



# CHAPTER 4

## CHAPTER 4

# INTERNATIONAL APPROACHES TO QUALITY AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN FOCUS

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance and quality promotion as described in the previous chapters, appear to be an international phenomenon that is firmly placed on the agenda for higher education. The South African higher education system is a relative late comer in the quality debates, and yet institutions of higher learning, and in some instances accreditation bodies have, for a considerable period of time been wary of quality assurance imperatives (Smith, Armstrong & Brown, 1999: 9). Internationally, there have been commendable strides made in some countries to promote the culture of quality in higher learning, largely based on the principles derived from other sectors. Much has been documented in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, the United States of America, New Zealand, Australia and several other European countries (Appelby, 1999: 53).

- The purpose of this chapter is to briefly draw some of the QA experiences internationally, at both the system and institutional (case studies) levels.
- Then focus on the situation in this country in areas of institutional quality assurance profiles in the university sector, and the existing practices in the technikon sector, particularly in over the last decade or so.
- Demonstrate how institutional governance can benefit from lessons learned in other parts of the world in order to enhance the development of a QA system in South Africa.

Emphasis will be placed on the roles of governing structures in relation to quality assurance. The dominating structure in these international case studies is the senate, as a result of the academic focus on QA. The two pillars of quality assurance, namely accountability and improvement will be matched with the authority structures to determine the impact that they are or will be making on transformation currently, and in the future. Councils for example, are finally accountable for the effective governance and fiduciary duties in institutions of higher learning. Whereas senates are accountable to councils, much of the core business of senate is academic in nature, and thus focuses more on improvement dimensions in teaching and learning, research and community service. This chapter explores perspectives on programme assessment and accreditation, total quality, peer review approaches in so far as they relate to curriculum re-engineering, and also the external quality monitoring or audits.

Highlights on institutional approaches will assist to map up the direction that the higher education system in this country is attempting to follow. In the spirit of the TQM principles, the role of students in an endeavour to promote a culture of quality will also inform the ongoing debates about student assessment and new learning techniques that are aimed at transforming the student. This transformation paradigm is applicable in the structural arrangements as they relate to quality.

## **4.2 THE INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON QUALITY**

Higher education increasingly operates as an enterprise without national borders, and networking and globalisation have become commonplace in this sector (Scott, 2000: 3). The increasing mobility of students, professionals, and other work seekers across national and continental boundaries combined with the increase in distance and on-line provision underscores the need for global debate about the comparability and equivalence of educational provision and outcomes

(Khan, 2000; 11). The increasing internationalisation of higher education and the 'globalisation of labour markets' makes collaboration among national and regional quality assurance agencies even more critical in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Singh, 2000: 8). Undoubtedly, quality has been the central concept and major focus of the policies of institutions and governments in the field of higher education in the nineties.

The Australian Minister of Employment, Education and Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) stressed the importance of international considerations in the implementation of a quality assurance system in December of 1999 in the following manner:

*There are several facets to the link between globalisation and quality assurance. Education is now one of Australia's major export industries in an intensely competitive market. While Australian universities compete with each other in this market, they also compete with the rest of the world. Our major competitors have external quality assurance mechanisms, and countries in our largest markets look to government verification of quality standards. To maintain market position we need to be able to advertise that we have quality assurance mechanisms in place, that they are being applied, and that they are having a positive effect on outcomes (Kemp, 1999: 3).*

With varying intensity, pace, thoroughness and success, according to Van Damme (2000: 10), most countries in the world have established systems and procedures of quality assurance in higher education, comparable to those in industry created a number of years ago. Now, at the end of the nineties, traditional, informal academic self-regulation – which for centuries was held to be sufficient in guaranteeing quality -- has been replaced by explicit quality assurance mechanisms and related reporting and external accountability procedures.

While transnational education offers benefits, it raises vexing questions, according to McBumie (2000: 25). Even where a provider is recognised as *bona fide* by its home country, how can one be confident that quality is maintained when the programmes "cross the border" into another nation. Other questions may be asked about the appropriateness of foreign content and teaching methods. Quality issues in transnational education must be seen in the broader context of quality in higher education.

A widely used definition of quality is "fitness for purpose," with quality assurance defined as "those systems, procedures, processes, and actions intended to lead to the achievement, maintenance, monitoring, and enhancement of quality" (Woodhouse, 1998: 258; Sallis, 1997: 15-16).

### **4.3 GLOBAL QUALITY ASSURANCE BODIES**

Quality assurance has indeed become a worldwide phenomenon. The need for sharing information and interaction among national / regional quality assurance agencies has led to the formation of the international networks such as the Global Alliance for Transnational Education (GATE) and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), amongst others. For purposes of clarification of global and international networks these organisations are identified to be relevant, current and effective in the dissemination of elements of good practice in higher education. It is from these international best practices that higher education in this country benefit as indicated by the entrepreneurial-expanding and traditional-elite institutions (see Chapter 7 section 7.2.3).

### **4.3.1 INQAAHE**

An opening message from the former President of INQAAHE, Jacques L'Ecuyer at the conference held in May 1997 at the Kruger National Park, in South Africa was that

*" new developments are also regularly occurring in the field of quality assurance. The globalisation of the economy and the availability of powerful means of communication have given rise to new preoccupations for the internationalisation of standards in postsecondary education. The dissemination of Deming's idea in the industrial world has led to the establishment of the ISO 9000 norms. The generalisation of these norms to all kinds of enterprises is likely to influence our methods of assuring quality" (INQAAHE, 1997).*

INQAAHE has a membership of quality assurance bodies in higher education in approximately 50 countries, with international conferences held biennially.

#### **4.3.1.1 THE PURPOSE OF INQAAHE**

The primary purpose of the Network is to enable members to share information about the maintenance, evaluation and improvement of higher education, and to disseminate good practices in the field of quality assurance. In addition, the QA Network enables members to:

- establish links between quality assurance and accreditation bodies worldwide;
- obtain information about higher education systems of different countries;
- be better informed about qualifications and awards for the purpose of credit transfer;
- conduct research in higher education quality management; and
- evaluate and monitor developments in higher education

To achieve these purposes, the network organises biennial conferences and other activities, publishes a newsletter called 'QA' and distributes to its members the journal 'Quality in Higher Education' (INQAAHE 5<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference, May 1999: 71).

#### **4.3.2 GATE**

The Global Alliance for Transnational Education (GATE) is a non-profit alliance, based in Washington, D.C., and founded to address issues of quality assurance for educational programmes and services which cross national borders. GATE was inaugurated at a 1996 conference in London, England, with participants from multinational corporations, national associations, the professions, accrediting and licensing authorities, and institutions of higher education worldwide. It was at this conference that it was announced that its secretariat would become the responsibility of The Centre for Quality Assurance in International Education with immediate effect.

GATE's programmes are designed to meet the needs of each of the constituencies mentioned above by:

- exploring current issues corporations face in international hiring and universities face in international admissions;
- providing access to global information on educational systems and institutions, and transnational educational offerings; and
- developing principles of good practice and recognition of quality in international education and training.

The strategic partnership that is GATE exists to maximize information and assure the quality of transnational educational programmes in a rapidly globalising education and human resources market (CQAHE, 1997: 6).

#### 4.4 QUALITY PERSPECTIVES FROM AUSTRALIA

The last decade has seen a growing concern about quality assurance in the Australian higher education system. The so-called 'quality movement' - with its theoretical models and specialised discourse - has impinged on the mainstream consciousness only since the issuing of a brief by the Commonwealth Government Minister to the Higher Education Council (HEC) in 1991, for an investigation of issues relating to quality in higher education and recommendations for the policy initiatives.

According to Baldwin, in Brennan *et. al* (1997: 276) there is no doubt that the developments in European countries, especially in Great Britain, had a strong influence on Australian policy trends in this area. For over two decades it has been a problem in some circles in Australia to encourage the transference of overseas ideas, and often the uncritical acceptance of overseas prescriptions without adequately recognising the differences between conditions in Australia and other comparable countries (Sheldrake and Linke, 1979: 13).

