CHAPTER 8

CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This Chapter summarises the findings made in the study, makes recommendations based on those findings, and also outlines possible themes for further research on the governance and quality interface in the South African higher education system. The rationale for this study was to investigate the impact that the transformed institutional governance structures are making towards the promotion and assurance of quality in institutions of higher learning.

In this study, the researcher has developed a framework within which institutional governance structures can evaluate their performance in relation to quality assurance mechanisms in their institutions. This was undertaken in an attempt to answer the research question:

HOW DO TRANSFORMED INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES INFLUENCE QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION?

Higher education transformation in South Africa is at the top of the Education Ministry's agenda since the democratic dispensation in 1994. This is an endeavour to address and correct the past imbalances in the system through structural transformation. Transformation is taking place at both the systemic and institutional levels since the NCHE (1996) Report, the Education White Paper 3 (1997), the SAQA Act (1995) and the Higher Education Act (1997). The

latter Act has been amended in 1999, 2000 and 2001 in order to improve the first version of the Act. The improvements relate mainly to institutional arrangements such as the repeal of certain obsolete laws and Private Acts, institutional mergers, pronouncements on foreign students, Councils of public higher education and their conflict of interests, etc.

In the midst of all these changes, quality is at the centre of competing priorities for the higher education system that requires equity and redress, adequate resources and institutions that are responsive to the broader agenda of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP).

8.1.1 THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to explore the extent and manner in which the transformed institutional structures are influencing quality assurance mechanism in their institutions. The reason for this aim is the improvement of productivity and accountability in their systems. The study sought to identify appropriate QA mechanisms that could serve the government and institutional imperatives.

Traditionally, the focus on quality has been predominantly on the academic activities of institutions of higher learning. This pattern will not change in the foreseeable future as illustrated in the data provided **in Chapter 6** (Section 4(a)). In order for the core business of HEIs to improve there has to be accountability, efficiency and effectiveness of systems, credible quality assurance and quality management systems. The inter-relationship of governance structures calls for the strategic focus areas that build on good practice and international benchmarking standards that will place the South African higher education system firmly on the map.

The study attempts to highlight the historical classification of HEIs and how they are responsive to the elements of good practice through their governance

structures. The four classifications (see Glossary) are within the reigning conceptions of Historically Disadvantaged and Advantaged Institutions in South African higher education.

Additionally, the study attempts to draw the attention of HEIs to develop effective QA management practices that can be accessible, improved and shared in the higher education sector so that the whole system (and institutions) can derive the benefit.

In order to achieve the above aims of the thesis, in **Chapter 1** a theme analysis was constructed in order to clarify the concepts that appeared throughout the study. These concepts are:

- Higher Education Transformation
- Higher Education Institutions
- Institutional Governance Structures
- Co-operative Governance
- Quality and Quality Assurance
- International Perspectives on QA

The literature review, the conceptual response to the research question, and the development of the concepts later operationalised by way of collecting data has been discussed. The quantitative and qualitative research methods that were employed in the study are also discussed in Chapter 1 and developed further in the study.

The study is based on quantitative and qualitative research methods as well as the historical and contemporary sources on governance and quality assurance literature. A questionnaire was distributed among higher education institutions and was it followed up with personal interviews in universities and technikons in South Africa. Adequate information was amassed from these rich interactions with senior academics and administrators of both the HDIs and HAIs.

In Chapter 2 a logical and descriptive analysis of the legislative framework was done at the national (systems) and institutional levels. Structures of governance at Macro-, Meso-, and Micro-levels are discussed in relation to quality assurance.

Due to the fact that the focus of the study is on institutional governance structures (Micro-level), the researcher found it compelling to differentiate among the different structures (Council, Senate, Institutional Forum) and the office of the Vice-Chancellor/Principal who, as the Chief Executive Officer is Council-*in-loco* in its absence on campus. The Student Representative Council as representing one of the constituent customers was briefly discussed in relation to how they fit in the transformed structures.

Apart from the structural arrangements, mention was also made of the pressures facing higher education in this country as well as abroad. Among the many pressures, quality and standards also come into play. This chapter demonstrates that quality assurance in higher education cannot be discussed in isolation. These pressures have a direct impact on quality at all levels in the institution.

In Chapter 3 the Quality Assurance framework, starting with the historical overview of quality in industrial models was discussed. A few prominent 'quality gurus' and how they influenced the thinking of higher education quality experts is explored in this chapter. The works of the 'quality gurus' is extensively used in the education sector, and a case is made that they can also be applied by structures of governance in their endeavour to build a sustainable quality assurance management system for their institutions.

A brief outline of the different Quality Management systems and how the notions of quality and standards inter-relate, (as informed by the quality experts) was given prominence in this Chapter. The Chapter captured the theoretical framework underpinning this study.

