corporate management where performance-based rewarding and shaping employee behaviour through carefully structured motivation systems are widely used. Heads of academic units act as managers whose responsibility, among others, is to get their subordinates to perform by using an appraisal system that is tied to particular rewards. Again, as brought out in Chapter 5 of this thesis, the influence of managerialism on quality assurance practices in higher education is very conspicuous in institutional practices.

[506] Interview with a Head of Department, Faculty of Education, University of Zimbabwe, 16 October 2005.

[507] University of Botswana Academic Quality Management Policy, p11

8.4 Quality assuring student assessment processes

Essentially assessment has to do with establishing the level of academic competency learners have achieved as a result of learning. The validity and reliability of such assessment are therefore important aspects of the process as they determine the accuracy of student rating. In order to ensure the rigour and objectivity of such assessment, institutions employ various checks and balances that are both internal and external. Examples of such internal checks include peer reviewing of examination items set and internal standardisation of examination answers. External checks include external examination of candidates' answers as well as the examination items used in a course. Common forms of assessment in the studied universities involve continuous (formative) as well as terminal (summative) assessment. The former is mainly for enhancing student improvement throughout the duration of a course, although often it contributes towards the final grade as well. Terminal assessment varies in the institutions from programme to programme, with sit-in examinations being fashionable in some programmes and others relying mostly on take-home or examination-equivalent papers. Institutions showed quite a wide range of processes used in quality assuring all these assessment strategies. As is the case with programme approval, institutional policies place a great deal of importance on student assessment as a key aspect of the delivery process of academic departments that should have both an internal as well as an external dimension.

Of the three case institutions, Wits has the most comprehensive quality assurance policy on student assessment and great emphasis is placed on linking such student assessment processes with the learning outcomes and competencies required for any programme. Key aspects of the system are that while assessment is used as an instrument for showing a student's level of performance in a particular area of study, it is also used to provide feedback to the student during the course of learning. Both the student and the lecturer use such feedback to improve the former in their identified areas of weakness. Thus, one of the strongest areas of the Wits assessment system is that it is linked to teaching and learning. The assessment practices at the institution are guided by the national policy on student assessment, which is stated in the HEQC policy document on criteria for institutional audits. The provisions of this document require institutions to have:

> … an assessment policy and clear and effective procedures for its implementation. The policy and its procedures [should] ensure academic and professional standards in the design, approval, implementation and review of assessment strategies for programmes and modules, and for the qualifications awarded by the institution.[508]

Although Wits has always had a long-standing and reputable culture of student assessment, to align itself with the new national policy requirements from the HEQC, the institution:

> ... has undertaken a comprehensive review of its policy and *Standing Orders on the Assessment* of student learning over the last two years. This arose out of discussions within the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee, and was premised on the need to encourage a greater variety of assessment practices, to better link assessment to teaching and learning, to encourage continuous learning and methods of enhancing deep learning rather than superficial learning through greater use of formative and continuous assessment, and the linking of assessment to objectives and outcomes. The revised policy states:
>
> 'The spirit of assessment is changing. There is a need to emphasise assessment as an integral and vital part of teaching and learning. The process of assessment of student performance should have educational value, in that assessment should support the achievement of a number of goals: it should guide, help and inform the learner by providing appropriate feedback, but should also be a way of determining whether a student has acquired the necessary competencies. Those competencies should be derived from a process of development and agreement within each school and faculty, as should the criteria against which they will be judged.'[509]

Student assessment practices at the University of the Witwatersrand rely on external peer reviews as well as on a wide range of internal practices that vary from school to school. Great emphasis is placed on the developmental aspect of learning, hence the importance of continuous assessment in most of the programmes. As policy states, this continuous assessment is meant to constantly give feedback to both students and lecturers so that areas for improvement can be identified before the student gets to the end of a programme. Together with the entire course package, students are given the continuous assessment tasks right at the beginning of a course, with due dates for the tasks provided. This allows planning and ample preparation of the assessment write-

[508] HEQC criterion 11 cited in the Wits Audit Report, (2006: 184)

[509] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report (2006: 184)

ups by students. The continuous assessment tasks also encourage students to read and prepare themselves for the subsequent lecture sessions on an on-going basis, something that maximises the benefits of learning during contact sessions. As pointed out earlier, such continuous assessment also counts towards the final grade and this motivates students to put their best into the papers. Thus, there is an apparent shift in the university from summative, judgmental assessment towards formative, diagnostic assessment which allows corrective measures to be implemented by both the course provider and the student before the latter completes a programme of study. It is worth noting that, of the three institutions, Wits is exceptional in terms of the high degree of congruence that prevails between its policy and the actual assessment practices on the ground, particularly with regard to linking assessment to teaching and learning. Continuous assessment is linked to specified course outcomes and feedback on course papers has to be timely enough for students to use the feedback for self-improvement. As the audit report states, the assessment system guides and informs learners by providing regular feedback to their performance.[510] It also encourages students to adopt strategies that will assist them to seek and request teaching methods that best fulfil their ability to respond to the assessment scheme.[511]

Another essential aspect of the Wits assessment practices is that students' performance is criterion-referenced rather than norm-referenced. Criterion-referenced performance is judged according to predetermined criteria, rather than according to group performance. The implication of this is that benchmarking of students' performance in a course is based on pre-specified standards, and assessment of students' performance is against such standards of achievement. As institutional policy states, "there is a responsibility to provide criteria that make explicit the constructs of the teaching and to make these available and accessible to the students in as many different ways as possible".[512] Thus course outlines do state what students should be able to achieve after going through a given course and assessment processes measure students against such outcomes.

[510] Wits HEQC Quality Audit 2006 Self-Evaluation Report, op cit

[511] Wits HEQC Quality Audit 2006 Self-Evaluation Report, (2006: 182)

[512]Wits HEQC Quality Audit 2006 Self-Evaluation Report, (2006:184)

Apart from formative assessment of students, the university has end-of-semester examinations which are quality assured through internal as well as external examination processes, whether they are in the form of sit-in examinations or examination-equivalent papers. Of the three case institutions, Wits is the only university where external examination of students is mandatory, irrespective of the school. This practice has always been in place in the university and has been guided by Senate standing orders on student assessment, even before the introduction of the new quality assurance policy driven by the HEQC. It is noteworthy that the new quality assurance regime from the HEQC is juxtaposed on an old tradition of quality assurance that was mainly internal and based on the professional artistry of the academic community of the university. Quality assurance of students' assessment through external peer reviews has helped the institution benchmark the performance of students according to international standards. The external examination process entails sending not only marked examination scripts for external review, but also the course outline with performance outcomes and course aims and objectives and the examination questions used for the assessment. Thus, the external examiner gives feedback on many aspects relating to the course examined, and this helps in the gradual improvement of courses and methods of delivery. Interview data and some of the external examination reports analysed showed clearly that forms of assessment adopted in the university are commensurate with international standards. At postgraduate level, for instance, it is an institutional requirement that one of the external examiners of a PhD thesis should be from outside the country.

At the University of Botswana, student assessment processes are more or less the same as those at Wits. There is the continuous assessment component as well as the final examination component. Interviews with some Heads of Department in the university bear evidence of the importance that is placed on formative assessment:

> The continuous constitutes 40% and the final examination 60%. So quality assurance is a continuous process and every now and then when we identify any problems in any particular course or some regulation which works against students, we look at those and see how we can improve and then we take the recommendation to higher committees.[513]

[513] Interview with a Head of Department, Faculty of Engineering, Wits University, 28 July 205.

The continuous assessment consists of different types of student assignments that vary in number from course to course. In terms of quality assurance processes, "the continuous assessment is internally moderated by departmental committees".[514] The weighting of coursework relative to the final examination is 40 per cent and 60 per cent respectively across departments, and this is guided by a university-wide policy which limits the coursework component to not more than 50 per cent of the final score.

Practice at UB departs from Wits practice in that end-of-semester examinations, which used to be externally examined, now undergo only internal processes of moderation. As one staff member indicated, "in the past the exams used to be externally moderated, but the university decided that that was too much of a cost".[515] So there are several internal mechanisms departments use to quality assure examination processes:

> After each course lecturer has done their questions they are taken to a group of peers or colleagues who are specialists in the area. In our department we have five areas…. So we have quite a range of courses we teach in the department. So depending on where your course falls, after you have designed your exam questions, there will be a cognate group of colleagues who are in that area. They will moderate the examination; go through the scripts which they sample from the group. They are given quite elaborate terms of reference on what things to look for and then they are supposed to write a report at the end of that.[516]

It has already been shown that the absence of external examination is a major limitation in the quality assurance practices of UB; this shortcoming has an obvious effect on students' assessment. It is true that in the absence of external review of course outlines, examination questions and examination answer scripts, the quality assurance processes have become too internal and therefore too subjective for the institution to claim international benchmarking. External examination gives an institution international legitimacy and accords graduates international repute.

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[514] Interview with an academic member of staff, Faculty of Commerce, University of Botswana, 27 July 2005.

[515] Interview with an academic member of staff, Faculty of Science, University of Botswana, 27 July 2005.