In an attempt to address the concerns expressed by many that the recent expansion of the system since the 1988 White Paper, the Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services, Peter Baldwin was instrumental in coining the following terms of reference for the Higher Education Council:

- to examine the characteristics of quality and its diversity in higher education;
- to examine the strategies that may be developed by government and the higher education system to encourage, maintain and improve the quality of higher education;
- to examine the relative importance of factors affecting quality, including student mix, teaching and research, in furthering the quality of higher education;
- to examine the nature of the relationship between resources and the quality of higher education; and

- also the means by which changes in quality over time may be monitored and evaluated, and to report, through the National Board, with recommendations for future policy initiatives (Higher Education: The Challenges Ahead, 1990: 30, sec. 4.10).

It is quite notable that the quality assurance movement of the past decade in Australian higher education has sprung from a variety of factors. Particularly important have been community and government concerns about academic standards and the levels of achievement of graduates in a time of major expansion in student numbers associated with decreased government funding support per student unit.

Clearly, the effects of increased international competitiveness have also driven it, by recognition of the need for greater mobility of professional labour. Demands for greater accountability by public institutions, by concerns related to the expansion of the private higher education sector, and by pressure from employers and the professions for university courses to become more relevant to workplace needs (Harman, 1998; 331). This phenomenon seems to have manifested itself in most countries that embarked on the task of developing quality systems in higher education.

#### **4.4.1 THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT POLICY**

In the Commonwealth of Australia, the six states have constitutional responsibility for higher education; universities are established and operate under state legislation. However, the Commonwealth government has taken over funding responsibilities, and therefore controls planning. Higher education is almost entirely a public system, although there is a small number of private institutions that have been established in recent years. In 1989, the government introduced a 'user-pays' element into the funding of higher education (known as the Higher Education Contribution Scheme), where students are expected to pay

approximately one-quarter of the average cost of their education, but can defer repayment until they are earning above a designated threshold, and repay through instalments as part of the taxation system (Brennan, *et al.*, 1997: 277).

The 1950s saw the start of a remarkable transformation of Australian higher education, a shift from an elite to a mass system that has much in common with similar movements in other countries, but is arguably the most rapid and far-reaching of all. The expansion of the university system came in several stages. The first saw the establishment of two new large institutions (the University of New South Wales and Monash) which developed along lines very similar to those of the traditional universities and which were quickly able to compete with them for students and establish strong research records. A second wave produced universities with different profiles and approaches: they did not offer the full range of professional courses, they experimented with inter-disciplinary studies and catered for somewhat different groups of people - students from less privileged backgrounds and mature students returning to study (Brennan, *et al.*, 1997: 278). At the same time, the technical and teachers' colleges were growing and the former institutions were expanding their range of offerings.

Looking back a little, the Commonwealth government in 1965, acting on the principal recommendations of a committee it had set up to investigate the future of tertiary education in Australia, known as the Martin Committee, established a binary system, with a university sector and an advanced education sector. The latter was to be different from, but complementary to, the university system, with a stronger vocational emphasis, and was to cost significantly less. A major part of the cost difference was that these colleges were not to be funded for research. A strong theme in the discussions surrounding this inquiry and the government's response was the desire to protect the nature and quality of university education in the expansion that was obviously necessary (Davies, 1989 cited by Baldwin in Brennan, *et al.*, 1997: 279).

Another wave of change in higher education came as a result of 'the Dawkins revolution', which called for the re-conceptualisation of higher education and its place in society. This 1988 famous White Paper was an attempt to re-position higher education as an essential part of the economy of the country. Government departments were thus reorganised and re-named, the binary divide was abolished, and institutions were amalgamated and funding policies were adapted to the new Unified National System.

An official policy of the Commonwealth government is to allow and encourage the autonomy of individual universities. This is demonstrated by a "hands-off" approach to academic matters. The notion of 'quality audit' seemed to offer the government a way of directing institutions to pay more attention to their own procedures for ensuring and demonstrating quality, while respecting institutional autonomy. Quality assurance measures are, of necessity, not prescribed by the Commonwealth government; but it would ask that institutions should demonstrate that they had a systematic and coherent system for evaluation and improvement. This was the genesis of the Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (CQAHE).

#### **4.4.2 INSTITUTIONAL REVIEWS**

The establishment of the CQAHE as was outlined in the report by Professor Ian Chubb entitled "Higher Education: Achieving Quality" was founded on the following terms of reference:

- Invite universities to participate in a regular review and audit of their mechanisms for monitoring and improving the quality of their outcomes:
  - ~ examine portfolios volunteered by universities showing what they have put in place to assure and improve quality;
  - ~ evaluate how they have assessed the effects of their policies and processes, including summaries of their own assessments of their performance;

- ~ conduct interviews and visits as appropriate; and
- ~ use existing, nationally based data.
- Recommend directly to the Minister(s) on the allocation of the specially designated funds to universities to recognise achievements demonstrated by the effectiveness of policies and procedures through an evaluation of their assessment of their quality of their outcomes.
- Advise the Minister on the use of the National Priority (Reserve) Fund earmarked for the development of quality assurance mechanisms and processes and related innovations, and on the funding allocations recommended as a result of the work of the committee for the Advancement of University Teaching.
- Over time, monitor the benefits resulting from funding previously allocated.
- Disseminate information on the best national and international practices and advise universities seeking assistance with quality assurance programmes.
- Assess from time to time, the range of quality assurance mechanisms used by universities and to provide advice on the effect of those mechanisms, and any alternatives.
- Provide advice to universities on matters which should be addressed at institutional levels.
- Advise the Minister(s) on issues relating specifically to the quality assurance mechanisms and processes (HEC, 1992a: 80).

The whole idea of explicitly managing for quality was somewhat foreign to the culture of Australian higher education at the time, therefore, the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) commissioned a major study by Dr David Warren Piper of the University of Queensland, on quality issues in higher education. He advanced a comprehensive or almost encyclopaedic model of quality planning and management in the university sector. Warren Piper defined quality as a 'domain that could be mapped' and identified eight provinces or areas which need to be managed in universities, namely, educational programmes, research, community service, staff, students, academic support

services, resources and assets and the overall governance of the institution (Warren Piper, 1993: vol. 1:21).

With regard to how quality is to be assured in each of these areas, Piper (1993: vol.1.33) identified the criteria by which the adequacy of an institution's quality mechanisms might be judged. These criteria commonly known as the Seven Seas ("Cs"), are Comprehensiveness; Communication; Cogency; Coherence; Consonance; Constancy; and Consequence. These two domains provided an overarching model of quality in universities. It was of interest to those at the institutional level involved in managing for quality and assuring quality and, at the system-wide level, those involved in auditing the adequacy of institutional quality assurance (Candy and Maconachie, 1997: 360). Over the years the system was refined, but the approach remained basically the same.

#### **4.4.3 THE CASE OF MONASH UNIVERSITY**

Monash is Australia's largest university, with more than 40, 000 students enrolled at 6 Australian campuses, 1, 000 at its Malaysian campus, and some 3, 000 students in a range of partnered transnational operations in Asia. The university had already recognised the need for more systematic development of its own procedures before the first quality audit in 1993. Attention was given to the development of quality assurance mechanisms that would ensure reasonable consistency across the university in its academic operations, workload, student representation, and review of outcomes. The policy also covers many aspects of course presentation, evaluation and continuous improvement.

An internal review of the management of research in the university in 1992 resulted in a strong affirmation of the principle of 'parity of esteem' for all areas of research and the right of all academics to conduct interest-driven research. Central administration, however, is actively involved in monitoring performance in this area. The Research Services Division has done a lot of research on

performance indicators, has introduced streamlined processes for gathering information and has engaged in systematic checking of returns for accuracy, the appropriateness of the claims, etc. (Brennan, et al., 1997: 289). Other methods include benchmarking, the use of performance indicators, and theme-specific review processes such as the OECD Internationalisation Quality Review Process (IQRP), which the institutions can use to review and "enhance the quality of their international dimension according to their own stated aims and objectives" (Knight and de Wit, eds., 1999: 241). The IQRP, like the Global Alliance for Transnational Education (GATE), utilises the internationally accepted approach of self-evaluation checked by external peer review, and Monash has undergone both processes (McBurnie, 2000: 26).