By way of laying a theoretical basis for responding to the above, in **Chapter 4**, international perspectives on quality assurance are explored. Four countries, (Australia, New Zealand, the United States and the United Kingdom) that are considered to be among the formidable exporters of higher education, are discussed in relation to how the international approaches could influence the sharing of good practice. This was done at both systems and institutional (case studies) level in order to demonstrate the significance of international best practice to the South African higher education scenario.

There are a number of similarities in the higher education systems of the selected case studies, especially in relation to the prominent role played by the state in funding arrangements aimed at enhancing quality at their institutions.

In Chapter 5 the research methodology operationalised in the study is discussed to highlight the complementarity of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. The research paradigm, strategy, instruments used, data collection, the sample and rationale for using these methodologies are discussed.

Particular care was given to the objectivity, reliability and validity of the results by ensuring the qualified participants who have a deeper understanding of the reconfiguration of higher education and how it affects quality were engaged through questionnaire interactions and later, face-to-face interviews for the triangulation of responses given.

In Chapter 6 the presentation and analysis of the quantitative (Questionnaire) data are discussed. This Chapter also provides the framework within which governance structures can develop, maintain and improve their role in Quality Assurance, with the caution that this should happen at different degrees owing to the historical classifications of HEIs in South Africa.

In Chapter 7 the presentation and analysis of the interview data is discussed in a manner that identifies how the interview data reinforces or conflicts with the questionnaire data. This approach brought about additional information on the role that governance structures are playing towards the quality goal(s) of HEIs according to their classifications. This Chapter also provides for the triangulation of results so that this study is scientific and could add value in the reconfiguration of higher education.

8.2 FINDINGS

8.2.1 Chapter 1 demonstrates that

8.2.1.1   the policies and practices pertaining to higher education had been flawed to a degree of discriminatory funding arrangements in the sector, with HDIs suffering the most since 1959;

8.2.1.2   based on the conceptualisation of governance and quality assurance in the transformation context, there is a need to recognise that institutional governance structures are at different developmental stages across the surveyed universities and technikons in South Africa;

8.2.1.3   the development of a framework for institutional quality assurance and management has become critical for governance structures to evaluate their performance against the set framework/standards.

On the strength of the above it is apparent that the development of an institutional quality assurance and management system for governance structures is a matter of urgency in this country.

8.2.2 Chapter 2 shows that

8.2.2.1 the transformation of higher education put pressure on HEIs from different angles such as inadequate resource allocation and accountability imperatives, growing market demand for quality and standards and the need to satisfy the primary customers (students).

8.2.2.2 Institutional governance structures inter-relate and are expected to complement one another towards the attainment of institutional quality goals. The mandated responsibilities of councils could form the basis of a standard against which council can be judged objectively in pursuance of its fiduciary duties;

8.2.2.3 The Quality Assurance structures of HEIs at the meso-level are at different levels of development (binary system - with the change in legislation imposing a further uncertainty in the governance structures, e.g. the abolition of Private Acts for Universities and the dissolution of SERTEC for technikons).

The changing legal framework and the expositions of the White Paper 3 form the basis of the development of a Quality Assurance and Management system that governance structures can adopt for purposes of good practice.

8.2.3 Chapter 3 points out that

8.2.3.1 the historical underpinnings of quality that started in industry have a bearing on how HEIs have conceptualised the notions of quality for the core functions of institutions;

8.2.3.2 the models developed by the 'quality gurus' permeate across management structures of institutions and organisations, and can thus be applicable to good governance at Council, Senate and the Institutional Forums;

8.2.3.3 Total Quality Management in higher education can be applied insofar as to develop the different types of HEIs. Some institutions need more assistance than others towards the development of an institutional Quality Assurance and Management system, with resource allocation (finance, human resource expertise) playing a pivotal role;

8.2.3.4 The characteristics of the Quality Assurance and Management Planning framework integrating models developed by experts, qualify management systems and the SAQA's elements of good practice are a comprehensive data bank that emphasised both the improvement and accountability dimensions of quality assurance in governance structures.

Based on the discussion in Chapter 3 it is clear that quality and quality assurance must gain prominence in other structures of governance in order for the institutional quality assurance and management framework to have ownership institution-wide.

8.2.4 In Chapter 4 it has been argued that

8.2.4.1 the international perspectives on quality assurance and the pressures of globalisation are essential ingredients of an institutional quality assurance and management system. International approaches promote benchmarking standards in higher education;

8.2.4.2 institutional approaches to international networks hinge more on the core business of institutions as it is dominated by academic exchanges in teaching and research. Senate as a governance structure responsible for this function can benefit from the international best practices shared in this chapter towards quality enhancement.