[516] Interview with a Head of Department, Faculty of Science, University of Botswana, 28 July 2005.

The UB situation resembles the assessment approaches at the University of Zimbabwe, which also semesterised its programmes some years back. The processes of quality assuring students assessment at UZ consist almost exclusively of internal checks and balances. Interviews with some Heads of Department at the university were most revealing in terms of the processes and constraints faced in quality assuring students assessments.

> But now we have constraints because external examiners don't come as frequently as they used to do. Now, we are supposed to have an external examiner every three years, yet previously it was external examination throughout. We would send examination papers to external examiners every year and the external examiner would come during the examination period. But now due to foreign exchange problems we are told we should bring in an external examiner once per three years. … However, in the absence of the external examiner we have our own internal examination system. Individual lecturers set examination questions, then we set up a committee to look at those papers. So each paper is looked at by a sub-committee. For each paper we look at the quality of questions, mark allocation, relevance, etc., before we send the papers for printing.[517]

Although these internal processes are rigorous, they suffer from lack of external input that is enriching and that gives international credibility to academic processes. The importance of peer reviews in the form of external examining systems was, in the past, a critical element of quality assuring the curriculum as well as the student assessment processes at the University of Zimbabwe. It was evident during this study that staff were very frustrated about the current forfeiture of this important facility. One of the faculty deans explained how important the role of external examiners was in the university:

> Then as I said, as we go on higher into the level of examinations, mainly the external examination system is one of the most important quality assurance mechanisms we had. I don't know it depends on universities, but in our system here, which is a university-wide system, the examinations were set at department level. Then the department itself would look for external examiners who were approved on the basis of their outstanding academic achievement in that area of study. They were chosen from the department and approved by the Vice-Chancellor. They moderated the examination questions and the curriculum, and then they also came and participated in the examination and then they furnished a report at the end of their visit. And

[517] Interview with a Head of Department, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Zimbabwe, 27 October 2005.

> those things are very important because they show whether the standards are of a very low quality or are of an international standard.[518]

It is clear from the sentiments expressed by the dean during the interview that there is the general feeling among staff that confining quality assurance of student assessment processes to internal staff is unhealthy in terms of achieving international standards of performance. Limiting quality assurance of teaching and learning activities to department committees lowers levels of academic excellence at the institution, especially in the wake of the staffing constraints that were discussed in Chapter 7. As was shown in the same chapter, in a situation where "you have vacancy rates of 40-45% … a lot of middle-aged lecturers have gone…. and we have old staff that is too old to go away and very young staff that is inexperienced",[519] internal quality assurance processes that are not supported by external peer reviews have serious limitations in terms of enhancing excellence in the university.

8. 5 Quality assuring research and publications

The traditional role of a university is to generate knowledge of high quality and to be able to disseminate that knowledge in such a way that it yields benefits to the wider society. Thus one of the criteria for judging the quality of university performance is the level of research output, both in terms of quantity and quality. All three case institutions have policies that encourage research and publishing by staff, although the University of the Witwatersrand has an outstandingly comprehensive policy and much greater thrust on research than the other two institutions. These research aspects of the institution will be dealt with more comprehensively in the later part of this section. As will be shown later on in this chapter, this emphasis is because Wits has chosen to be a research rather than a teaching university.

The University of Botswana's quality assurance policy emphasises the need to assess the ability of staff to perform research at the individual as well as at the faculty level. Further, the policy privileges the assessment of research relevance to UB and assessment of the dissemination of research findings. The policy makes reference to the need to assess external research funding as well as instituting sound research

[518] Interview with one of the Faculty deans, University of Zimbabwe, 14 October 2005.

[519] Interview with one of the Faculty deans, University of Zimbabwe, 15 October 2005.

management within the university. In terms of the actual practices, it was noted that the university recognises some significant amount of publications, in spite of certain constraints pointed out by staff. A combination of lack of adequate funding to accord staff effective incentives and heavy teaching loads were cited as some of the major constraints militating against the achievement of research excellence in the institution. The following is a sample of views given by academic staff across faculties during interviews on the major constraints their units faced in achieving excellence in research:

> The research output is not what we would like, but quite a number of colleagues are publishing but the problem is with the teaching loads. The time when many people can do research is usually during the long vacation which is about two to three months, but during the term it is difficult.[520]

> The research output is not good enough; it's not good enough because of the teaching loads. But at least we try to attend a few conferences and from the presentations that we do we try to squeeze out a paper or two per year. So basically we try to do research but sometimes it's not possible, because of large student numbers. Like last year, you find we were handling about 700 students and there were only two of us.[521]

> We do research but a lot of us are not happy with the research output. Most of the year we are involved in teaching. After May/June, which is the end of the academic year, a lot of us in education are involved in teaching practice and that takes a lot of our time, right up to end of July, and in August we are already starting a new academic year. The time factor, plus during the semester there is work overload.[522]

The university has put in place a number of mechanisms in order to enhance research, but availability of time for research and lack of incentives for staff seem to be the main constraints. Staff members require reasonable teaching loads and, as will be shown later on for Wits, inter-semester research breaks in order to allow enough time for research. Quality management of research also entails putting in place effective incentive systems that encourage staff to undertake research. This study identified that:

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[520] Interview with a Head of Department in the Faculty of Science, University of Botswana, 28 July 2005

[521] Interview with academic member of staff from the faculty of Education, University of Botswana, 25 July 2005.

[522] Interview with academic member of staff from the Faculty of Education, University of Botswana, 26 July, 2005

> … actually in a system like UB the expatriate worker gets a contract which is reviewed periodically, every two years, three years or five years. But ordinarily for the citizen employee the only incentive is promotion; there is no other incentive because they are permanent and pensionable.[523]

It was also evident that where the university had invested significant resources, there tended to be greater output in terms of research. A typical example of this was noted in the Faculty of Science, where the output was identified to be highest, according to the university publications records.[524] Although there could be many other variables at play, one of the interviewed faculty professors explained the high research output in the faculty as follows:

> The reason may be is because the university has invested quite a lot in research in Science. We have state of the art equipment which you can't find even in some of the richest universities abroad, you find it here. So really, having invested so much the university insists that you should work. So they have also instituted research funding whereby people are applying for research funds and they have to produce results.
>
> The other thing is that quite a sizable proportion of staff are expatriates, and expatriates are on contract and your contract renewal depends on your productivity. So there again people have to show evidence of research.[525]

Apart from providing research grants to staff, the recruiting of highly qualified and experienced international staff is another approach the university is using in order to boost its research capacity. The university also established a staff support facility through the Centre for Academic Development, as one of the Heads of Department confirmed:

> Yes, I believe they try; of course the CAD is tasked with developing us as staff members. We have an induction programme for new staff and whenever you feel there is need they mount workshops for us every now and then, so that is in place.
>
> Ahh, in terms of research, there is a lot. They offer funding for research, twice a year they will offer some kind of funding, and to go with that there will be some training on how to write research proposals and so on. So there are

[523] Interview with a Head of Department, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Botswana, 26th July 2005

[524] See Office of Research and Development, (2003) Research Outputs of the University of Botswana for 1995-2001, University of Botswana

[525] Interview with a professor in the Faculty of Science, University of Botswana, 27 July 2005

> things that are being done, but of course one wishes more could be done. For example, we are teaching all the time. So to find time for research is very difficult. People should be able to get research leave, but we can't afford to give people research leave. What do we do when they are out there researching?[526]

Staff can access funds for the purpose of attending and presenting at conferences as a way of encouraging them to publish. Lately, the university has also established an Office of Research and Development that is headed by an academic with a doctorate. Among other services, the office runs research workshops for needy departments and monitors research activities in the entire university through a faculty-by-faculty research and publications database which the office developed. Unlike at UZ, the research grants staff can access through the Office of Research and Development can sustain meaningful research activities. This is mainly because of the very stable nature of the economy and the Botswana currency.

The other approach UB is using to quality assure research is through staff development. As one interviewed senior member in the university indicated,

> Research output is low in the Faculty. The lecturers did not have PhDs; they needed to do PhDs, so we sent them abroad. We do have some research and we encourage everybody to do research.[527]

Encouraging and supporting staff to do PhDs seems to be a positive way of ensuring that the institution upholds research through local staff. This is a long-term measure that is meant to promote research output in the university without relying heavily on expatriate staff. This measure is based on the assumption that acquisition of higher qualifications, particularly doctorates, will equip staff with research skills and ultimately lead to more publications. This assumption was pursued in the three institutions through surveys. The qualifications of staff were matched with their research output over a period of five years. The results in all three institutions showed clearly that there was a positive correlation between qualifications and research output of the surveyed staff, notwithstanding the small and non-representative nature of the

[526] Interview with an academic member of staff in the Faculty of Commerce and Law, University of Botswana, 27 July 2005

[527] Interview with a senior member of staff in the Faculty of Engineering, University of Botswana, 27 July 2005.

samples that were used. Although there is a very high likelihood that this trend is universal in the three institutions, care is taken here not to generalise the survey findings to the entire staff populations from which the samples were drawn. Cross-tabulation of the qualifications of combined surveyed staff only is illustrated in Table 8.1, and the assumption that doctoral qualifications enhance research output in an institution seems to be confirmed by the results of the survey.