The transformation of institutional cultures is deeper than the quality assurance movement, and in the case of Monash there has been some clear benefits, although numerous problems were identified with the interpretation of outcomes in Australia. Monash's success story include:

- a stronger culture of self-evaluation on the basis of evidence
- the articulation of many things formerly taken for granted -- policies, values, educational principles, etc. -- which has stirred debate and encouraged reflection
- a re-examination of fundamental questions about the nature of university education
- creativity in curriculum development, in response to concern for the interests and needs of stakeholders
- more sustained attention to the presentation of mission and achievements to the tax-paying public
- a more systematic approach to many aspects of university operations, such as course approval, management training, consultation with students
- better communication between faculties and departments and between these units and central administration

- a shift towards a more student-centred approach in teaching (Brennan, et al., 1997: 296).

#### **4.4.3.1 THE CURRENT STRATEGIC FOCI**

A fresh mandate of the HEC in Australia is to guide the development of the system, ensure it is appropriately rigorous and report publicly on institutional- and system-wide quality assurance outcomes. It also has to provide an accountability structure for the sector that is credible to government, the community, and the universities themselves (Candy and Maconachie, 1997: 366). The process of implementing a new QA strategy has placed enormous responsibilities on institutions of higher learning. For example, the decision to participate in the review squarely resided with each institution in the unified national system. The process has been based on initial self-assessment and institutions themselves have determined what evidence to present in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of their relevant policies and practices, and the quality of their outcomes (Alt, 1999: 76). The new approach is being driven by ongoing accountability concerns.

The government's policy to encounter greater competition within the higher education sector and increased revenue-generating activities by institutions is creating new concerns that financial considerations may drive institutions to sacrifice academic standards. Hence, the present government sees quality assurance as a means to protecting other key planks in its overall policy approach for higher education (Harman, 1998: 345).

According to the Minister of Higher Education of the New Coalition Government, the previous programme was fundamentally flawed and unsustainable over the longer term. It relied on separate funds to ensure institutional involvement in a process that was externally imposed, and which assumed that all universities

could be ranked against a common set of criteria (Higher Education Budget Statement, 1996: 13).

The momentum for an integrated response to diversity has accelerated considerably in only the last two or three years, partly in the wake of a national quality assurance process and partly as a consequence of the emergence of new stakeholders, alongside students and academics (McInnis 1998:38). The ways in which universities respond to the new realities of student populations at a strategic planning level will be as diverse as the populations they aim to serve. The increasing numbers of students demanding academic support imply major adjustments of university programmes and services. Integrated strategic planning is essential if universities are to maintain control over the shape and quality of their academic programmes (McInnis 1998:38).

In conclusion, evaluation and reviews are not just technical mechanisms for accountability and improvement but can be used, and are used by different political actors associated with higher education as important policy instruments. In some cases, professionals may have some empathy for the policy objective sought, while in others, they may be highly critical. But whatever objectives, there needs to be consciousness of political agendas and motives in any programme of evaluation and reviews, particularly at the national or higher education system level. Of the range of policy instruments available, quality assurance reviews can be particularly powerful policy levers in the hands of ministers and bureaucrats (Harman, 1998: 345).

## 4.5 QUALITY PERSPECTIVES FROM NEW ZEALAND:

### The State Sector reforms

New Zealand has a population of 3.5 million, and its higher education sector comprises seven universities, 25 polytechnics, four colleges of education, and two *wananga* (Maori language institutions), in addition to a few small, special-purpose private institutions. It is difficult to separate the effects on higher education of external quality assurance processes and agencies from the effects of the other radical, structural changes in New Zealand society over the last decade. During this period, a transition from élite to mass higher education has been taking place in a context of major social and economic change. These include: financial market deregulation with increased reporting of financial performance; public sector reform, with a distinction between outcomes and outputs and a heavy reliance on contractual responsibilities; self-management by individual entities within a strengthened reporting and accountability regime; a focus on output-based funding; greater targeting of expenditure; more contestability in supply; and greater distinction between the ownership and purchase roles of the Government; all designed to increase the efficiency and accountability of public sector managers (Preddy 1993, Trotman 1996 in Woodhouse and Hall, 1997: 377). The changes have led to a great increase in the need for and use of monitoring and evaluation, to see if targets are being met, contracts are being kept, and accountability is being achieved. These changes affect the higher education institutions directly, as well as affecting the environment within which they operate, including changed attitudes and expectations (Woodhouse 1994, 1997: 377- 378).

Although the restructuring in higher education has not been as extensive as in other areas, the general principles underlying the higher education reforms have mirrored those in the rest of the state sector. Reform in the higher education sector has included the introduction of fees; deregulation of tuition fees; and the

income contingent student loan scheme. Under consideration are changes in governance and a capital-charging regime for higher education institutions.

Significant among the reforms, is the evolving roles of councils of higher education institutions. At present, these have representatives from business, industry, local authorities, universities, women's and ethnic groups, as well as wider education and community interests. The government is considering legislation to reduce the size of councils to four or five members, nominated by the Minister of Education from the business sector. The proposed capital charging regime for higher education institutions would require them to recognise the cost of capital invested in them by the government, and is intended to encourage them to use their capital resources (more) efficiently (Blackmore 1995 as cited by Woodhouse and Hall, 1997: 378).

#### ***4.5.1 VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON (VUW) CASE STUDY***

A number of well-established quality assurance and quality control provisions were in place before any academic audit: "VUW's preparation for external academic audit has been long, detailed, thorough and productive" (New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit 1999: 1 of 3). Between the late 1980s and early 1990s consciousness was growing of the need for the university to reshape some aspects of its operations.

The VUW had for some years examined its academic quality assurance procedures and in 1994 an overseas academic commissioned an external audit. In 1995 it documented all of its quality-related processes in a quality assurance manual. This demonstrates an extensive self-review which resulted in a written audit portfolio which provided the basic information for the audit's panel's investigations (New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit 1999: 1 of 3).

In its strategic plan for 1995-1999, the university acknowledged the need for a framework for regular assessment of its progress in reaching the goals of the strategic plan.

It identified the need to establish more specific objectives, which allowed the university to assess its progress. The university replaced its strategic plan with a more detailed operational plan process under the heading of *Mission and Goals 1996-2000*. The significance of the operational planning procedures of the university for academic audit is that they establish the framework within which the various quality assurance provisions can be integrated at the micro-level and linked with the macro-goals of the University (Hall, Woodhouse & Jemyn 1997: 434).

#### **4.5.2 CURRENT QA STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENTS**

The New Zealand universities decided to adopt the process of academic audit as the mechanism for monitoring institutional quality assurance following upon a series of inter-university workshops and seminars held by the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC) in 1992. The purpose of these meetings were:

- To examine overseas and New Zealand trends and pressures for quality monitoring;
- To identify the range of current monitoring practices in New Zealand universities;
- To determine whether a national approach to quality monitoring was necessary and, if so, what form this approach should take.

The outcome of these 1992 NZVCC meetings was the decision to create a New Zealand Universities' Academic Audit (AAU) with similar, but not identical functions to that of the UK Unit. Following a period of consultation throughout the universities, the AAU was established as an independent unit.

A manual on academic audit was produced by the AAU which provided a comprehensive coverage of the audit process, including details of the portfolio that institutions should develop, the self-review they should undertake, the focus of the audit, details of the visit, and the mechanisms for reporting. Under the heading "*Initiating the process*", the Manual described the relationship of the audit process to the roles of the AAU and the self-evaluation undertaken by the institution.

Self-evaluation processes inevitably took three forms:

The first involved periodic review processes which universities undertook of their systems, irrespective of their involvement with the academic audit.

The second involved trail audits, either by an auditor from the United Kingdom or from the AAU itself.

The third involved preparation of the audit portfolio and dealt with the actual self-evaluation statement submitted to the AAU. For instance, the University of Auckland (UA) was audited during the period April to November 1997 (University of Auckland 1998: 1; Hall, Woodhouse & Jermyn 1997: 425).

The next cycle of audits, which has commenced in 1999, will comprise three theme audits followed by a comprehensive institutional audit.

