Internal quality assurance reviews: Challenges and processes – Walter Sisulu University’s Business, Management Sciences and Law Faculty

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Abstract
The Council for Higher Educations’ (CHE) Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) requires internal quality evaluations to be performed on the various programmes offered by the Faculty before visitation by the HEQC. This article examines some of the challenges and processes followed by six of the departments of Walter Sisulu University’s Faculty of Business, Management Sciences and Law utilising a case study approach. Challenges are identified and highlighted across the Faculty. Furthermore, examination of the processes followed and challenges encountered by the Department of Public Relations Management and Communication is utilised, whilst conducting an internal quality evaluation on the National Diploma: Public Relations Management. The article recommends a number of strategies that may be followed to smooth the process.

INTRODUCTION
South African Higher Education, having formed part of a society based on apartheid principles, has undergone a vigorous transformation, following the onset of democracy in 1994. Subsequently, ‘intense policy making and implementation activities’ (Luescher and Symes 2003, 6) have been taking place. The transformation process seeks to redress issues of inequities, distortions and imbalances of the past. In this regard the restructuring and transformation of Higher Educational Institutions (HEI’s) saw a reduction in the total number of institutions. Prior to 1994, universities were not subjected to any formal external quality assurance processes, unlike the technikons, who were accountable to the Certification Council for Technikon Education (SERTEC).
This is not to say that universities did not have their own internal quality assurance mechanisms. With the onset of the democratic era, and the review of Higher Education (HE) and their contribution to social and economic development being relevant to the needs of society, the Council of Higher Education (CHE) established the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) as a body regulating quality within HEIs.

Walter Sisulu University, as a South African HEI, is accountable in terms of the relevance of its programmes in meeting the demands of redressing societal inequities and imbalances as created by the apartheid era.

In this regard, the Walter Sisulu University’s Quality Management Directorate (QMD) set upon a strategy for the reviewing of programmes within all faculties, including the Faculty of Business, Management Sciences and Law. This article reports on the various responses by Schools/Departments within Faculty to this process. It also looks at the challenges experienced.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**Historical context**

Historically disadvantaged institutions have been constantly labelled as being second best to the historically advantaged institutions, and are frequently labelled as institutions of poor quality, in terms of programmes, staff and resources. These labels are perpetuated as institutions such as WSU are predominantly located in poverty-stricken environments.

In terms of its national mandate, the Department of Education has to ensure that all HEIs, regardless of status, meet the requirements for addressing the inequities and imbalances of the past. Part of this is to ensure that all HEIs offer relevant, quality services to society for the purposes of social, cultural, economic and political development. In order to fulfil this role, HEIs have to ensure that programme offerings have the ability to meet the requirements for facilitating development within a transforming society, including skills development in scarce skills areas, and to redress past inequalities. In doing this HEIs will serve the new social order and meet pressing national needs by responding to new realities and opportunities.

Central to ensuring the relevance of HEI offerings is the process of reviewing such offerings in terms of a quality assurance process as directed by various legislative processes.

The HEQC’s quality assurance framework and criteria are well-published and not re-reported in this article. In terms of the HEQC criteria, the quality management directorate (QMD) at the Walter Sisulu University embarked upon a process of educating and informing all departments within respective faculties about the criteria, thus establishing a platform for self-evaluation.
Quality and quality assurance in higher education

Various authors have argued that the term ‘quality in higher education’ cannot be limited to a singular interpretation (Harvey and Green 1993; Birnbuam 1994) and that it is dependent on, and may influence, the perspective and contexts in which it is being approached (Harvey and Green 1993; Green 1994; Brennan, De Vries and Williams 1997). These perspectives may be inclusive of various institutional stakeholders (including academics, students, industries and funders). Depending on the context in which quality is being evaluated, different aspects of quality may be of more pertinence than in other contexts, indicating that the concept of quality can never be viewed as static nor absolute (Mammen 2006, 641) but that it may vary accordingly. Mammen further proposes a definition of ‘quality in higher education’ within the context of his study, as ‘the capacity to respond actively to the needs of local contexts within South Africa, making effective and efficient use of the available resources to achieve pre-defined goals and purposes for which students are enrolled, and to enable students to acquire qualifications that conform to comparable national and international standards’ (2006, 642). This definition is relevant to that particular study, but may differ in other contexts and in terms of perspectives. Gouws and Waghid (2006, 753), purport that quality assurance is an attempt by ‘the state to deal with the “massification” of higher education’. Within the context of transformation, and as a means of meeting the national agenda of redressing past inequities, imbalances and distortions, there is a need for a diversity of courses and resources, to meet not only the needs of business and industry, but also to make a contribution to local, regional, national and international needs.