Table 8.1: Academic qualifications and publications of surveyed staff at the three universities

		Number of published articles in a five-year period					
		0	1-4	5-9	10-14	+15	**Total**
Qualifications	Honours	2	1	0	0	0	3
	Masters	18	19	2	0	0	39
	Doctorate	4	21	16	8	6	55
	Total	24	41	18	8	6	97

Thus the main mechanisms of quality assuring research at the University of Botswana are supporting staff through research grants, staff development programmes that involve research workshops, sending staff abroad for PhDs, monitoring publications faculty-by-faculty, and investing in resource infrastructure like computers, laboratory equipment and library facilities. While the institutional policy stresses the need for the institution to maximise external research funding and instituting sound research management within the university, interviews with staff showed that research output in most departments was very low due to a number of constraints that staff were facing. Apart from establishing the Office of Research and Development, there is much that is yet to be done in order to improve the general management of research in the university.

The University of Botswana is similar to the University of Zimbabwe in that both of them define themselves as teaching universities. Apart from teaching, they also place a great deal of importance on research that supports the teaching service and contributes to the commonwealth of knowledge. In terms of structures, the University

of Zimbabwe has a Research Board which is responsible for managing research funds that can be accessed by academic staff for research as well as for attending conferences. Each year, the university allocates research funds to the Board, which normally are rationalised according to the number of academic staff in the university. So each academic member of staff has a certain allocation for research every year. Staff members apply to the Board for funding of proposed research projects, and the Board considers the proposals at its sittings that are normally fixed at the beginning of the year. The application is accompanied by a corresponding budget for the project and the Board, which consists of representatives from all the faculties, peer reviews the proposals as a way of establishing the viability of the research project. This is a long-standing quality assurance tradition that enhances transparency in the allocation of research funds to staff, while at the same time it provides support in developing sound research proposals by staff. Once the proposal is approved, funds are released and the Board monitors progress of the project by calling for reports from the recipients within certain timeframes. The output of the research has to be tabled before the Board at the end of the project.

Apart from the Research Board, there are also Faculty Research Committees that encourage and support research at faculty level. The main responsibility for these committees is to develop research capacity in faculties. Faculties also make an effort to source additional research funds for their staff from outside the university.

While there are research funds availed to staff in any one year, it is saddening to note that due to the hyperinflationary climate in the country, the funding levels can hardly sustain any meaningful research any more. What is allocated to the Board at the beginning of a year is fast eroded by inflation to a point where research funds applied for by staff become too little to support any meaningful research by the time they are released. The constraints caused by inflation in terms of research funding are depicted by the following interview responses from staff:

> Right now the Research Board fund has dried up. You can't apply for funds to the Research Board. For external donors there are problems because a lot of

> them have withdrawn their support even for university funding. So research would have to be self-funded, from your own salary.[528]
>
> At the moment the economy is not conducive. People have to spend a lot of time worrying about other things like how to get home, how to get to work, where to get the cheapest food, and even if one were to get research funds from the research grant, it is swallowed by inflation before you even start using it. In this department we bid for Z$100 million and we got it a few weeks ago so that we do research and publish as a department. But that Z$100 million is now meaningless. There are six of us; if you divide that by six, it's less than Z$20 million per person. To go into a hotel you need more than Z$20 million per person; you need fuel and that alone swallows the entire Z$100 million. So we are stuck. So research output is very minimal.[529]

The campus climate discourages staff from doing research. As pointed out in chapter 4, many academic members of staff do without dedicated computers in their offices. They find it very difficult to access the Internet to search for information. The library facilities are very poor and inter-library loan facilities are non-existent. For a full picture of the constraining climate at UZ, readers are referred back to Chapter 4 on institutional contextual factors influencing quality assurance. Thus, quality management of research at the University of Zimbabwe is currently in a state of crisis due to the unfavourable macro-economic conditions in the country.

It was also noted that, as at the University of Botswana, there are no significant incentives given to staff for research and publishing. In fact, this culture is one of the major factors undermining research excellence at UZ. Staff members prefer to engage more in consultancy work, which is financially rewarding, than in research and publishing, where they enjoy no monetary benefits. Most members of staff interviewed expressed concern over lack of incentives for research and publications:

> No incentives. The only incentives are in the form of promotions or things like that.[530]
>
> Well, you could get promoted but there are other variables which come into play. The quality of the articles, the journal you publish in, etc., but in

[528] Interview with an academic member of staff in the Faculty of Education, University of Zimbabwe, 15 October 2005.

[529] Interview with an academic member of staff in the Faculty of Education, University of Zimbabwe, 16 October 2005.

[530] Interview with Head of Department in the Faculty of Education, University of Zimbabwe, 15 October 2005.

> principle you get promoted on the basis of publications. I know of people who got promoted but without that many publications; there probably are other factors. And also if you get promoted to senior lecturer, the gap in salary is just negligible.[531]

Management of research at the University of Zimbabwe is much more challenging than it is at the University of Botswana because of the country's high inflation rate and the mass exodus of qualified and experienced staff. There is great dissonance between the policy of the university on research and the actual research activities. Where there is still some expertise to carry out meaningful research, efforts are stalled by the prohibitive conditions that are characterised by limited access to computer and Internet facilities, poor library resources and unstable financial support.

As mentioned earlier on in this chapter, the University of the Witwatersrand is exceptional among the three case universities in that it is a research university with priority focus on research output and postgraduate training, albeit without underplaying the importance of undergraduate teaching. Because of its thrust on research, "Wits has had a DVC dedicated to Research since the mid-1980s…."[532] As the Audit Report explains, the key role of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) (Research) is to ensure effective management of research and research quality throughout the entire university.[533] As a member of the university's Senior Executive Team (SET), she is in a position to ensure that strategic planning and processes are harmonised with the research activities and focus of the university.[534] The DVC is supported in discharging this important role by the Research Office, which has a staff complement of seven. "Each position in this office has clear duties and a clearly defined role in respect of the quality assurance functions of the Office which include the management of and support for obtaining research funding, University rules for record-keeping, budgets and investment facilities."[535] Thus, research-related activities are well co-ordinated, efficiently managed and systematically recorded through this

[531] Interview with an academic member of staff in the Faculty of Education, University of Zimbabwe, 15 October 2005.

[532] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report, (2006:210)

[533] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report (2006:227)

[534] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report (2006:232)

[535] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report (2006: 228)

office. A neat and updated database of all research and publications realised by individuals within the university is kept in the Research Office.

Apart from the DVC (Research) and the Research Office, there are many other structures that deal with matters of research at various levels within the university. There is the University Research Committee (URC) that is chaired by the DVC (Research) and whose membership changes every three years.[536] As Table 8.2 shows, senior university management is part of the membership of this august Committee. This is a clear demonstration of the commitment of senior university management towards research, a phenomenon that was not as explicit in the other two case universities. The active involvement of senior management in the Research Committee makes it possible for research to attract a significant attention in terms of funding and provision of facilities.

Table 8.2: Membership of the University Research Committee, University of the Witwatersrand

Chairperson: Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)	Professor B Bozzoli (E)
Vice-Chancellor	Professor L Nongxa
Deputy Vice-Chancellors	Professors T Mthembu and Y Ballim
University Librarian	Mr F Ubogu
Council Appointees	Professors V Rees and H Marques Dr B Smith (E)
Deans' Representative	Professor R Bharuthram
Dean's Nominees	Professors I Currie (E), S Chandiwana and F Mahomed Drs N Sachs S Koyana
Appointed by the Postgraduate Association	Mr L Thompson
Chairpersons of the Faculty Research Committee	Professors C Albertyn (E), MH Moys (E), J Ogude (E) and M Ramsay (E) (Science vacant)
By invitation of Chairperson	Drs G von Gruenewaldt and S Elmaleh
Representative of Industry/ Science Councils	Dr P Mjwara – to be replaced

(E) Member of URC Executive.
Source: Wits Audit Report, (2006:228).

[536] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report (2006:228)

The major role of the URC is to implement university policy through its various sub-committees. Among the many responsibilities of the Committee cited in the Audit Report are:

- Addressing all general matters of research policy, as they affect the University.
- Responding to Government, statutory councils and other external agencies on research-policy matters.
- Allocating University funds for research and related activities.
- Managing and allocating various trust funds and endowments and other general funds bequeathed to the University for research and related purposes.
- Dealing with all matters related to research funding by statutory councils such as the National Research Foundation and the Medical Research Council.
- Screening all proposed research involving human and animal subjects to ensure compliance with both University and national ethical guidelines.
- Compiling and presenting an annual report on the research output of the University: this includes an annual submission to the Department of Education, which forms the basis of one component of the government subsidy formula; the funds so generated are fed back into the University's overall research endeavours via FRAC allocations.
- Assisting individual researchers and research entities with the general running and administration of their activities, including in particular, matters such as appointment and remuneration of staff, drawing up research contracts and budgeting.[537]

One of the main features of quality assuring research at Wits is the decentralisation of research management and responsibilities to faculties. To facilitate decentralised management of research, each of the five faculties has a Faculty Research Committee (FRC). This committee, which comprises members from the faculty, is responsible for enhancing research activity in the faculty by developing a comprehensive research plan. It also reports annually to the URC on research output in the Faculty. Thus, much of what happens in a given faculty in terms of research falls within the ambit of this Committee.