Aspects of the NZQA accreditation and approval process were challenged. Insufficient attention was paid to the "professional artistry of the teaching practitioner". The transformative purpose of higher education also needs to be considered. All of this implies the need for a reconsideration of the focus of academic audit and perhaps the need to give greater emphasis to student experience (Hall, Woodhouse & Jermyn 1997: 425).

The focus and scope of the academic audit require some thoughtful reflection. The question is whether such a comprehensive process is required a second time. Should a more selective approach with greater focus on systems directly related to the quality of the teaching-learning environment not be undertaken?

It seems that there is a need for a reconsideration of the focus of academic audit and perhaps also the need for greater emphasis on the student experience. At Victoria University a relational model of teaching and learning has been developed. The focus of this research is to determine whether quality monitoring is impacting on the student experience.

#### **4.6 QUALITY ASSURANCE PERSPECTIVES IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

In comparison to Australia, New Zealand or even The United Kingdom, the United States is not only the most populace nation, but has over 4, 000 colleges and universities ranging from small to large, private and public, and invariably the largest exporter of higher education in the world (Lenn, 1996: 4). In a series of discussions with academic staff at several universities in Minsk, Moscow and Kyiv regarding approaches to quality assurance in higher education, Stetar (2000: 32) was struck by the intensity of their characterisation of the USA as the "capital of educational arrogance". It is their assertion that far too many USA academics tend to view universities in most parts of the world from a perspective most akin to that of zealous missionaries from imperial Spain or Britain at the height of their respective empires. That is, there is no limit to the good that can be accomplished if only the "heathens" can be converted to the USA process of quality assurance.

It stands to reason that a country the size of the USA faces enormous challenges in its higher education. A narrow selection of the trends in higher education

quality debates will be helpful in order to contextualise the US perspectives on quality assurance. Given the culture of higher education in the United States, the debate over quality assurance stems from several seeming deep-rooted concerns which, in one view may be characterised as follows:

- Discontent with Higher Education bureaucracies;
- Rising costs that threaten public access;
- Higher Education is viewed as inherently inefficient;
- Unwilling to adopt even rudimentary processes to streamline costs;
- Curriculum and teaching methods are perceived as ineffective if not irrelevant (Stetar, 1996: 304).

There is, for example, a general and rising discontent in the United States with the educational bureaucracies and specific efforts have been undertaken to dismantle them and substantially reduce if not eliminate the number of government and higher education association *apparatchiki* that have emerged in recent years to regulate, guide and ensure quality in American Higher Education (Bergmann 1991: 12-16). Public opinion suggests a growing influence of government bureaucrats and university administrators coupled with a self-serving professoriate that are fuelling the rapid rise in the cost of higher education. This thinking resonates well with the increasingly financially strapped American middle and upper middle classes (Laing, 1995: 25- 29).

State and federal governments are also rethinking the current quality assurance process and their current stress upon institutional inputs. They are also looking at both institutional and programmatic accreditation and seem intent upon using the quality assurance process to make higher education more market oriented and thereby more responsive to state, regional and national needs. Such movement is consistent with the data emerging from the Higher Education Roundtables sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trust. According to Pew, the lesson of the early 1990s is that “...most Americans were prepared to trust markets than government.” At every level, the willingness of society to tax itself

to promote the public good has receded, and most Americans have come to doubt the capacity of government to either clearly define appropriate public objectives or muster the expertise to effectively manage the programmes that will achieve them (Zemsky 1995: 1).

The private, voluntary accreditation process is also under attack as being too self-serving, intrusive and bureaucratic. Critics see the United States institutional accreditation process as ineffective and meddling in university affairs beyond any reasonable mandate. Specialised accreditation (e.g. business, law, education, medicine, etc.) dominated by professionals in the practice or discipline is seen as too concerned with salaries, buildings, faculty perquisites, etc. to effectively make a substantial contribution to the quality assurance process (Stetar, 1996: 306).

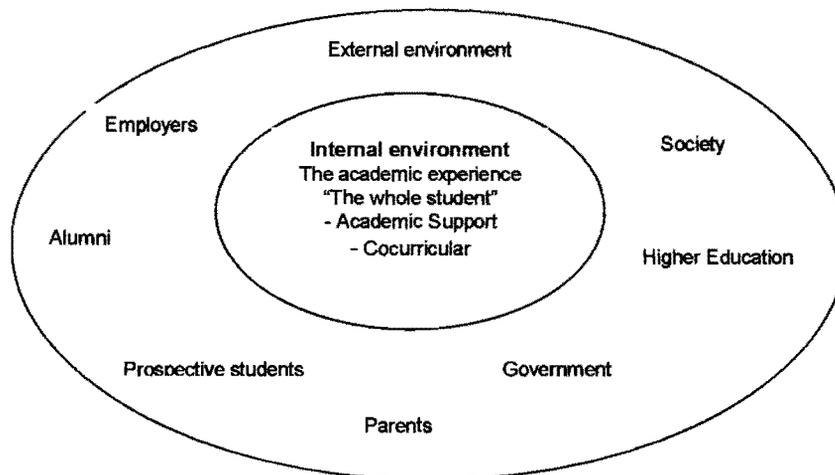
The steady rise in the number of accreditation and quality assurance bodies in the United States has forced many critics to ask if the proliferation will ever end. Likewise, one has to ask if there is any end to the willingness of these bodies to interfere in internal university budgetary processes. The best institutional budget plans are often quickly discarded as wave after wave of departments and disciplinary subsections come forth with demands for additional funding, library or computing resources, salaries or other expenditures to meet new professional or programme standards. These resources have to be drawn, in all but a few instances, from other departments who often lack the club of professional quality assurance (Trachtenberg and Wise 1996 as cited by Stetar, 1996: 306).

The future holds many important answers to the questions on how the US system of accreditation will evolve to insure quality not only in its higher education institutions and programmes, but how effectively it will incorporate global concerns for quality professional education. However, accreditation's rich history of peer review and collegiality in the US has armed it with the tools it needs to undertake self-examination and make the necessary changes (Lenn & Bobby, 1999: 268).

#### **4.6.1 TOWARDS A MORE COMPETITIVE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE UNITED STATES**

In recent years the quality, relevance, and cost of higher education has come under increasing scrutiny and criticism. Engelkemeyer, in Roberts (1995: 135) believes that higher education must follow the example of U.S. industry in improving competitiveness by increased responsiveness to customer needs. This means better meeting the needs of today's students and the organisations they will be working for tomorrow. Experimentation, creativity, and change will be required; there are few models to follow.

Many colleges and universities will choose to do nothing. They will continue to struggle with declining enrolments, student dissatisfaction, disenfranchised alumni, and public criticism. In Engelkemeyer's (1995: 135) opinion, well-known institutions of higher education – sleeping giants that have never had to worry about competition in the past – will diminish in prestige due to lethargy. New leadership institutions will emerge. Some of these new leaders may not even be in the business of higher education at this time. According to Roberts (1995: 138), society as a whole becomes the customer in Figure 4.1 below:



**Figure 4.1. Who is the customer of higher education**

#### **4.6.2 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY FOR TOTAL QUALITY AT BABSON COLLEGE:**

##### **A case study (presented by Dr Engelkemeyer, Director of Quality)**

Babson College is a small private college based in Wellesley, Massachusetts, that has embarked on a successful journey towards total quality or continuous improvement from the early 1990s. According to Engelkemeyer (1995: 140 - 141) professional service providers (like health care and higher education) must develop more effective strategies to engage the professionals – doctors and academics -- in the adoption and implementation of total quality. The classic implementation strategy in industry is a top-down approach. With this strategy there is typically a full-scale, organisation-wide total quality launch. Training is conducted, teams are launched, and all employees are expected to be involved within a relatively short period of time.

In higher education, however, a top-down strategy is difficult to implement because there are few mechanisms to compel academics to become involved. Instead a strategy must be devised to effectively engage and involve faculty in the initiative. A strategy that allows interest and enthusiasm to bubble-up from the academia is needed to support, or even to make possible, a top-down approach applied to other areas of the college.

The strategy used at Babson has been a combination top-down and bubble-up approach. A deliberate effort was made to implement a differentiated strategy across the campus. With administrative and staff personnel, quality training was required. Involvement in continuous improvement initiatives eventually became part of all performance evaluations; however, academics were approached more cautiously, by involving them in issues they deemed important, and highlighted existing practices that were consonant with the tenets of quality. Although every opportunity to engage faculty was explored, training and involvement was voluntary for them.