Herselman and Hay (2002, 240), argue that an integrated approach to quality assurance should be primarily internally driven, within an external quality assurance system. Furthermore, quality assurance should not be about compliance with expectations of quality audits and inspectorates, but should form an integral part of teaching and learning. Beyond this, quality assurance should also extend to public accountability and assist in directing institutional resources and planning processes (Van Damme 2000, 11). This reiterates quality both as an internal (institutional) and external phenomenon, as internal practices and processes are subjected to external reviews.

However, these views can be further extended to the national process of democratisation within South Africa. In her article on ‘Democratisation and quality assurance in South African higher education’, Symes (2006, 1), argues that quality assurance can best serve the national agenda only if ‘an inclusive and socially accountable understanding of “fitness for purpose” and “value for money” is achieved; only then is democracy served’. Part of her argument purports that quality assurance should not be limited to ‘rituals of verification’ but should incorporate co-production of quality in the core functions of teaching, learning, research and community service, as well as stakeholders’ involvement in improving fitness for purpose. This perspective
sees quality, although a diverse phenomenon, to perform a regulatory function, and to be all-inclusive, in order to best meet the national agenda.

It would also be wise to heed Higg’s perspective that education goes beyond economic considerations (2006). This cautions us against a myopic view in terms of quality and quality assurance, as a tool towards ensuring quality programmes so as only to serve the national agenda. It must always be borne in mind that education is more than acquiring knowledge and skills towards economic and social development, but in essence is a form of enhancement of the self and society, in terms of growing towards self-realisation and the betterment of society (Higgs 2006, 839).

**Process issues in quality assurance**

On an international scale within the African continent, Uys, Awases, Kamanzi, Kohi, Mtshali and Opare (2006, 6) described a process of establishing a quality review process for various nursing and midwifery schools in various African countries. Two schools, in Nigeria and Ghana respectively, reported not to have completed the internal review. Whilst no reason is given for the Ghanaian school not to have completed the review, the Nigerian school did not complete ‘due to unrest in Nigerian Universities’. In terms of this particular study, it should be realised that various Departments (Institutions) have their own internal problems that may contribute to the non-completion of an internal review. In the same manner, Fourie and Alt (2000, 116) indicate that contextual factors (such as mergers) should be taken into account when evaluating reasons for non-completion of the internal review process.

On a more local level, a study conducted at UNISA following an internal review of a distance education, Masters Programme clearly indicates that it is of importance that it should ‘include important issues such as cooperation between leadership and management of the department’ (Bornman 2004, 377).

In a study that examined the views of heads of departments (HoDs) at the former University of the Orange Free State, Fourie and Alt (2000, 120), found that in the process of conducting an internal review a primary concern was that of the resources available to the Department for the purposes of conducting such an internal review. It was claimed that the process takes the departmental staff away from the core teaching activity.

The few cases highlighted indicate that internal reviews are not without challenges, whether on an international or local level.

**RESEARCH METHODS**

This study used a qualitative approach which lends itself to investigating perceptions and seeking insight into the phenomena studied (Leedy 1997, 104). The qualitative approach also assists in understanding an individual’s perceptions (Bell 1993, 5–6), and in the first section of this study, took the form of interviews with selected members of a number of Schools within the Faculty. These interviews were recorded and transcribed. Follow-up questions were asked for the purpose of clarification and
Interviewees were also given an opportunity to make comments on areas they felt were not covered in the interview questions.

This study also followed a project driven approach, using interviews and a case study. It concentrated on work-in-progress and the researchers will continue to monitor this project over a period of time. The approach allows for the flow of reporting on the various stages of the project, always considering that the findings may not be conclusive, but may lead to further investigation as the project progresses.