[537] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report (2006:228-229)

Quality assurance of research at Wits is also very much enhanced by the various Ethics Committees that exist in the university and whose main responsibility is to ensure that university researchers, students included, comply with ethics rules and regulations. They also set out clear guidelines that should be followed during the research process. It is important to note that the review of proposals by these committees as a way of monitoring adherence to ethics is a critical quality assurance mechanism that contributes quite significantly towards the rigour of proposals by staff and postgraduate students.

It is clear from the various committee structures pointed out in this chapter that Wits has always been fully committed to a robust system of quality assuring research and achieving excellence in this area. The various committees facilitate the day-to-day research activities of university members and provide various forms of support to those members. At the same time, there is high level of communication between planning, management and research activities in the university. Unlike the other two cases, the spirit of the university's policy on research is fully supported by the commitment of resources and political will to the actual research activities of staff. There is immense commitment to research and publications by academic staff because of the support provided by the university. In this sense, Wits is significantly different from its two counterpart universities in that there is hardly any discernible gap between its research quality assurance policy and the actual practice on the ground.

The discussion above on the structures that were created in order to give effect to the research policy of the university shows that research is big business at Wits, and its quality management is a key element enhancing research development. Unlike the other two case institutions, there is a tremendous amount of investment in the planning of research and this has made it possible for the institution to address both national and international research priorities. The commitment of such levels of resources has in itself been one of the most significant quality assurance measures enhancing excellence in research in the university. As highlighted earlier, the establishment of the Research Office, with one of its functions as mobilising and managing research resources, is a unique quality assurance innovation that has contributed greatly to enhancing research capacity in the university. In 2004, the

university attracted non-statutory grant income of the tune of R262.4 million, in addition to the statutory research funding of R29.4 million.[538] The non-statutory income is exclusive of the Wits Health Consortium (WHC) turnover of "approximately R217 million (excluding drug trials)".[539] Thus, funding levels of research activity at Wits are an important measure that helps create an enabling climate for a vibrant research culture and attract reputable international research academics. Management of such colossal sums of money has also necessitated the establishment of an office that is dedicated to research issues.

An important aspect of quality assuring research at Wits is the benchmarking of the activities using Department of Education as well as international standards. The university takes pride in ranking 301- 400 in the Shanghai ranking of the Top 500 World Universities, and 301 of the 575 universities and colleges in the Champions League (CEST Rankings).[540] Locally, Wits ranks second to the University of Cape Town in the Shanghai rankings, while the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the University of Pretoria rank third and fourth respectively.[541] Apart from these high rankings of the institution, there are also prominent individual scholars who are highly rated both internationally and locally. The university boasts 12 A-rated scientists, 55 B-rated scientists, and 3 P-rated scientists, the latter comprising one white male, one black male and one black female. Wits has the fourth highest number of rated scientists (143) and the second highest number of A-rated scientists in the country.[542]

In line with its tradition of peer reviewing its practice, most research at Wits is subjected to peer review at multiple stages of its development, from proposal to publication. This happens for both staff and student research. As the Audit Report confirms,

> At the proposal stage, there is typically a process of peer review through, for example, the functioning of the various Faculty Research Committees, the

[538] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report, (2006:211)

[539] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report, (2006:211)

[540] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report, (2006:211)

[541] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report, (2006:211)

[542] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report, (2006:225)

> URC's 'Fellowships Committee', Faculty Higher Degrees Committees, systems of formalised staff and student seminars, and many others.[543]

In postgraduate research, every proposal is subjected to scrutiny by several academics at school level, mostly through organised research seminars. Over and above this, they are usually also given to at least two other researchers for further review, one of whom is outside the country. Thus, stringent measures are taken to ensure that any proposed research does not commence before it is fully ascertained that it meets university quality requirements. There is also external examination of completed research reports, and this gives international flavour to the research activities of postgraduate students in the university.

Thus, quality assurance at the University of the Witwatersrand is embedded in the procedures that are followed in the conduct of research in the entire university. The Audit Report aptly captures some of these procedures that form the hallmark of quality assurance in research:

> Every proposal, whether emanating from staff or students, which requires financial support by the faculty or other bodies in the University is evaluated - either by a colleague, the Head of School, the research representative, a committee, the Dean or other grouping of peers. In addition, each faculty has a research adviser whose task it is to facilitate research-related activities through the structures. Specifically, applications for NRF [National Research Foundation] grants are signed off by both the Head of School and by the Dean of the Faculty. Sign-off on applications must be obtained from a senior person from the same or similar disciplinary area as the applicant. All proposals submitted via either the Research Office or Faculty research structures are evaluated by two or three people.[544]

Another important innovative way through which Wits has enhanced its research capacity is the establishment of research entities that are the research "flagship" of the university. These research-based entities consist of the following:

- Two NRF/DST of Excellence: one in Strong Materials and another in Biomedical Tuberculosis Research.
- One Department of Trade and Industry-funded Centre of Excellence in Aerospace which provides a unique opportunity for collaboration between the aerospace industry and academia.

[543] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report, (2006:225)

[544] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report, (2006:226)

- Research institutes (e.g. Wits Social and Economic Research, Economic Geology Research).
- Twenty-three research units (e.g. Cancer Epidemiology Research, Hepatitis B Research).
- Thirteen research groups (e.g. Materials and Process Synthesis, Brain Function Research).[545]

These centres of excellence also house some internationally sought-after scholars who continue to give the university an internationally competitive edge. This aspect of expertise is very critical as it also provides junior scholars with appropriate mentorship in the area of research, an important aspect that was discovered to be lacking at the University of Zimbabwe. Indeed, experience and expertise are important prerequisites for achieving high levels of scholarship in research. This aspect is coupled with the national as well as the institution's policy framework on the benefits associated with research and publication. Unlike in the other two institutions, where neither staff as individuals nor the institution benefit financially from research and publications, the Wits situation is very different. The university stands to benefits quite significantly, financially, from the Department of Education through its publications; in fact, the more publications it realises the more it earns through research. At institutional level, any publication realised in accredited journals earns the publisher a certain percentage of what the Department of Education pays for that publication. So the arrangement acts as an incentive for individuals as well as for the institution to strive to maximise high-quality research publications. In a way, this arrangement is a positive way of quality assuring the research activities of universities at national level, an arrangement that is lacking in the other two institutions. Wits is also different from the other two institutions in that the academic year is planned in such a way that staff have short research breaks that allow them space for focusing on research and writing. This arrangement acts as an additional incentive for academic staff to research and publish.

Quality research at Wits is also enhanced by a well-developed infrastructure that promotes research activity among staff and students. Apart from sound funding levels, there are state-of-the-art library and computer facilities, laboratories and scientific equipment. The following are a few illustrations of how much investment the

[545] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report, (2006: 220-221)

university has made towards ensuring quality research through state-of-the-art equipment:

> Over 25 600 full-text electronic journal titles, 100 databases and a growing collection of e-books, substantially in support of research activities, are accessible across all campuses through the Library website.[546]
>
> The School of Mining Engineering has a 3000kN (300 ton) servo controlled "stiff" rock testing machine. It is the only one in the Southern Hemisphere and the only one at a University worldwide. The machine is useful for determining the post-failure characteristics of materials.[547]
>
> The School of Pathology houses several Automated DNA analysers including the ABI3130; a dHPLC Transgenomic WAVE machine for the analysis of DNA heteroduplexes, the first Pyrosequencer in the country, which allows rapid sequencing of short DNA sequences and SNP typing for genome projects, a microarray reader and Several Lightcyclers for real time PCR analysis.[548]

The scenario painted by the few illustrations above shows significant departure of not only planning and commitment to research excellence from the University of Botswana and the University of Zimbabwe, but also of the research training experiences students go through at Wits. As the report states, the preservation and promotion of quality in general are protected by both tangible and intangible aspects of life at the University of the Witwatersrand.[549] The enabling policy framework of the institution, the dedicated research committees at the various levels, and the substantial investments made in establishing supportive research infrastructure have resulted in the establishment of an extremely robust research culture in the university, to a point where the institution has been able to attract and retain internationally reputable researchers in a variety of academic disciplines. According to the University Audit Report, "for the past 15 years, Wits has had no less than 8 and up to 13 A-rated researchers at any one given time".[550] As the report further indicates, many of the academic researchers in the institution participate in public research bodies and undertake editorial and scientific consulting activities in the country and abroad.[551]

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[546] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report, (2006:222)

[547] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report, (2006:224)

[548] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report, (2006:223)

[549] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report, (2006:225)

[550] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report, (2006:210)

[551] Wits HEQC Quality Audit Self-Evaluation Report, (2006:219)

Quality assurance of research is embedded in the various structures and day-to-day research activities of university members at various levels. "Through the activities of the research-focused committee structures at university, faculty, school, and discipline level as well as within research units and other multidisciplinary groupings, the various processes of quality control cut across the many levels at which research takes place all times"[552]

An interesting aspect to note regarding quality assurance practices and processes in the three institutions, as hinted earlier in this chapter, is that the actual practices are very similar from institution to institution. There are common approaches to quality assuring teaching and learning activities, programme development and student assessment processes. What is important to note, however, is that the quality of the actual processes and the value of the outcomes of those processes are very different among the three institutions. This is mainly because of the nature of the personnel that is involved in those processes, and the amount of resources committed to supporting the quality assurance processes. Clearly, where a committee of professors with many years of experience in university teaching, course development, and local and external examining meets to vet student assessment or to review newly developed academic programmes, better quality outputs are realised than where inexperienced assistant lecturers without even a master's degree meet to undertake similar processes. The value of the quality assurance activities of institutions lies heavily in the quality of the expertise that is invested in it. It was apparent during this study that this is one of the major contextual factors differentiating quality assurance implementation from institution to institution. While in well-staffed and adequately equipped institutions the quality assurance processes add value to practice, in poorly staffed and under-resourced institutions the same processes are merely symbolic.