At Babson, they needed to do a lot more than just teach total quality. They needed to use total quality tools and principles to manage their college in both the academic and administrative areas. They believed total quality would help them to realize their vision of becoming an international leader in management education.

In 1989 Xerox Corporation hosted the first Quality Forum, a gathering of academic and business leaders, in which total quality and its role on U.S. campuses (particularly at business and engineering schools) was discussed. Academia was charged with the challenge not only of teaching the concepts of total quality, but also of using quality as a way to run their organisations. Babson College listened to what industry leaders were telling them, and had responded accordingly. Within the four years they made substantial changes in the following four areas.

- (i) Teaching total quality management
- (ii) Research in the area of total quality
- (iii) Curriculum development
- (iv) Using total quality in running the institution.

#### ***4.6.3 USING TOTAL QUALITY AS A WAY TO MANAGE THE INSTITUTION***

Utilizing a total quality philosophy at Babson can be traced to the development of the Strategic Plan 1991 –95. The development of the plan involved over 130 members of the Babson community, including faculty, administrators, students, alumni, and trustees. The planning process translated major college goals into specific objectives, with timetables and methods for evaluating results.

In a letter to the Babson community dated February 27, 1992, President William Glavin stated that

*in order to be successful, we need to coordinate the adoption and implementation of the principles of total quality in the classroom as well as in the way we operate the college to help us achieve the mission and goals we all agreed to in our strategic plan. To that end, we will establish an Office of Quality to oversee all our quality efforts. That office will be responsible for the management and coordination of our training and implementation programmes. The Office of Quality will be structured in such a way that both the academic and administrative efforts are integrated.*

A main goal of the Office of Quality is development of an organisational infrastructure to facilitate total quality implementation. The model, to be detailed, was developed using the Shiba model. Specific elements of each of the infrastructure areas are as follows.

- *Goal Setting* involves articulating what we want to achieve with respect to total quality. This includes results as well as process-related goals. At Babson, this was achieved through the incorporation of quality goals into the current evaluation system and preparation of strategic plan for quality that includes specific goals for the next five years.
- *Organisation setting* involves deploying the necessary resources for implementation. This could involve setting up an Office of Quality or deploying a champion in the organisation who reports to the highest level in the organisation (president, dean). This individual will own the initiative. The individual in charge should be a strategic thinker, well- respected, a good communicator (and listener), and have hands-on capability (a doer). At Babson, they have two directors of quality: one from the administrative ranks and one tenure-track faculty member. This ensures that both perspectives are accounted for as the implementation strategy proceeds.
- *Training and education* involves enabling people with tools and techniques. Decisions must be made regarding the content and length of training based upon the individual needs of the institution. At Babson, their basic training

involves a heavy focus on the tools and techniques of quality management, with specific focus on work process analysis. A significant proportion of the training is dedicated to effective meeting skills, in order to enable a more disciplined and effective process for meetings.

- *Promotion* involves flyers, newsletters, and other written materials as well as visual display and promotional events to pique interest and enthusiasm. At Babson, they host two open houses a year, where they celebrate their progress and recognize team efforts. They also submit information on their quality initiative to the student and employee newsletters on a regular basis.
- *Diffusion of success stories* is a mechanism to learn from others and includes communication of specific means and results, the methodology applied by particular teams, and so forth. At Babson, they profile team initiatives, approaches, and results during quality open houses, and teams make presentations to other work groups on their progress, results, challenges, and key learning experiences. In addition, they have two storyboards placed in strategic locations on the campus that profile the methodology and results from quality initiatives of specific teams.
- *Incentives and awards* include incentives for teamwork and involvement in total quality, and recognition and reward systems that encourage involvement. This is perhaps one of the most important areas for higher education, particularly with regard to faculty. Modification of the reward and recognition system needs very careful consideration in order to facilitate involvement. At Babson, they have modified the faculty load system in order to encourage participation in activities that further the goals of the institutions. In administrative areas, modification of the performance management system is placing importance on involvement in team-based improvement efforts. Monetary rewards are perhaps not appropriate to nonprofit organisations, but there is much they are doing to recognize participation via certificates, notes, announcements, special luncheons, and the like.
- *Diagnosis and monitoring* involves a plan-do-check-act (PDCA) cycle of the overall total quality initiative, which allows modification if necessary. As a

result their initial PDCA started working more closely with the cabinet on inspecting the process and furthering team motivation. They developed additional training opportunities in response to employee needs. In the future they plan to do a self-evaluation with the Baldrige criteria in order to understand where our strengths and opportunity areas exist. A long-term goal of the Office of Quality is to ensure that key processes have been identified within all divisions. This involves identifying the outputs of all processes, determining customer requirements, flowcharting the work process, and determining if work processes are capable of consistently meeting customer requirements. Once processes have been identified and measured, a quality cost review will be conducted in order to determine the costs associated with not meeting customer requirements in the most efficient and effective manner, and to identify opportunities.

Corporate models might suggest moving linearly, in development of the organisational infrastructure. In higher education it is probably important to initially obtain buy-in before setting goals and objectives and driving the process. Starting with promotion, limited training and education are mechanisms to pique interest and prove the value of involvement and the resulting benefits that can be obtained. Highlighting the results of pilot projects can add support for institutional commitment to total quality. Without a conscientious effort to mobilize an organisation infrastructure for quality, it is doubtful that the initiative will be successful because all elements are necessary in order to enable a system-wide integrated, comprehensive and compatible initiatives.

Babson's top management (cabinet) participated in total quality training in 1992 and has been involved in a number of quality-related retreats. They have been involved in several projects in order to showcase the quality tools and concepts they learned and serve as model for senior and mid-level managers (Engelkemeyer, 1995: 151- 155).

## **4.7 QUALITY PERSPECTIVES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM**

### **4.7.1 BACKGROUND TO INSTITUTIONAL SELF-EVALUATION AND QUALITY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM**

Higher Education institutions in the United Kingdom are subject to a range of external quality monitoring procedures. These are complemented by a variety of internal mechanisms to assure quality of standards. Traditionally, British universities have had a high degree of autonomy. In the 1960s, a binary system of higher education was introduced with the development of a polytechnic sector. The polytechnics had far less autonomy: they were initially controlled by local authorities and were subject to inspections by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI), in the same way as schools in the public sector. Furthermore, the polytechnics initially had no degree awarding powers, and graduates received their award from the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA).

The CNAA introduced a peer validating procedure to ensure that potential courses in the polytechnics were of an appropriate nature, based on a review procedure that examined potential curricula, syllabus content, staffing, teaching and learning methods, learning resources, and so on. This validation process, initially very inquisitorial, became slowly delegated to the polytechnics. The polytechnics became incorporated in the early 1990s; moving out of local authority control, and following the ending of the binary system in the 1990s were given degree-awarding powers. However, despite the increased autonomy of the new universities (as the polytechnics became known) they retained many of the systems that had been put in place under CNAA. Although no longer subject to HMI inspections, most new universities retained a rigorous system of periodic review and validation of courses inherited from CNAA (Geall, Harvey & Moon, 1997: 187).

With the imminent ending of the binary divide in British higher education, increasing pressure was placed on the old universities to be more accountable and open to scrutiny. Apart from HMI inspections of teacher-training provision in universities, there had been no tradition of accountability in the old universities sector, outside the need to demonstrate that some courses fulfilled the requirements for professional-body accreditation. First attempts to breach the closely guarded autonomy of the old universities came via the introduction of a process of Academic Audit, instituted under the auspices of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom (CVCP). Academic Audit involved a review of the mechanisms within a university for assuring quality. It did not, according to Geall, et al (p.187), attempt to assess the quality of teaching and learning at a subject level, much less comment on the adequacy of academic standards. Academic Audit subsequently became a division of the newly created Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC), wholly owned by the CVCP.

Academic Audit was an attempt to thwart closer inspectorial control of provision by external, governmental, agencies. In the event it failed and a process of Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA) was introduced under the auspices of the newly constituted Funding Councils (one each for England, Scotland and Wales). TQA was subject-based, involved self-assessment, peer visits and statistical indicators and included direct observation of teaching.