**Sample and verification strategy**

The researchers identified three of the six schools within the Faculty for interviews, and the fourth school as part of the case study presented. Two schools were excluded as they had not undergone any form of internal review (this was confirmed by the Heads within the two schools), as well as due to the fact that the School of Tourism and Hospitality was already selected for interviews as one of the Schools that had not undergone the internal review process.

Schools and programmes that had been selected are included in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of School</th>
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<tr>
<td>Law</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Relations, Media Studies and Marketing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tourism and Hospitality</td>
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</table>

Staff members interviewed were selected on the basis that they were actively involved in co-ordinating the review processes within the Schools and thus had an in-depth knowledge of the processes and challenges experienced. Within the three schools, namely Accounting, Law and Tourism and Hospitality, the researchers interviewed senior members per School (mostly the Heads) on separate occasions so as to verify the responses. For example, in the School of Tourism and Hospitality, the Head at the Buffalo City Campus was interviewed and thereafter the Head at the Butterworth Campus was interviewed, with the same questions posed, in order to verify the responses. Such a process of verification was also applied in the School of Accounting where a senior member was interviewed at the Buffalo City Campus and two senior members were interviewed at the Butterworth Campus on a separate occasion. The situation was slightly different within the School of Law where the Head at the Nelson Mandela Drive (NMD) site was interviewed, followed by an interview with one of the members of the internal review panel. The reason is that that the Bachelor of Law programme is only offered at the NMD site. As the internal panellist had been part of the review process of the School at the NMD site, the verification process was not compromised.
Areas covered in the interviews are included in Table 2.

Table 2: Schools that started/did not start the quality assurance evaluation process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools that started the process</th>
<th>School that did not start the process</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for the start-up</td>
<td>Reasons for lack of start-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Details of processes followed in workshops</td>
<td>Challenges experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processes followed after workshops</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges experienced</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
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</table>

Steps followed in the analysis of the interviews

‘Framework’ as described by Ritchie and Spencer (2002, 310) was applied in the analysis of the interviews as it allows for a documented method. The five key stages in framework are (Ritchie and Spencer 2002, 310):

- Familiarisation (“for listing key ideas and recurrent themes”)
- Identifying a thematic framework (identifying “key issues, concepts and themes”)
- Indexing (labelling of various items)
- Charting (constructing a table of emerging issues from data)
- Mapping and interpretation (discussion of key objectives of data)

In terms of familiarisation, the researcher conducted all interviews, transcribed all interviews to familiarise herself with the data and checked for correctness of transcriptions, listening to tapes shortly before the analysis process. Thereafter, in line with the next stage, key themes were identified. Indexing involved labelling various items as they emerged in the actual data. A rough table was then drafted (charting) containing all the framework issues that emerged from the data. Mapping and interpretation involved determining the relationships between various interviewees and discovering the theory that emerged from the data.

Methods of data validation

Data collected in this research was validated as per Lincoln and Guba’s (in Seale 1999, 44–45) criterion, namely, through credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Through constant interaction with the interviewees, the researchers assured credibility of the data. This included presentation of the data on four separate occasions, including a University seminar, a Faculty Board meeting and two Faculty workshops. Various members of the University, including interviewees, were present on these occasions. The presentations included transferability, which is described as
the ‘detailed, rich description of the setting studied’, giving the audience ‘sufficient information to be able to judge the applicability of findings to other settings which they know’. Feedback from workshop participants was helpful and added to the integrity of the data. Dependability involved the process of giving the information on several occasions to a peer at WSU to review. Confirmability was established through documentation of the research and reflecting on the personal insights as shared by interviewees in the form of quotes (as in the discussion section).

**REVIEW OF DATA**

The review of data examined classified the results from interviews with the HoDs into three clearly identifiable themes, and also examined the case study, which considered the processes and procedures followed by the Department of Public Relations and Communication in conducting the quality review.

**INTERVIEWS WITH HOD’S FROM DEPARTMENTS IN THE FACULTY**

**Theme one: Start/non-start of the review process**

Interviewees in the Department of Tourism indicated that they were awaiting contact from the Quality Management Department (QMD) regarding when the workshops would start. Although dates had been received via internal memoranda, these dates kept changing and they had been drafted without consultation with the School. Although the School Heads had contacted the QMD, to enquire when workshops would take place, QMD had not been forthcoming with a response.