There is a sense in which education can be viewed as a production process with inputs, processes and outputs that are definable and quantifiable. In this sense, it is possible to manipulate the various input and process variables of a system in order to yield particular desired outputs. Teaching and research are critical process aspects of educational operations of university systems that have various facets that are quality

[552] Wits Research Report, (2006:227)

assured differently in the three case institutions. The same process aspects are also manipulated differently in the three institutions; hence the different levels of scholarship in them.

8.6 Conclusion

This chapter showed that there are two major approaches through which quality assurance policies in the three universities are implemented. These approaches consist of internal as well as external processes. Internal quality assurance of teaching and learning, programme development and research is given effect through a system of university committee structures that operate at different levels within the universities. External forms of quality assuring the same core activities of the universities are mainly in the form of peer reviews from other institutions, professional organisations and national quality assurance agencies like the HEQC in South Africa.

While there are similarities in terms of the quality assurance practices and structures among the three universities, there are also striking differences when it comes to the rigour of the processes. At the University of the Witwatersrand, there is a distinct culture of rigorous implementation of quality assurance in all the aspects of university academic business through internal self-scrutiny that is supported by external peer reviews. In this sense, practice closely resembles policy. At the University of Botswana and the University of Zimbabwe, however, the role of external peer review is not very insignificant as a quality assurance measure. Quality assurance of the core activities of these two universities is primarily in-house, a situation that poses great challenges to the international reputation of the two institutions. Relying exclusively on internal forms of quality assurance poses even greater threats to quality delivery at UZ because of the current poor staffing conditions. In both institutions, there is great mismatch between the written quality assurance policies and the actual practices in the academic units. This study identifies the "quality gap", a manifestation of the contextual imperatives of the institutions, as the major threat to quality delivery in the two universities.

Chapter 9

CONCLUSION

9.1 Introduction

This study set out to establish the nature of quality assurance policies and practices at three universities in the SADC region – the University of Botswana, the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Zimbabwe. The question that informed the study is: **What is the nature of quality assurance policies and practices in selected universities in SADC countries and what are the factors that shape these policies?** In pursuing this question, the study explored the quality assurance policies that informed practice in the three selected universities, and the main factors that influenced both the development and implementation of the policies in the institutions. In doing so, it sought explanations on why quality assurance is better implemented in some institutions than in others.

9.2 Institutional trends

Viewed from the theoretical framework outlined in chapter 2 of this study, the three case institutions display striking differences in terms of their quality assurance systems. These differences are briefly summarised in terms of the purpose of the quality assurance system and the locus of power and control of the system. The purpose of institutional quality assurance depicts how much self-improvement a given quality assurance system enhances. Power and control show whether a quality assurance system is internal or external to an institution.

At the University of the Witwatersrand, the quality assurance system is clearly multi-purpose, serving an accountability function to an external state agency – the CHE as well as enhancing self-enlightenment through regular and systematic self-review processes. The accountability function enables external stakeholders to understand better what goes on in the institution, and self-enlightenment has great potential for enhancing institutional improvement. In terms of power and control, the Wits model

consists of a combination of internal control and external steering from the Council of Higher Education. This model is a reflection of the national policy of shared governance of higher education institutions as a way of improving the performance of universities. Although there is influence from outside in terms of standards and reporting procedures that must be met, the institution exercises reasonable degree of flexibility in terms of its quality assurance arrangements. Thus, there is shared power when it comes to quality assurance arrangements in the University.

Quality assurance arrangements at the University of Zimbabwe are very limited in terms of accountability to external stakeholders, and they are less enlightening of institutional processes to the world outside the University. In principle, they are meant to enlighten internal staff for purposes of self-improvement. Due to the lack of rigour in the processes, a recent development that has been caused by severe resource constraints, quality assurance systems in the University have significantly lost this self-improvement value. Thus lack of meaningful resource support has rendered the system insignificant in terms of both self-improvement and external enlightenment. The quality assurance processes are largely internal with very little external peer review. Unlike the Wits model, the locus of power and control of the quality assurance system is too internal and the processes are too subjective to be credible. Although the institution has the prerogative of defining its quality assurance policy and procedures, state support in terms of implementing such plans is insignificant. State institution relationships are in a state of instability and do not provide clear direction and purpose.

The University of Botswana has an internal quality assurance system that is devoid of any external accountability. The system was mooted from within the institution, for the clear purpose of enhancing institutional self-improvement. A healthy political environment thrives for the University to exercise freedom in terms of developing its own systems. The University of Botswana is an example of a case where the state steers from a distance and acts as a facilitator for the University to meet its national mandate. There is reasonable commitment of public funding of the institution although funding levels are outstripped by the ever-increasing enrollments. In terms of power and control, the University is fully in control of the quality assurance system. An important point to note is that whilst the quality assurance system is

wholly internal to the institution, some academic staff claim that more power and control of the system resides within university management than academic collegiality. This perception is clearly an indication of the complex nature of the notion of internal and external when it comes to quality assurance issues, and how this factor plays itself out in the different contexts.

9.3 Understanding the interface of context and policy in quality assurance: general outcome of the study

Overall, a powerful message made up of several claims has emerged from this study. First, the study reveals the complex nature of the internal-external dichotomy of quality assurance systems commonly discussed in the literature. Internal quality assurance systems are generally associated with institutional improvement and external systems are associated with compliance culture and accountability discourses. This study showed that quality assurance systems mooted and driven by institutional management are generally regarded as managerial and lack ownership by academic staff. Lack of policy ownership by academic staff has serious implications in terms policy implementation. Thus, internal quality assurance systems remain external to academic staff unless such staff is fully involved in the development of the systems. A key message running through this thesis is that in any given context, quality assurance is under girded by power relationships between and amongst the various stakeholders of an institution. The nature of such power relations has a direct bearing on the effectiveness of the quality assurance systems of an institution.

Second, understanding quality assurance systems of a university involves accounting for the contextual complexities that shape such systems. Simply engaging with institutional documents like quality assurance policies and institutional structures does not provide one with sufficient information on the dynamics of the quality arrangements of an institution; neither does it shed enough light on how best to improve the system. The perceptions of the various actors within a university of the quality assurance systems therein, the subtle relationships that exist between the university and external stakeholders like national quality assurance agencies are significant factors that shape quality assurance systems of institutions. Understanding such factors is most revealing in terms of existing constraints and opportunities for

improvement. Interacting and dialoguing with institutional stakeholders in their context is highly informative of the deep-seated nuances of the quality assurance system of an institution. Quality assurance systems of an institution cannot be fully understood outside context, and efforts at improving such systems should take full cognisance of the context. While this may sound an obvious observation, it is of significant importance in a domain that is dominated by technicism in studies concerning quality assurance where contextual variations tend to be overlooked (e.g. the specific ways governments articulate with institutions, national and institutional political environments, the role of power and power relations, and the nature and role of stakeholders).

Third, as countries adopt a more outward –looking stance and their higher education systems become more porous to outside influence, quality and quality assurance issues are becoming increasingly regional (and international) through, for example, alignment of policies, standardization of structures and procedures, and harmonisation of qualifications. It is important for universities in Southern Africa (and indeed in other developing contexts) to draw from regional and international practices in developing their quality assurance systems but in the process of doing so, they should give priority to contextual factors in order to make the systems relevant and appropriate. Adopting quality assurance policies that are in line with regional trends and affiliating to regional and international quality assurance agencies should augment rather than replace efforts at addressing contextual imperatives.

Fourth, state facilitation and not state interference is a key factor affecting the ability of institutions to develop and maintain robust quality assurance systems. By virtue of their staff that have expertise in their disciplines and cherish their freedom of practice, universities operate better where they exercise autonomy in discharging their academic project. Whilst the state, as the chief mediator of societal interests in higher education, lays down broad national policy frameworks within which institutions operate, and steer the system so as to keep it in line with broad national development goals, caution should be taken to avoid any form of state control and state interference that infringes with institutional autonomy.