The Funding Councils also evaluated research, nominally to ensure that public money provided for university research was used efficiently and to best effect. The Research Assessment Exercise, a paper-based evaluation, is directly linked to the distribution of research monies and tends to occupy the (older) universities to a much larger extent than does teaching quality assessment. Williams and Loder (1990: 9) also held the view that the relationship between quality and resource allocation is not unambiguous. Is quality weakness something to be penalized or is it a reason for additional resources to try to overcome the

weakness? The Funding Council had been explicit in its position to provide extra funding for high quality research, and yet there was no clarity on how good quality teaching was to be rewarded.

The upshot of the changes in external quality monitoring in the UK in the 1990s is that institutions are faced with five main forms of external monitoring:

- Academic audit of institutional quality assurance procedures.
- Teaching quality assessment on a subject basis.
- Research evaluation via the research assessment exercise, on a subject basis.
- Professional body validation and accreditation (in some subject areas).
- Inspection of teacher- training provision, now under the control of the Teacher-Training Agency.

In addition, UK higher education has a long tradition of external examining, in which subject peers from other universities literally examine the assessed work of students in other institutions in an attempt to maintain standards across the system. Ramsden (1998: 80) notes this culture in that *"just as good teachers actively listen to their students, so good academic leaders listen to what their colleagues say about their experiences of the academic environment and academic leadership"*. There are problems with the effectiveness of the external examining system given the enormous growth in higher education and the increasing diversification of the sector. Nonetheless, external examiners are seen as the mainstay of standards. The system is somewhat curious inasmuch as externals are invited and appointed by the universities and have no responsibility to external bodies, other than, in some cases, to professional and regulatory bodies which may also have nominated external examiners (Geall, Harvey & Moon, 1999: 189).

External monitoring in the UK is likely to go through further changes in the next few years following the creation of a new Quality Assurance Agency, charged

with rationalizing the work previously undertaken by the Quality Assessment Divisions of the Funding Councils and the Academic Audit division of the Higher Education Quality Council. In the wake of the Dearing Committee report, it is also likely that the new agency will be asked to review the Research Assessment Exercise; to identify ways to enhance the external examiner system; and to ensure that quality procedures place more emphasis on academic standards. For example, the system of selecting external examiners is likely to change following the recommendation that there should be a pool of academic staff, which is recognised by the Quality Assurance Agency, from which institutions will be required to select their external examiners (Geall, Harvey & Moon, 1999: 190).

The emphasis of most external quality monitoring in the United Kingdom has been on accountability rather than improvement. The HEQC has, since its inception, had a Quality Enhancement Division, but its impact has been far less profound than that of Audit, given the predominately accountability and value for money approach of the British Government.

Internal quality monitoring in British universities has both preceded the growth in external monitoring in the 1990s and has also responded to it. Internal validation and review, especially in the old polytechnic sector, was well established prior to any external monitoring, which meant, for example, that those institutions already had procedures in place prior to the advent of the Academic Audit. This was not always the case with some of the older universities, who found themselves clarifying and documenting procedures for the first time when auditors were invited in to explore quality assurance processes. On the other hand, some of the external monitoring procedures has led to additional internal procedures or the realignment of internal procedures to mesh with external processes.

The following is an attempt to indicate the broad range of internal procedures currently practiced in English universities. The University of Central England in Birmingham, one of the “new universities”, will be used as a case study. The role

of student feedback in internal quality monitoring is also explored, as this is an essential item in the University's approach to quality monitoring, and an important element nationally, as students are major stakeholders in higher education.

#### **4.7.2 INSTITUTIONAL APPROACHES TO QUALITY MONITORING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM**

Institutions collect a wide range of data about the services they provide, including:

- Surveys of student views.
- Internal peer review of teaching.
- Internal audits of quality procedures.
- External reviews of teaching and research
- Professional body scrutiny of programmes.
- Surveys of recent graduates.
- Employer views of graduates.

These activities generate the following two types of data about stakeholder views of university provision:

- Threshold judgements relating to standards, comparability or accountability for public funds.
- Quality judgements.

According to Williams, in the UK, the external examining system has

*" . . . become a means of maintaining a kind of balance between institutional or departmental autonomy and external inspection on the one hand, and a defense against the encroachment of institutional managerialism on professional and departmental autonomy on the other."*  
(1997: 86).

The key question according to Geall, et al (1999: 192- 193) is “What do you do with the data?” In particular, how is the data used to change anything? How does it fit into institutional quality improvement policies and processes? To be effective in quality improvement, data collected from surveys and peer reviews must be transformed into information that can be used within an institution to effect change. Furthermore, this information must be linked into a process of feedback and action. In short, there must be a means to close the loop between data collection and effective action.

This requires that the institution have in place a system for:

- identifying responsibility for action;
- encouraging ownership of plans of action;
- accountability for action taken or not taken;
- feedback to generators of the data;
- Committing appropriate resources.

Establishing this is not an easy task, which is why so much data generated by surveys or peer reviews is not used to effect change, irrespective of the good intentions of those who initiate the inquiries. This involves encouraging a bottom-up quality improvement process alongside a top-down accountability requirement. However, though such an emphasis on team-work and collaboration lies at the centre of calls in the UK for a move towards greater institutional self-regulation, there is a danger that a number of complexities may remain hidden by the results from staff survey and evidence from external reports (Newton, 1999: 31).

Management, in this approach, has six strategic functions in respect of quality improvement:

- Setting the parameters within which the quality improvement process takes place;

- Establishing a non-exploitative, suspicion-free context in which a culture of quality improvement can flourish;
- Establishing and ensuring a process of internal quality monitoring;
- Disseminating good practice through an effective and open system of communication;
- Encouraging and facilitating team working amongst academic and academic-related colleagues;
- Delegating responsibility for quality improvement to the effective units that are going to deliver continuous improvement at the staff-student interface (Geall, et al, 1999: 194).

Two types of managerial structures as outlined below largely characterise higher education:

- A “collegiate” structure in which lines of accountability are diffuse and often implicit, and where academic managers are often elected.
- A hierarchical structure in which lines of accountability are focused and explicit and professional managers are appointed.

It is potentially easier for the hierarchical structure to implement a top-down accountability system, although it is much harder for it to ensure ownership of, and involvement in, the quality improvement process, rather than mere compliance with managerial requirements. Conversely, the collegiate system would appear to be better able to encourage ownership, although a real willingness to account for action may be a more difficult procedure to implement.

Perhaps the most basic anxiety among academics is that quality systems and quality monitoring, whether externally or internally driven, are essentially a managerialist tool, which threaten academic or professional autonomy. As De Vries (1997: 51) argues, regarding the growing influence of quality management principles in higher education, “the academic community has viewed this ideology as the means by which university administrators have sought to gain

control of the quality of its work". University managers and administrators, he argues, "arrogate to themselves the power to require compliance with the systems of monitoring, review and accountability" (De Vries, 1997: 57). Alderman (1996) as cited by Newton (1999: 19) has charted the hostile reactions in England to the introduction by the state of external teaching quality assessment at programme and subject levels, a development which Trow (1994: 43) describes as an example of "hard managerialism" and as an attempt to "control the uncontrollable". Whether conceived of as being of the 'hard' or 'soft' variety, it is difficult to escape the view that much activity in the UK higher education since the legislative changes of 1992 (HMG, 1992) has been devoted, at sector and institutional levels, to changing the behaviour and practices of academics through quality management.

For Shore and Roberts (1995: 8), in their discussion of the emergence of the panopticon paradigm, 'current education policy can be usefully analysed in terms of discourses of power and their relation to systems of control and bureaucratic surveillance'. Managing for quality (HEQC 1995: 158) refers to the use of:

psychological . . . forms of encouragement and persuasion to assist implementation of quality management initiatives: the authors of the case studies report using a variety of mechanisms to develop support for change and for neutralising resistance.