Interviewees within the School of Accounting indicated that workshops had taken place in line with the QMD memoranda. QMD had initiated the workshops and members of the School had attended these. The School of Law indicated that their situation was unique due to specific challenges within the LLB programme. This resulted in the review process that the School of Law felt was imposed on them. The interviewee acknowledged that the review was in keeping with the policy that all programmes should be subjected to internal reviews.

The School of Public Relations, Media Studies and Marketing was treated as a separate entity and not interviewed for the purposes of this discussion, due to the fact that the case study (discussed later) was done on one of the departments in the school, the Department of Public Relations and Communication.

**Theme two: General QA preparations**

Selected members within the School of Accounting had attended the workshops as initiated by QMD. After the first workshop a work plan with deadlines and the identification of persons responsible for co-ordination of the process and collection of information to meet criteria, was produced. A task team was formed consisting of members who did the work voluntarily.
A second workshop was initiated by the School and was also well attended. This workshop assisted in clarifying areas of uncertainty which arose within the work plan. Procedures were explained and work was once again detailed. Interviewees mentioned that they perceived the former SERTEC evaluations of the former technikon-type programmes as valuable, and assisted in understanding the review process.

The School of Law had received a report late in 2005 from the Department of Education. The process for review started in 2006 after the recommendation for a review was made by the University. QMD had subsequently arranged a workshop. Approximately 60 per cent of lecturing staff attended as there was a perception by staff that ‘this was a management responsibility’ and they only had lecturing responsibilities. Staff also questioned the motives for the review.

At the first workshop, attendees were divided into four groups. Each group was responsible for 3–4 criteria as per the HEQC review process. Four group leaders were appointed on a random basis in order to lead the processes pertaining to the criteria. When the external panellists did not turn up for the first evaluation, this was used as an opportunity for a second workshop. More staff attended this time, but only because they were told there would be interviews and they wanted to air their views on the LLB review.

Theme three: Challenges in terms of preparations
Interviewees from all schools were uncertain as to who should initiate and lead the internal review processes. A further challenge was ensuring buy-in and commitment to the process. The question was put as to what should be done about non-co-operation by lecturers despite mouthing commitment? Preparing and keeping of subject files was also viewed as a major challenge as there was no uniform format and lecturers did not seem to keep to this responsibility. In terms of the review process itself, the challenge remains as to how to balance teaching workloads and other administration and research with preparation for review? This may be viewed as an initial challenge, as once the process has been kick-started it may be easier in the future. Interviewees complained about too many other commitments. They also had found it difficult to keep to action plans and meet deadlines as scheduled in the work plans.

The interviewee from the School of Law mentioned that the collecting of evidence had been a challenge, for example, consulting former students.

CASE STUDY: THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION (PR Dept)
Justification for the case study
The Department was selected as the first Department to conduct an internal quality review by QMD. The reason for this was based on the fact that the Department had a good track record in QMD’s opinion, for delivery of good standards to learners within the field of Public Relations Management. The Department had in the past
shown acceptable performance on issues such as liaison with external advisory board members for community based projects, staff qualifications and involvement with faculty affairs. The Acting Vice Dean of Faculty, a co-author to this article, was previously in the position of Head of Department for this specific department, and had insight into departmental operations and was in a position to continually monitor the department’s performance during the internal review. Added to this was the fact that the current Head of Department allowed a staff member, a co-author of this article, to work actively on the internal review throughout 2007. This lecturer’s lecturing load was reduced by half in order to allow the necessary time required to make a useful contribution.

**History and maturity level of the department**

The Department of Communication and Languages of the former Eastern Cape Technikon (now part of the newly merged institution, the Walter Sisulu University and known as the Department of Public Relations and Communication) has been in existence since 1989 when it formed part of the former University of the Transkei (UNITRA) before coming into existence as part of the Eastern Cape Technikon. Ever since its inception, it fulfilled the function of a servicing department to all faculties which offered programmes requiring subject offerings in language and communication. The Department started with a staff compliment of two members.