The fifth point is that the way institutional quality assurance policies are developed has bearing on how they are implemented. The perceptions of academic staff of the quality assurance arrangements of an institution are a significant factor influencing policy implementation in an institution. The extent to which staff is involved in the policy process, their level of ownership of the policies, and the ability of the processes to take into account issues of context are key factors affecting the success of institutional quality assurance policies.

Lastly, an important point to note is that investing in the development of sound quality assurance policies is necessary but not sufficient to enhance institutional quality. Good policies need to be supported by a sound resource base if they are to yield the desired effects. The existence of sound and relevant quality assurance policies, the deployment of reasonable levels of resources towards supporting policy implementation, and the systematic monitoring of an institution's progress towards narrowing the gap between policy and practice are key factors explaining why quality differs from institution to institution.

Key theoretical insights emerge from the messages outlined above, and these are highlighted in the following section.

9.4 Theoretical insights

There are important insights that emerge from this study which have particular significance to quality assurance in universities in the Southern African region. The first is that quality assurance should not ignore the fact that countries went through particular colonial experiences that shaped educational values and practices of those countries. The development of effective and relevant quality assurance systems cannot negate the historical legacies of an institution. Whilst in some instances those legacies are an asset, in others they constrain the ability of an institution to transform its quality assurance arrangements in a way that enhances self-improvement. This is typical of developing universities. For instance, whilst most universities in sub-Saharan Africa have to address issues of redress, social transformation and accountability, they struggle to maintain high levels of scholarship that can give them international competitiveness. There is a tension that exists between the redress

project which entails enrolling greater numbers of learners from disadvantaged social groups of society and the aspired high standards of scholarship that are upheld by the quality assurance policies of the universities. In the majority of these countries, colonialism still remains a factor in their efforts to transform and facilitate the evolution of sound quality assurance systems in their fast-expanding higher education systems. It has become evident through this study that understanding quality assurance practices in these institutions entails taking into full account their specific histories and cultures. This point is particularly fundamental when it comes to the role international experts should play in the development of quality assurance policies of these institutions. Critical to these legacies is the specific way individual institutions articulate with the state and the government, as well as with the civil society.

State coordination and steering

It emerged in this study that states forge different forms of relationships with universities. This is interestingly so even in countries that share relatively common historical legacies and development needs, as is the case in most Southern African countries. The way states position themselves in relation to universities determines the amount of autonomy institutions enjoy in determining their transformation policies. Where the state steers from a distance institutions enjoy sufficient autonomy to shape their own quality assurance policies without being constrained. In such instances the nature of state-institution relationship is very enabling in terms of the development and implementation of quality assurance arrangements in the university. Where the state interferes with university business institutional autonomy is compromised and quality assurance policies assume more accountability than epistemic role. Thus, the nature of state-university relationship prevailing in a given context is one of the major factors influencing the ability of an institution to develop and implement effective quality assurance policy.

In the studied cases, the impact of state-university relationships was very distinct and this varied from institution to institution. In the case of Wits, the facilitative role of the state was evidenced through guiding national policy as well as through institutional support in terms of capacity building in quality assurance. Within the broad national guidelines, the University had scope for exercising much flexibility in terms of developing its own quality assurance arrangements. This situation was very different

from the University of Zimbabwe where no such policy guiding frameworks are provided, let alone the support the institution required in implementing its quality assurance policy. The relationship between the state and the University is rather messy and confusing. At the University of Botswana, the state steered from a distance and gave reasonable room for institutional autonomy in so far as quality assurance is concerned. State steering mechanisms included, for example, funding university expansion programmes, providing bursaries for students and encouraging expansion in student enrollments. Under these conditions the University was able to develop its own internal quality assurance arrangements without and form of interference from the state.

The role of power relations

An important dimension in understanding the nature and dynamics of quality assurance processes is the consideration of power relationships that mediate these processes. As highlighted in the section on messages above, quality assurance is an activity that is under girded by power tensions between academic staff and management within the university, and between the university and external quality assurance agencies at national level. As a result of such tensions, the issue of relevance and appropriateness of quality assurance arrangements of an institution becomes a moot point. These tensions arise mainly from the manner in which institutional quality assurance policies are developed. The balance of power between the university and outside stakeholders as well as between university management and academics is a critical factor influencing the effectiveness of quality assurance policy implementation in universities. The epistemological implication of this revelation is that in our quest to understand the nature of quality assurance systems today and to seek ways of improving them, we need first and foremost to understand the nature of power relationships between and amongst the various people with a stake in the higher education system.

Prevalence of managerialism at the expense of collegiality

Related to the above point is the role of the collegiality in the development of institutional quality assurance policies, and the tensions that exist between this academic community and university management regarding institutional quality assurance arrangements. The collegiality is a peculiar academic community that is

committed to a particular way of producing and advancing knowledge, and that holds certain perceptions of how learning should operate. Put differently, it is a community that is guided by the values and principles of academic freedom, freedom of expression, and civil liberties. These values and principles occupy the centre of their modus operandi. This is quite in contrast to a managerialistic environment where bureaucratic and almost dictatorial principles dominate academic work for the sake of efficiency and performativity. The different value positions of the two camps constrain effective implementation of quality assurance polices in institutions. This tension was conspicuous at the Universities of Botswana and Zimbabwe, where academic staff generally felt that quality assurance reforms were driven by management, and did not necessarily meet the specific needs of teaching departments and units. The situation was however slightly different at Wits where academic staff felt that quality assurance reforms involved staff in teaching units, through a much organised system of committees. There was however, the general feeling that although the university was developing its own systems, it was responding to the requirements of the CHE.

The quest for institutional responsiveness and competitiveness

Changes in the higher education market have forced universities to re-visit their quality assurance systems. There are several reasons why quality assurance has occupied centre stage as institutions respond to these environmental challenges at national, regional as well as at global level. The first reason is that there is increasing pressure on institutions to be accountable to their stakeholders in terms of the funds (public or private) they receive. Concern for quality ensures accountability of funds utilised and informs stakeholders about taking appropriate decisions. Students, parents and sponsoring agencies as customers of higher education institutions are now highly conscious of their rights and demand value for their money and time spent. Developing explicit quality assurance systems is the only way universities can inform their customers of the credibility of the services they offer. Whilst traditionally quality assurance in universities has been driven by epistemic values, there is an emerging trend where the development of quality assurance systems in universities is increasingly being driven by a market rationale.

The second reason is that universities are responding to changes in the global higher education market where competition among educational institutions for students and funds is on the increase. With globalization and the GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services), the higher education environment will be seized by increased competition; and institutions that are able to demonstrate that they offer quality stand to enjoy a competitive edge.

The third reason is that as resources become scarcer and enrollments grow, greater efficiency is expected on the part of universities. This calls for more careful planning and steering of such institutions if they are to meet broader social and economic development goals. Thus, in the developing world, the university has become an integral part of the national development project and key stakeholders like the state and the business community want to have a stake in its affairs. Institutional audits and programme evaluations have become prevalent in universities, and these steering mechanisms require explicit policies that provide a basis for such evaluations. Institutions therefore need to have quality assurance policies that define their quality goals and how they intend to achieve those goals. In this sense, quality assurance policies in universities are developed as mere managerial tools.

From common-sense to policy driven practice

There is a general shift in the quality assurance policies that are adopted by the case universities; from traditionally implicit and common-sense practices to more explicit practices that have clear standards and norms, explicit guidelines and criteria, and well laid out procedures that involve stakeholders external to the university. This shift shows movement in higher education institutions from minimum specification to greater specification in terms of quality assurance. Although institutions had some quality assurance systems in place, they were implemented in somewhat ad hoc fashion, and often in uncoordinated manner. In some instances, these practices varied from faculty to faculty within an institution and there was very little accountability on the part of the institution as a whole. The current shift has made quality assurance a more objective and explicit exercise on the basis of which universities can be evaluated. This trend was observed at all the three case universities used in this study, with Wits and University of Botswana having explicit policies that were already being

implemented. The University of Zimbabwe had also started internal consultations on the development of an explicit quality assurance policy.

Stakeholder participation and consultation

The changing social, political, and policy environment in the region (and indeed globally) resulted in increasing stakeholder involvement and intrusion in university business. This demanded new institutional modus operandi which entails more participation of relevant stakeholders, more inclusive practices and consultative approaches in the running of universities. This study highlighted that the involvement of stakeholders in the development and operationalisation of quality assurance systems of institutions has both facilitative as well as constraining effects, depending on the context. The significance of the emerging multistakeholder university lies in the need for institutions to mediate the interests and needs of the increasing diversity of its client system. Under these circumstances, issues of quality assurance become very elusive as they are negotiated and re-negotiated within the institutions. As much as there may be consultation in the development of quality assurance arrangements of an institution, consensus can hardly be achieved in terms of the best policy options to adopt.