#### **4.7.3 THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ENGLAND IN BIRMINGHAM: A CASE STUDY**

The University of Central England in Birmingham (UCE) has an extensive set of processes and procedures for internal quality monitoring. The various procedures include:

- Student feedback of the total student experience of learning at an institutional level (Student Satisfaction).
- Monitoring of teaching quality at a faculty level (using peer review, self-assessment and student feedback) linked to individual performance review (IPR).
- Accreditation and validation of programmes of study (including employer and professional body feedback where appropriate).
- Approval, registration and examination of research degree students.
- Internal audits of aspects of university regulations and practices.
- Annual monitoring reports from programmes of study, including module-level feedback from students.
- Receipts and review of reports of external examiners and moderators.
- Faculty-level monitoring of services guaranteed in Student Charters.
- Evaluation of research development, monitoring the expenditure of money obtained via the Research Assessment Exercise.

The approach goes well beyond that used in most universities in Britain and other countries. In a recent external audit of its quality assurance procedures (HEQC 1995:32) UCE was commended for the extent, clarity and rigour of its processes. So extensive is the quality monitoring at UCE that the HEQC Academic Audit report cautions about proliferation and suggests that, despite the consultation and carefully planned introduction of quality monitoring procedures, the university might “*consider the advisability of keeping under careful review the increasing scale and complexity of internal quality assurance monitoring arrangements at all levels of the institution*”. During the audit, the team of auditors advanced the view

that the internal system might be over-elaborate and that there appeared to be excessive monitoring. The unanimous response from those audited was that it was better to be over-cautious than have an underdeveloped quality monitoring process (HEQC 1995:8).

Although the array of procedures at UCE are more than most institutions are likely to have, they do encompass the range of alternatives, relating to higher education, to be found within English universities. There are clear lines of accountability, responsibility and information flows in the university. The ways that external processes mesh with internal ones are clearly articulated at UCE. In a sense, however, external quality monitoring processes (EQM) add another layer to the extensive internal quality monitoring (IQM) processes and reporting procedures (Geall, et al, 1999: 197; Harvey, 1995a; 1995b). In his work on 'continuous quality improvement' and the 'new collegialism', Harvey noted that:

*Part of the responsiveness of higher education must, at least in the medium term, involve a recognition of an obligation to external quality monitoring processes . . . what is required is an internal quality approach that meshes with external requirements (1995b: 39).*

In conclusion, internal and external quality monitoring are not static processes. They develop in response to, among other things, political and economic climates. This has been seen in the United Kingdom over the last decade in response to changes such as the removal of the binary divide between universities and polytechnics, the political climate of public services having to be more accountable to the government and the public, and the rapid expansion of higher education. Over the next few years we shall see developments in response to a new government, the recommendations from the Dearing Committee review and subsequent policy changes, and the restructuring of the Quality Assurance Agency. However, we can conclude that, if quality monitoring is to be used to enhance the experience of students in higher education, then

systems will need to be responsive to key stakeholders (including students and staff). Quality monitoring needs to result in action and be more than just a fact-finding or paper pushing exercise. Also, continual enhancement needs to become more central to the debate and not just a by-product of accountability.

#### **4.8 IMPLICATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS ON QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The case studies presented in this chapter demonstrate that the relationship between governance arrangements and quality assurance in higher education are informed by broader national and international agendas. According to Bitzer & Malherbe (1995: 49), "quality assurance in higher education, has indeed become an international phenomenon with different approaches and applications". Similarly, Lategan (1999: 74) contends that the globalisation movement towards quality assurance is, in a manner of speaking, no novelty in university education. According to Harker (1995: 36), "it has partially been the cost of financing equity and access, which have resulted in the recasting of the value of the modern university in performative and economic terms". These arguments, therefore, make the South African higher education system to become a serious player in both the national and international quality assurance movement.

While Strydom (1999: 104- 105) argues that "it becomes important to critically evaluate policy development and formulation at especially the macro- and meso-level of quality assurance", at another level, institutions of higher learning are required to establish their own quality management systems. Quality management systems can, of course, also be established at various institutional levels such as faculties, departments, units, etc. "In this way, the overall responsibility for assuring quality is placed as close as possible to the individual organisation or sub-unit providing the educational service" (Lategan, 1999: 12)..

Some international contributions (Van Damme, 2000: 10- 19; Woodhouse 2000: 20- 27), suggest that

"state control or steering of national QA system tends to be more direct in the early phases of the system, but that as the system matures, this becomes unnecessary and the state's touch may become lighter and even indirect".

In the South African context, transformation imperatives such as the reconfiguration of system to meet national human resource development needs, relevance, efficiency, equity, redress and cost effectiveness is not different from developments elsewhere in the world. Australia is a case in point in that the waves of change have necessitated that institutions of higher learning reposition themselves in accordance with the economic considerations, and by and large move towards the amalgamation of institutions. This approach seems to manifest itself in the higher education developments in South Africa.

Kotecha & Lockett (2000: 206) argue that "it is only through significant pressures from the state that different institutions are likely to be "persuaded" to adopt new identities, functions and missions". Like in the UK and Australia, the state intervention led to the abolition of the binary divide in higher education, and yet South Africa is grappling with how to rationalise the system and possibly do away with the a binary divide because it has implications for quality assurance mechanisms, as illustrated in Chapter 2. Lessons from these countries are valuable for the evolving QA system in this country especially in relation to how systemic and institutional governance influence developments in quality assurance. International experience, according to Van Damme 2000; Verkleij 2000; Newton 2000; Woodhouse 2000 suggests that "a QA system should not be allowed to become fixed or static in its design, but rather that it should evolve dynamically as the system matures and as diminishing returns set in for particular procedures".

The establishment of the HEQC in South Africa as one of the governance structures is not dissimilar to the HEQC (now QAA in Higher Education) in the UK, the Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (CQAHE) in Australia and the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit (NZUAA) Unit. These international structural arrangements are yet another comparison that enriches the South African higher education system by learning from the mistakes and good practices elsewhere.

The accountability regime in New Zealand has affected the restructuring of higher education to an extent that institutional governance was under serious consideration. Governing councils that had wide representation from many sectors of the society were significantly reduced by legislation to have fewer members appointed by the Ministry of Education. This comparison to the South African situation is the opposite to the situation in New Zealand. On the contrary, representation in the governing councils have included other stakeholders as outlined in Chapter 2, to an extent that there are issues around role clarification of councillors in relation to management as will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. This, nevertheless, is a characteristic of the transformed institutional governance structures that were exclusive and discriminatory in the previous dispensation in South African higher education.

Another implication for the international comparison is the culture of "quality audits" in higher education. New Zealand first engaged in self-evaluation processes, and then moved to institutional audits. The United States engaged in the "rethinking of the QA processes" and moved more towards a market oriented approach with continuous quality improvement (CQI) or total quality (TQ) receiving prominence in some institutions. The participation of senior management in quality training on "how to run an institution" in the US compares favourably with the blueprint published by Piper (1993: vol. 1:21) on "the overall governance of the institution" in Australia. Consciousness is growing in South Africa for HEIs to reshape some aspects of their operations as well as

preparation for institutional audits that will be conducted by the HEQC. These are largely along the lines of self-evaluation as it has been the case in other countries.

As part of its implementation strategy, the HEQC in South Africa could provide guidelines for all HEIs and undertake capacity- building and the sharing of best practices where internal systems are found to be lacking. This does not mean that a single blueprint for QA should be imposed on all HEIs. On the contrary, a variety of internal QA systems should be encouraged and HEIs should be advised to develop systems which are in keeping with their differentiated functions and with the particular cultures and "lifeworlds" of their staff and students – i.e. those who will have to use the QA systems.

The HEQC could provide a framework and broad guidelines for the establishment of such internal self-evaluation systems – for example, to ensure that if it focuses on the teaching-learning interface then it should become sufficiently institutionalised. This could "ensure that the quality function is integrated into line management functions so that the self-evaluation procedures do result in effective decision-making and action for improvement" (Muller, 1997: 37). This approach would also follow the advice given by Verkleij (2000: 87) that "the design of a QA system should begin at institutional level with self-reflection". These international experiences have assisted the South African HEIs to recognise that quality assurance is primarily their responsibility, and for that reason, governance and management arrangements should be put in place first before QA systems are developed. Setting up accountability structures for quality assurance demonstrates the effectiveness of policies and practices for QA. The UK example of the "bottom-up" Quality Improvement and the "top-down" Accountability requirements ties up with the HEQC's approach to quality as value for money. An implication for this comparison in South Africa is that governance structures are subjected to public scrutiny through the review of their QA mechanisms in higher education

Another dimension to the international comparison, if we follow Van Damme's four functions of a national QA system, apart from the improvement of teaching and learning via self-evaluation, other functions which would need to be addressed are "ensuring public accountability, providing client information and market transparency" and in some cases such as ours assisting the state to steer the transformation agenda. The last three functions would all "require some sort of external assessment not only of institutional quality management systems, but also of the actual quality on HEIs' inputs, processes and outputs" (Van Damme, 2000: 10).