The first fully-fledged programme introduced by the Department was the National Diploma: Public Relations Management, introduced in 2002 in both East London and Mthatha. The qualification grew vertically with a Bachelor of Technology programme introduced in 2005.

The Department in its current form therefore offers two fully fledged programmes alongside the servicing subjects to various departments across all faculties, and has a staff compliment of 30 staff members. In 2008 the programme in the National Diploma: Public Relations Management houses approximately 220 learners equally divided between East London and Mthatha. The B.Tech. programme in Public Relations Management, only offered in East London, is offered to 16 learners.

The maturity level of the Department therefore can be described as having been in existence, in various forms, belonging to three different institutions, for 19 years and having grown from 2 staff members to 30. It had grown from offering service subjects only, to offering two programmes as well as service subjects across all faculties.

**Defining quality and founding philosophies**

Before conducting the review, a number of philosophical-theoretical questions needed to be answered.

Firstly, a definition of quality was required. The Department needed a workable definition and perspective that explained the process in terms of what the review was trying to achieve. It was agreed by members that the review should be examined as a once-off bird’s-eye view of quality in the Department, with quality referring to all
activities that result in value-added experiences, such as the use of data projectors in a multimedia educational experience as opposed to talk-and-chalk. It was also agreed that the review was not a cover-up of activities, but rather an exposure of activities and challenges, in order to ensure that problems are conveyed to management level and subsequently addressed by management.

It should be clear from the above paragraph that the Departmental definition of quality was mainly based on a pragmatic approach in relation to the requirements set by the internal review, as opposed to a simple textbook definition of quality. If the above philosophies were to be summarised into a single definition, without taking the influence of other textbook definitions into account, the departmental definition of quality can be stated as follows:

Quality is all activities within the Department that result in value-added experiences (such as the use of multimedia as opposed to talk-and-chalk) for everyone involved with the Department in some form, inclusive of internal stakeholders, such as learners, other departments serviced, and inclusive of external stakeholders, such as advisory board members and members of industry that would eventually be interested in the incumbents produced by the Department. The process of quality happens continually, as the department goes about its daily business. A birds-eye view perspective, such as an internal review, is merely a reflection at a given time, and isn’t produced for external activities such as HEQC visitation, but is produced to continually inform the department of its ability to achieve its intended outcomes, as informed by both the institutional and departmental vision, mission, strategies and objectives.

The internal quality review process was therefore viewed as a review of management practices and policies, since it is the management approach that determines the ultimate quality for the learner.

Staff buy-in was obtained through allotting the responsibility for conducting the review to a lecturer in the Department who did not have management responsibilities. This approach, supported by the view that it was an evaluation of management practices, thereby allowed a person with ordinary care responsibilities to evaluate the actions of those allotted with fiduciary care. This ensured that staff buy-in was obtained and that the process belonged to the Department.

The review attempted to enforce principles of honesty and openness. In line with this, nothing was done for the specific purpose of conducting the review (i.e. a sudden survey that allowed for compliance), but rather attempts were made to highlight shortcomings that could be addressed in the improvement plan.

**Processes followed**

*Quality assessment practices prior to July 2006*

The Department held annual workshops addressing issues of quality (i.e. marking practices and procedures, departmental strategies, HEQF changes and adaptations,
curriculum adjustments, etc.). Furthermore, the Department engaged in annual advisory board meetings and conformed to SAQA professional bodies’ registration.

Quality assessment activities since July 2006

The activities are listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Departmental quality assurance activities since July 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity Description</th>
<th>Activity Purpose</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 2006</td>
<td>2-Day Workshop</td>
<td>To inform members of the department of the procedures associated with internal review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2006</td>
<td>Quality Assurance Meeting</td>
<td>To divide members of the department into groups, with different groups addressing different criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2007</td>
<td>Departmental Board Meeting</td>
<td>It was decided that a single member should oversee the QA process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February to April 2007</td>
<td>An office for the purpose of quality assurance was identified.</td>
<td>Cabinet-file all supporting documentation. Prepare area for compilation of QA documents. Prepare nerve centre for QA meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2007</td>
<td>Review of current processes</td>
<td>Ensure that current activities are in line with QMD requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2007</td>
<td>Mthatha Site Visit</td>
<td>Ensure that Mthatha staff are complying with QMD processes and procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March to July 2007</td>
<td>Writing of QA Document</td>
<td>Provide a report for the QMD with portfolio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2007</td>
<td>Reception of various memos with dates from the QMD</td>
<td>To determine dates for visiting and review of documents by QMD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2007</td>
<td>Internal Review document review</td>
<td>To ensure that all departmental members agree to Internal Review Document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2007 to Current</td>
<td>Action Plan Implementation</td>
<td>To ensure all activities in the action plan are implemented.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of Table 3, the strength of the approach followed lies in the following:

- Departmental members were actively a part of the process, with every departmental member responsible for some portion of the work, whilst the whole process was overseen by a departmental member not associated with management, but reporting to management, thereby creating a synergy between management and staff.
The numerous visits with the QMD of the institution ensured that there was continuous agreement between the Department on the quality assurance activities and the activities recommended by the QMD.

- The formalised office set up for quality assurance centralised the activities, with an understanding that the office was responsible for reviewing quality, whilst quality maintenance remained the responsibility of management.

- The procedure followed set a precedent for an annual review of the documentation by the respective programme co-ordinators.

- The procedure utilised departmental members to implement the improvement plan. This allowed for actual improvement of quality standards.

It should, however, be noted that the Department faced the following challenges in the process of conducting the review:

- Lack of a definite route – the department mapped its own route with buy-in from QMD.
- Certain criteria seemed generic.
- After completion of the review no feedback from QMD in terms of outcome was forthcoming.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion are done through discussing recommendations arising from the interviews and from the PR Department.

It is clear that the internal QA reviews took place for various reasons, either as driven by QMD (School of Accounting), or Departmental driven (Public Relations and Communication) or due to external pressures (Law). This contextualises the reviews (an important point as indicated by Fourie and Alt 2000) as it may influence the manner in which the reviews are undertaken, as well as the challenges experienced and outcomes obtained.

The School of Law may have been under tremendous strain given the context of their review. This takes staff focus away from the teaching core focus far more than a department that could easily dedicate half of the workload to conducting the internal review to a single person, as a leading exercise in the institution.

It could further be stated that there is a casual link between the contextual factors surrounding the reasons for a department conducting an internal review, the resources available to that department and the extent to which management and staff buy-in could be obtained. Basic reasoning behind this lies in the fact that it could be expected that a pro-active department would make adequate resources available for the completion of an internal review, and due to the fact that they are pro-active, such department would ensure the necessary workshops and training opportunities to obtain management and staff buy-in. This is in comparison to a department which
is defending its existence, and hence is low on resources, and having a negative staff morale and total opposition to interaction with management.

It is also questionable whether the discourse on quality assurance in HE has actively taken place within most Schools. Perspectives on the need for QA are strongly linked to addressing HEQC requirements as an end in itself, rather than a broader sense of quality (as in Higgs perspective 2006). It is because of this view that most interviewees perceive quality as a task to be initiated and performed by the QMD – and something ‘imposed’ on them (Law interviewee). The perspective is emphasised by comments that staff see QA as part of the ‘general duties’ of management (Law interviewee); that ‘resistance was found’ when QA duties were allocated to staff and that it increased the workload ‘as this was over and above whatever is being done … originates from the senior officer therefore quality belongs to seniors’ (Accounting interviewee).

There is a sense that staff may only react when a top-down approach is adopted, that ‘strong … leadership’ is needed (Tourism interviewee) and if no initiative is taken at a senior level, external to the Faculty, no further action would be taken on the matter; ‘the feeling was to wait for QMD to conduct workshops’ (Tourism interviewee). The preference for such an approach brings to mind the question whether Schools view QA as a means of voluntarily measuring their relevance in terms of serving the new social order and meeting pressing national needs by responding to new realities and opportunities. This is not to imply that QA is the sole tool of measuring relevance. It is the lack of participation and willingness to apply the measuring tool unless a top-down approach is adopted that is cause for concern.