Local vis-à-vis global and regional concerns

While quality assurance policies of higher education institutions are influenced by local imperatives, they are also heavily sensitive to regional dictates. This is a direct result of the integration of the regional higher education market that makes it imperative for institutions to align their curricula and their quality assurance systems with regional norms. In Southern Africa for instance, an emerging regional higher education space is being forged by regional organisations like SADC, DEASA and SARUA. Such regional bodies are promoting harmonisation of higher education systems through the formation of national quality assurance systems that affiliate to a regional quality assurance body. The movement of staff and students, harmonisation of curricula in order to facilitate credit transfer, and monitoring of institutional quality arrangements by a regional body are factors that are significantly shaping the quality assurance systems of regional institutions. Quality assurance in higher education is increasingly becoming a regional rather than a national project.

The question of resources

Lastly, there is a dialectic relationship that exists between the economy of a country and the effective functioning of a university system. Universities that operate in favourable economic conditions perform better and support quality assurance systems better than those that operate in distressed economies. At the same time, well-functioning university systems are capable of supporting the economy better by providing the requisite human resource skills and research-based innovations that enhance productivity. Quality assurance can only take effect where it is accorded the right resources, and where staff feel motivated to invest their full effort in their academic work. It was clear that although there were resource constraints, there was reasonable funding of students at Wits and the University of Botswana. There is motivation for the Wits academic staff to maximise research and publications through a national research grant scheme. Both institutions fund staff to attend international conferences and to go on sabbatical and contact visits. These activities are fundamental in terms of developing the quality of academic staff and in raising the morale of staff. At the time of the study, staff at the University of Zimbabwe had no funding for research and for sabbatical and contact visits. Very few academic staff had access to computers and internet in their offices. Most of the qualified and experienced staff had left and there was low morale amongst the few who had remained. It is very difficult to uphold quality under such conditions.

The insights that emerged from this study point at significant ways on how universities in the Southern African region can enhance the quality of their delivery. The following paragraphs highlight some of the hints institutions might want to consider as they try to enhance their quality assurance systems.

9.5 Towards more effective quality assurance models

There are some important lessons that can be drawn from this study. One of these relates to the involvement of stakeholders, especially the state in the quality assurance activities of universities. Whilst this is healthy practice in terms of maximising transparency and making institutions more accountable, balance should be struck between facilitative steering and constraining interference. Institutions should be

provided with broad frameworks within which they can exercise freedom to moot their transformation strategies.

Quality assurance policy consensus should take into account contextual factors. Institutions should make realistic choices on what is desirable and what is possible, and such choices should be informed by their contextual specificities – their resources, student enrolments, demand and supply issues and their social expectations. The exchanging of ideas and engaging of international consultants by institutions in the development of institutional quality assurance systems shows the extent to which developing institutions value this existing resource. While this is a huge advantage to the developing universities, reliance on international expertise should not be done to the detriment of local staff and local contexts. It is necessary for international experts to work with local staff in developing appropriate and customised quality assurance systems that address local problems and that maximise ownership of the policies by local staff. Sound quality assurance systems in developing institutions where resources are inadequate and capacity is limited should be developed organically, taking into account where the institution is, setting appropriate standards to be attained, and planning for continuous development.

While performativity is here to stay, and in fact is an important value given the legacy of inertia, passivity, corruption, and somewhat anarchic practices in certain departments of universities, it has to be pursued without losing sight of the nature of the university as an institution concerned with the production of knowledge and the complex nature of research and academic work. Performativity applied in a mechanist way can be a constraining rather than an enabling factor.

Given the nature of academic work, academics and lecturers should occupy a central stage in quality assurance. The academic staff is best positioned for the development of norms, standards of performance, evaluation criteria, and for defining suitable procedures and practices for driving the actual quality assurance processes. This study demonstrated that where this has not happened, quality assurance systems have not impacted on the day –to-day practices of staff.

Strategic decisions need to be taken in order to balance political expedience with the academic/epistemic priorities of institutions, particularly in universities in post-colonial developing contexts where issues of redress take centre stage in matters of societal development. Preoccupation with redress results in either too many or under-prepared students being enrolled in university programmes. This scenario leads to overstretching available resources and poor student throughputs, aspects that compromise quality performance of institutions. While they have a social contract with society, it is essential that governments mediate societal interests in higher education in such a way that those who access that form of education experience quality; high quality for a few is better than no quality for many.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire for academic staff

University of the Witwatersrand, School of Education

Dear sir/madam 11 April 2005

My name is Ephraim Mhlanga and I am a Ph.D. student in the School of Education, University of the Witwatersrand. I am doing my research on quality assurance policies and practices in selected university institutions in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region and University of ----- is one of them. I would like to request your participation in the study.

This questionnaire is targeted at university faculty and is meant to collect data that will be used purely for my Ph.D. study purposes. Your responses will therefore be treated with utmost confidentiality. The respondents are kindly requested to respond to all questions and as honestly as humanly possible in order to enable the researcher to draw the most accurate conclusions on quality assurance issues in the university. The survey will also be followed up by interviews that will include respondents other than those targeted by this instrument. It may however be more informative following up certain responses given in this survey by interviewing the same respondents. Please note that you are also free to send any other relevant information or ideas you may have on quality assurance issues at your university through my contact details provided below.

A copy of the thesis report will be sent to your university after the thesis is completed and examined. Your cooperation and support in this study will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for participating in the study.

Ephraim Mhlanga

Email: muhlangae@avu.org Tel: 027 (011) 717 3022

Quality assurance policies and practices in university institutions in SADC countries

Questionnaire for academic staff

A. Basic demographic data

A	Agriculture	❍
B	Arts	❍
C	Education	❍
D	Engineering	❍
E	Law	❍
F	Science	❍
G	Other (Please specify)	

1. What is the name of your faculty? (Tick in the appropriate circle below)

2. Please indicate your sex by ticking in the relevant box.

A. Female ☐ B. Male ☐

3. Please indicate your age in the space below.

A	Under 20 years	❍
B	20 to 29	❍
C	30 to 39	❍
D	40 to 49	❍
E	50 to 59	❍
F	60 +	❍

4. What is your employment status?

A. Permanent ☐ B. Temporary ☐ C. Full time ☐ D. Part time ☐

5. Indicate your highest academic qualifications by ticking in the relevant circle below.

A	Bachelor's degree	❍
B	Honors degree	❍
C	Master's degree	❍
D	Doctoral degree	❍
E	Other (please specify)	----------

6. Where was this qualification obtained?

A	Botswana	❍
B	SADC Countries	❍
C	Rest of Africa (other than SADC countries)	❍
D	Europe	❍
E	North America	❍
F	Central and South America and Caribbean	❍
G	Asia	❍
H	Australia and New Zealand	❍
I	Other (Please specify)	----------

7. What position do you hold in the university?

A	Assistant tutor	❍
B	Tutor	❍
C	Senior tutor	❍
D	Lecturer	❍
E	Senior lecturer	❍
F	Principal lecturer	❍
G	Associate Professor	❍
H	Professor	❍
I	Other (specify)	❍

8. Where were you born?

A	Botswana	❍
B	SADC Countries	❍
C	Rest of Africa (other than SADC countries)	❍
D	Europe	❍
E	North America	❍
F	Central and South America and Caribbean	❍
G	Asia	❍
H	Australia and New Zealand	❍
I	Other (Please specify)	----------

9. For how long have you been teaching in a university other than the current one?

A	0-4 years	❍
B	5-9 years	❍
C	10-14 years	❍
D	15-19 years	❍
E	20-24 years	❍
F	25+ years	❍

10. For how long have you been teaching in your current university?

A	0 –4 years	❍
B	5-9 years	❍
C	10-14 years	❍
D	15-19 years	❍
E	20-24 years	❍
F	25 + years	❍

B. Quality assurance policies and practices

11. Select and rank three of your core duties in your current job. (1 denoting the most important and 3 the least)

		1	2	3
A	Teaching	❍	❍	❍
B	Research and publication	❍	❍	❍
C	Community service	❍	❍	❍
D	Materials development	❍	❍	❍
E	Administration	❍	❍	❍
F	Course coordination	❍	❍	❍
G	Other (Please specify)----------			

12. Do you have any mechanism of assuring quality in each of these three duties?

		Yes	No
A	Teaching	❍	❍
B	Research and publication	❍	❍
C	Community service	❍	❍
D	Materials development	❍	❍
E	Administration	❍	❍
F	Course coordination	❍	❍
G	Other (Please specify)----------		

13. Please indicate your name in the space provided below. (This information is only needed for subsequent follow-up of question 11 through interviews and is optional.)