International experience suggests that, "...it is in working out the tensions between the first and the other three functions that national QA systems can easily go wrong". For example, Van Damme states that it is at this stage that a shift in power is usually experienced in HEIs from academics to managers, who in turn increasingly wield power on behalf of the state. Scholars point to the change in internal relations and equilibria provoked by quality assurance policies and systems

*A shift in power towards the managerial top of institutions, parallel with an increasing professionalism of management personnel has been one of the most important consequences . . . the increasing autonomy and the development of QA systems have moved the political power of the state in the institutions themselves, with rector's conferences acting as a bridgehead of the state (Van Damme, 2000: 15).*

This inevitably causes resentment amongst the "managed" who perceive QA to be driven by managerial and external interests and to threaten academic and institutional autonomy (Newton, 1999: 18). A "hands-off" approach to academic matters was followed in Australia in bid to safeguard institutional autonomy.

In South Africa, we are advised by Newton (2000: 79) to acknowledge tensions up-front and more importantly to utilise them as "a basis for intervening with purpose, since it provides a basis for understanding prior to design and intervention". At a more general level Newton warns that institutional contexts always interfere with planned change, for change has emergent properties and is always unpredictable. Newton warns that

*Quality can only be understood relative to how actors construe and construct "quality" and the "quality system". Situational factors relating to context and actors' subjectivities prevent accountability and improvement from being reconciled and undermine the implementation of the referred quality policy.*

Writing from the British experience, Newton suggests that one of the greatest challenges in establishing a viable QA system is to gain and maintain the trust of academics and thus to avoid its degeneration into compliance – "ritualism", "tokenism" and "game-playing". In our context, the challenge is to determine appropriate ways to encourage innovation and improvement (Kotecha & Lockett, 2000: 208).

Jacobs (2000: 71- 72) and Strydom (2000: 8- 9) warn against the so-called "quality overkill", such that, time, energy and cost constraints force academics to adopt a "getting by" approach to quality. Newton (2000: 80) also advises that "if the system is not to become discredited, one needs to ensure that adequate resources are available at the operational level to ensure that the identified "quality gaps" can indeed be closed". This challenge faces the governance at all levels, particularly at institutional level to ensure that if they need to influence quality assurance mechanisms in their institutions, they would have to consider adequate resources for QA in the manner that the Australian government set the pace initially. A contentious issue in South Africa is that there are competing priorities in higher education, and quality is just one of them. The international

approaches to quality depend much on the marketability of institutions abroad and the availability of resources other than what the state provides. How to deal with the tension between establishing a coherent national system and the demands of operating in a global market is the question that the HEQC on the one hand, and HEIs on the other, should deal with in an attempt to encourage international benchmarking.

Another tension referred to above, which both the HEQC and HEIs will need to address, is the one between nation-building and globalisation. The former requires building local coherence into the higher education system, whilst the latter is likely to result in fragmentation and even greater diversity. As a young democracy South Africa is obliged to ensure that its national assets (in this case, HEIs) are employed to further its human resource development and knowledge production needs. However, given the trade liberalisation of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy (GEAR), the entry into South Africa of a multitude of private higher education providers and the demand to operate competitively in a global market, the HEQC will need to address, as a matter of urgency, the issue of international benchmarking and the regulation and quality assurance of private providers, thereby protecting the interests of public higher education.

It would be simpler to advocate a “two-stage revolution” (transformation) i.e. to first deal with national transformation and thereafter deal with internationalisation and QA on an international scale. But current realities suggest that this will not be possible (Kotecha & Lockett, 200: 209). Thus the HEQC is likely to have to engage with the international dimension of QA fairly early on in its activities. Following Woodhouse (2000: 21), this phase would allow a more diversified and pluralistic approach to QA in which there need not necessarily be a one to one relationship between an HEI and an external quality assurance agency (EQAA). Woodhouse (2000: 24- 25) paints a scenario where national EQAAs begin to operate across national boundaries and independent EQAAs operate

internationally via benchmarking clubs, consortia and professional associations, etc. He also predicts that HEIs themselves will not exist as coherent entities for much longer and will themselves become “brokers, co-ordinators and credentiallers” for a variety of educational providers.

This complex scenario suggests a more mature stage of a QA system in which steering by the state and its agencies are no longer necessary. Instead, individual institutions and organisations organise their own QA, to their own market advantage, via a range of mechanisms, which would need to be co-ordinated by “external quality managers”. Presumably, at this stage, an external quality agency would only need to play a brokering and co-ordinating role. Woodhouse cited by Kotecha and Lockett (2000: 209) suggests that eventually, the function of national QAAs could wither away altogether.

International experience (viz Verkleij) tells us that over time, national QA systems tend to result in diminishing returns. They also tend to push HEIs towards uniformity and homogenisation. This suggests that the HEQC will need to adopt a dynamic approach to QA and as the system develops and learns and as the external environment changes, it will need to keep adjusting and refining the demands it makes on HEIs – i.e. it will need to keep changing the rules of the game, as it has been the case in the UK, Australia and the United States.

Furthermore, given the actual and the planned diversity of our HE system and the different stages of development of different institutions, the HEQC may well need to allow institutions to operate at different phases of the QA system. Some, with already well developed internal QA systems may well be ready to move on, whilst others may need nurturing for some time (Kotecha & Lockett, 2000: 209; Strydom, 2000: 8). This is as a result of the unevenness in the South African system as discussed in Chapter 1 and 2.

This will make the HEQC's work a difficult balancing act between meeting a national nation-building agenda as well as operating in a global market, between devolving responsibility for QA whilst still driving a national QA agenda, between fostering improvement whilst ensuring accountability. In the words of Woodhouse, (2000: 26), it will therefore need to be "maximally flexible, maximally cost-effective and minimally intrusive", this presents an enormous intellectual, political and practical challenge.

In many QA systems overseas, it is assumed that QA for accountability will automatically result in improvements in practice as a spin-off from the threat of external scrutiny. However, research and international experience suggests that this is not necessarily the case and that all that happens is that people learn to play the "quality game" better (Yorke 1999, Harvey, 1995).

Finally, it is evident from this discussion that governance and quality are inseparable. The two pillars of QA, namely, improvement and accountability complement each other. Some countries are guided by accountability considerations (value for money), whereas others are focusing on a "light touch" improvement dimension that is nurturing the academic sector of HEIs. Whatever the focus is, international perspectives on quality assurance are influenced by the transformation agenda at both the system and institutional levels.

## **4.9 CONCLUSION**

The South African national quality assurance system, although it is at an embryonic stage, has much to benefit from other experiences in the world. The dedicated academics and administrators are demonstrating their commitment to the national policy priorities, with quality assurance underpinning all of them. It is only through quality assurance and self- evaluation that our higher education system can be considered to be reliable and credible.

Experiences from Australia have taught us that if government is serious about redressing the imbalances and even building the human resource capacity, it has to, as a matter of fact invest heavily in the development of a quality assurance system. The HEQC ought to be adequately resourced and well- trained in order to carry the mandate of building a better future for all.

*It is not enough to have quality. Quality also has to be maintained and guaranteed. In higher education, quality assurance is the collective term for institutional activities, policies, and procedures that provide a measure of confidence that what is done academically is consistent with the institution's goals and is likely to effect learning at levels established by the institution or by external bodies. (Whitaker, 1989: 73).*

In this chapter the international trends on QA demonstrate the pressures faced by the South African QA system at both national and institutional levels. Of importance is how these QA considerations interface with the governance imperatives in a post-apartheid South Africa. The international perspectives provide a solid base for the empirical study undertaken in the next Chapter.