It may be that this lack of participation is also influenced by uncertainty about the process of the review. Most interviewees repeated the need for encouraging ownership and buy-in through the process of inculcating staff to ‘realise reasons why it is being done’ (Accounting interviewee). The internal panellist (Law interview) indicated that staff had ‘no knowledge of the review process’. This reflects the general lack of understanding of the QA processes, specifically in relation to the HEQC requirements. The ‘total inadequacy in meeting criteria’ in terms of the first submission, prompted a request for a ‘refresher session’ by QMD, after which the second submission indicated that guidelines had been ‘followed up to a point’ (Internal panelist – Law).

The Public Relations programme had a number of workshops to ensure that staff understood the process. The Accounting interviewees also emphasised that they attended both ‘internal activities and a workshop in Johannesburg’, in order to better understand the processes. Despite this, Accounting interviewees and the Public Relations case study indicated that at times QMD was uncertain about the processes. This underscored the fact that it is a learning curve for all.

The practical implications in terms of workload of QA cannot be understated as the administrative processes, inclusive of documentation collation and filing is an indication that it is a physically demanding process initially. This is emphasised in the Public Relations case study, where the co-ordinator’s lecture load was reduced. All interviewees recommended a reduced lecture load for the person(s) whose task
was the collation and filing of evidence. These rituals of verification (Symes 2006) are part of the process, though not limited to it.

The need for a common understanding of QA is imperative for the way it is approached within Schools. The Public Relations case study indicated that QA referred to all activities that resulted in value-added experiences. This understanding must not only be guided by both national imperatives as set, but may also extend to the enhancement of self and society (Higgs 2006).

In terms of the case study the following recommendations are made to other departments for conducting a review:

- Map a definite route with deadlines.
- Assign a person responsible and accommodate lecturing workload.
- Workshop with all staff, QMD and management.
- Set up QA office – find all past documentation and make a habit of keeping filing system up to date.
- Include action plan in final document with names, dates and responsibilities assigned.
- Monitor action plan attainment and re-review on annual basis.

It should be noted that both interviewees and the PR Department stressed that the process should be initiated by both the QMD and the Department. Again the need for departmental buy-in is emphasised, as earlier described by Bornman (2004). It is important that the department should feel that they own the process and dictate the nature thereof.

In summary, it should be stated that it is of utmost importance that a department ensures that the entire process is not a mere window-dressing activity for an HEQC visitation. This can be achieved by ensuring that the review is viewed as a bird’s-eye view of quality delivery at that very moment of the review, and that overall quality is viewed as a flowing river with neither beginning nor end. Changes made to the process of delivery to learners allow for better quality delivery overall. It should further be remembered that it is of the utmost importance that it is a four-sided process (learners, management, departmental members and the quality directorate), and that the process should ensure buy-in from all four stakeholders. The HEQC and their committees should only be viewed as an outsider looking in, and the process must belong to the identified stakeholders.

**CONCLUSION**

The literature review reflected the internal review challenges as experienced by various Institutions (Universities of Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa and former Orange Free State). These indicated that internal QA reviews can be accepted as a challenging process, and that it is not exceptional that the Faculty at Walter Sisulu University is experiencing this.
What should be borne in mind is the broader purpose of the internal QA reviews; the purpose of an integrated approach primarily internally driven, within an external QA system (Herselman and Hay 2002). Further, that it extends to public accountability and assists in directing institutional resources and planning processes (Van Damme 2000), and that it engages all stakeholders in improving fitness for purpose and value for money (Symes 2006). Most importantly, that it should not only be a tool that ensures that education serves the national agenda, but goes beyond knowledge and skill acquisition to the enhancement of self and society (Higgs 2006).

The review process within the Faculty should therefore be seen in the light of assisting in identifying challenges, strengths and improvement of education delivery, towards self realisation and the betterment of society.

The major significant findings relating to this study demonstrate how the Faculty initiated and started the process within various departments with different levels of success. It was determined that there is a causal link between the contextual factors surrounding the reasons for a department conducting an internal review.

The case study demonstrated that it is essential to ensure that staff and management buy-in into the process of conducting an internal review is obtained, and that the process should not be linked to punitive measures, but to an assessment of the current position of the Department in relation to quality matters. Should both management and departmental members agree on issues highlighted by the internal review, the route followed in establishing an improvement plan could be mapped reciprocally, and allow for buy-in from both parties.

REFERENCES