Respondent's name	----------

14. What is the average size of your postgraduate classes?

A	0 to 10 students	❍
B	11 to 20 students	❍
C	21 to 30 students	❍

D	31 to 40 students	❍
E	41 to 50 students	❍
F	51 + students	❍

15. What is the average size of your undergraduate classes?

A	0 to 24 students	❍
B	25 to 49 students	❍
C	50 to 74 students	❍
D	75 to 99 students	❍
E	100 to 124 students	❍
F	125 to149 students	❍
G	150 to 174 students	❍
H	175 to 199 students	❍
I	200 + students	❍

16. How many postgraduate students do you supervise for research at a given time?

		0 students	1-5 students	6-10 students	11-15 students	16-20 students	21+ students
A	At Honors level						
B	At Master's level						
C	At Ph.D. level						

17. How many hours per week do you teach?

A	0 hours	❍
B	1-5 hours	❍
C	6-10 hours	❍
D	11-15 hours	❍
E	16- 20 hours	❍
F	21 + hours	❍

18. In your own view are these teaching hours appropriate for you to be able to do other duties effectively?

A. No ☐ B. Yes ☐

19. How much time per week do you set aside for private consultation with your students?

A	0 hours	❍
B	1-4 hours	❍
C	5- 9 hours	❍

D	10-14 hours	❍
E	15+ hours	❍

20. How many hours per week do you spend on research?

A	0 hours	❍
B	1-4 hours	❍
C	5-9 hours	❍
D	10-14 hours	❍
E	15 + hours	❍
F	Not stipulated	❍
G	Not sure	❍

21. Does the university give any incentives to faculty for research output?

A. Yes ☐ B. No ☐

22. If so, please tick in the relevant circle to show the type of incentives given. (You may tick more than one option)

A	Money rewards	❍
B	Promotional recognition	❍
C	Less teaching hours and more time for research	❍
D	More research funds	❍
E	Conference grants	❍
F	Other (Please specify)----------	❍

23. In your view, are these incentives effective enough to encourage research and publication output by faculty?

A. Yes ☐ B. No ☐

24. How many publications in refereed journals have you produced in the past five years?

A	0 articles	❍
B	1-4 articles	❍
C	5-9 articles	❍
D	10-14 articles	❍
E	15 + articles	❍

25. In the last 5 years have you been involved in any academic collaborative activities with colleagues at a foreign institution?

A. Yes ☐ B. No ☐

26. If your response is “yes” to item 26 above, please indicate the types of collaborative activities you have pursued. (Check all that apply)

A	Collaborative research	❍
B	Collaborative teaching	❍
C	Curriculum development	❍
D	Materials development	❍
E	Joint publication	❍
F	Joint supervision of post-graduate students	❍

27. In your view do these collaborative activities help improve your performance?

		Yes	No
A	Collaborative research	❍	❍
B	Collaborative teaching	❍	❍
C	Curriculum development	❍	❍
D	Materials development	❍	❍
E	Joint publication	❍	❍
F	Joint supervision of post-graduate students	❍	❍

28. Is there any specific policy you follow in assuring quality in the following activities?

		Yes	No
A	Programme development		
B	Student assessment		
C	Teaching		
D	Research		

29. If yes, where does the policy come from? (You may tick more than one response)

A	Government	❍
B	National state agency	❍
C	Professional organization	❍
D	Within the university	❍
E	Within my faculty/ school	❍
F	Other sources (Please specify) ----------	

30. Do you participate in the development of quality assurance policy for the university?

Yes ☐ No ☐

31. How often have you been involved in quality assurance policy development at your institution?

A	Very much involved	❍
B	Quite involved	❍
C	Involved a little	❍
D	Rarely involved	❍
E	Never involved at all	❍

32. In your view, how effective is university policy in enhancing quality in the following activities?

		Very effective	Effective	Not effective
A	Teaching			
B	Student assessment			
C	Research			

33. If not effective, suggest any reason why they are ineffective.

A	No adequate resources to support them	❍
B	Policies not well understood by staff	❍
C	Policies too managerialistic	❍
D	Policies not well supported by staff	❍
E	Policies involve too much paper work	❍
F	Other (Specify) ----------	

34. What do you think can help further improve the quality of teaching and learning in your institution?
(You may tick more than one response)

A	Reducing teaching load for staff	❍
B	Introducing performance based incentives for staff	❍
C	Reducing class sizes	❍
D	Improving teaching resources	❍
E	Other (Please specify) ----------	

35. In your opinion, who should monitor quality in your university? (Rank your options, with 1 denoting the most appropriate authority for monitoring)

A	The government	❍
B	Quality assurance agencies independent of government	❍
C	The university (e.g. Deputy Vice Chancellor-Academic)	❍
D	Academic staff	❍
E	Outside stakeholders (like professional organizations)	❍
F	Other (please specify)	❍

Thank you for responding to this questionnaire

Appendix 2: Interview schedule - university office responsible for quality assurance.

1. What policy does the institution have on assuring quality in:
    i. Academic programme development?
    ii. Teaching and student support?
    iii. Student learning and assessment?
    iv. Research output by faculty?
2. Who develops institutional policy on quality assurance?
3. What is the official position of government on quality assurance by the university?
4. Do academic staff members know the official position and how do they do so?
5. Is the university required to make any form of reporting to the
    i. Government?
    ii. Professional bodies?
    iii. National/ Regional/ international quality assurance agency?
6. How often does the university get a complete institutional review?
7. Who initiates it and who is responsible for undertaking the review?
8. What guides bench-marking in the university?
9. How is staff involved in developing quality assurance policies and practices in the university?
10. What mechanisms are in place to ensure that faculty meets institutional requirements in terms of performance?
11. Is there any kind of support offered to faculty in order to ensure their systematic development?
12. How much does the institution spend, on average, on:
    i. supporting staff on research?
    ii. staff development
13. What is the university's policy on faculty recruitment? (minimum academic/professional requirements, employment conditions- contract, permanent, temporary until tenured)
14. What strategies does the institution use to recruit, attract professorial staff?
15. How does the university promote sound scholarship by faculty?
16. How many publications has the institution realized over the last year?

17. How many academic staff has been elevated to professorship over the last two years?
18. Are there any collaborative linkages the university has with:
    i. other local organizations?
    ii. regional organizations?
    iii. international organizations?
19. What incentives are offered to faculty in order to retain them?
20. Over the last year, how many faculty:
    i. have you lost?
    ii. have you recruited?
21. What are the categories of these faculty members?
    i. Professors
    ii. Associate professors
    iii. Senior lecturers
    iv. lecturers
    v. senior tutors
    vi. tutors
    vii. assistant tutors
22. What is the official university policy on staff/student ratios?
23. Is the university accountable to any external authority on quality assurance?

Appendix 3: Interview schedule - academic staff

1. If I may start by finding out if you have any policy that you follow in quality assuring teaching and learning in your school.

2. Who developed that policy?

3. Is there any institutional policy on quality assurance from which you draw in developing your school policy?

4. What is the understanding of quality that you go by as a school?

5. So who decides on quality assuring processes like student assessment and even teaching and learning in the school?

6. As a school, how much participation do you have in the development of the institution-wide quality assurance policy?

7. How about ordinary members of staff, how much participation did they have in the development of the policy?

8. Do you have a school position on student/staff ratios and staff teaching load?

9. Does the university have a policy on things like student/staff ratios and teaching loads?
10. What's your opinion on student throughput rates in the school?

11. What role does the school play in the recruitment of new staff that is appointed to the school?
12. Would you also like to comment on the research output of your school?

13. What kind of staff support do you get to enhance the research skills of staff?

14. Apart from that, are there other incentives for research?

15. How do you quality assure program development?
16. .
17. Would you consider the new quality assurance policy in the university internal or external?
18. Are staff members receptive of the policy, do they see any value that it adds to their practice?
19. Are there any constraints that you experience in trying to achieve your quality benchmarks in the school?

20. What is the average class size in the school?

21. How much influence do the professional organizations you made reference to earlier on influence your curriculum?

22. As a school do you have any collaborative linkages with other institutions within or outside the country?
23. Finally, do you have any suggestions as to how quality should be improved in your school or in the university as a whole?

END OF INTERVIEW

Appendix 4: Interview Sample

Institution	Designation of interviewee
University of the Witwatersrand	Head: Academic Planning and Development Office
	Faculty of Health Sciences Quality Assurance Representative
	Faculty of Humanities Quality Assurance Representative
	Faculty of Engineering Quality Assurance Representative
	Faculty of Commerce and Law Quality assurance Representative
	Faculty of Science Quality Assurance Representative
	Head of School of Human and Community Development
	Head of School of Media Studies
University of Zimbabwe	Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Science
	Dan of the Faculty of Social Sciences
	Dean of the Faculty of Arts
	Head of the Department of Anatomy and Physiology
	Head of the Department of Animal Science
	Head of the Department of Educational Administration
	Head of the Department of Curriculum and Arts Education
	Head of the Department of Geology
	Senior Lecturer- Department of Science Education
	Senior Lecturer – Department of Educational Administration
	Lecturer – Department of Educational Foundations
University of Botswana	Deputy Director for the Centre for Academic Development- Academic Programme Review
	Assistant Director for the Centre for Academic Development - Academic Programme Review
	Deputy Director for the Centre for Academic Development - Teaching and Learning
	Deputy Director for the Centre for Academic Development – Affiliated Institutions
	Dean of the Faculty of Humanities
	Faculty of Education Quality Assurance Coordinator
	Faculty of Engineering Quality Assurance Coordinator
	Faculty of Commerce and Law Quality Assurance Coordinator
	Faculty of Humanities Quality Assurance Coordinator
	Head of the Department of Nursing Science
	Head of the Department of Chemistry
	Head of the Department of Biological Sciences
	Professor in the Faculty of Engineering
	Professor in the Faculty of Education
	Professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences
	Lecturer in the Faculty of Commerce and Law
	Dean of Postgraduate Studies
	Director - Research and Publications