Based on the discussion in **Chapter 4** it is, therefore essential to recognise that the institutional quality assurance and management framework cannot be developed without taking into consideration the international, national and institutional processes and developments in Quality Assurance. It is through this approach that lessons learned from other countries can be developed to avoid the shortcomings that were experienced in the past.

8.2.5 Chapter 5 highlighted the fact that

8.2.5.1 the majority of HEIs (78%) participated in the study with a good spread according to their historical classification. This enabled the researcher to see the angles from which these institutions approach Quality Assurance in their governance structures. It further enabled the researcher to see the receptive nature of HEIs to legal requirements for governance and quality, and how these support their strategic objectives;

8.2.5.2 the methodology employed in the study is complementary to the on-going discourse on the reconfiguration of the higher education system in South Africa.

Based on the quantitative and qualitative research methods the triangulation of results was found to concur with the issues emanating from the research question. Reliability and credibility of the

instruments enable the study to make a contribution towards the development of institutional quality assurance and management system that will enhance good governance and the quality focus.

8.2.6 In Chapter 6 it has been **found** that

8.2.6.1   there was general compliance by HDIs and HAIs in relation to the stipulations of the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 with respect to the establishment of transformed institutional structures, a dimension that was attributed to stable institutional environments and good leadership.

Where compliance was a problem it was attributed to internal problems and prolonged consultations with stakeholders; this demonstrates the unevenness in the manner that HEIs conduct their business in South Africa.

8.2.6.2   the majority of institutional responses (both HDIs and HAIs) gave an indication that their governing Councils needed assistance insofar as delineating the role of Councils and that of management with the purpose of attaining quality systems in the institution; capacity building is identified as a need in governance structures if they have to influence quality assurance mechanisms.

The classification of institutions as outlined in **Chapter 6** gives a in-depth scenario of the unevenness of HEIs without being overly negative of the circumstances that cause institutions to classify themselves in that manner;

8.2.6.3   quality assurance in HEI governance structures is taking place albeit to varying degrees as the data showed. This is a confirmation of the hypothesis that is made in **Chapter 1**;

8.2.6.4 accountability and improvement dimensions of quality assurance are taking place at Council, Senate and to a limited extent in the Institutional Forum. This finding is informed by how the different types of governance structures in these HEIs understand their role. Some governance structures are overly enthusiastic about their duties [at HDIs], whereas others allow management the space to account and improve those aspect that required attention [at HAIs];

8.2.6.5 The institutional dynamics that influence the quality perspectives at institutions were found to be characteristic of an unstable and uneven higher education environment insofar as the image (internal and external), financial viability and the perceived relations with the DoE;

8.2.6.6 The economic considerations for higher education remain a growing concern that there is no adequate funding for higher education in South Africa. The situation at HDIs is much worse than in HAIs as a result of the past imbalances. This is a world-wide phenomenon, and yet it calls for the institutional governance structures and other role-players to view this in the context of the cost of quality as Crosby has warned (cf. Chapter 3). The issue of funding requires creativity and innovation on the part of governance structures towards the fulfilment of institutional quality mandates.

It should be noted that **Chapter 6** therefore, alerts us to the fact that there is an indication that the unevenness in the system and at institutional levels, is addressed by national policies (see NPHE, 2001) and the need to revise the funding formula for higher education. This is a positive first step and a 'good faith' effort by the South African government on the one hand, and the responsiveness of HEIs to the transformation and quality imperatives on the other.

8.2.7 On the basis of the data analysed in **Chapter 7** it has been **found** that

8.2.7.1 governing Councils do in fact take their duties and responsibilities seriously, although at times there are potential clashes with management structures as far as the day-to-day duties of the latter are concerned in some HDIs. The situation in HAIs is different in that the governing structures are reported o accord their management structures the liberty and confidence to run their institutions effectively and efficiently.

8.2.7.2 strategic plans are in place in most institutions, and that operational structures are held to account to their governance structures;

8.2.7.3 the classification of institutions shows a different outlook to resource availability and allocation in HAIs and HDIs, with the former being well resourced in comparison to the latter. This is a concern that has a bearing on quality and standards, as well as service delivery, especially in HDIs.

8.2.7.4 the transformation and changed composition of Senate have an influence on how Senate conducts its business in relation to the past. Senate is still regarded as the supreme governing structure on academic matters, and yet in some institutions it seems like 'business as usual', which is a concern for the improvement dimension of QA in the system and in the institutions affected; it becomes a question of how responsive some of the HAIs are to the structural transformation agenda?

8.2.7.5 the Institutional Forum (IF) as a relatively new structure in the academic fraternity, and unique to the South African situation, does not seem to enjoy support and continued existence in both HDIs and HAIs. Although HEIs are in a compliance mode, they do not see how the IF

can contribute in the quality aspects of the institution. This becomes an efficiency question for the legislature since much of their services are incorporated in the existing organisational/ institutional structures.

8.2.7.6 the proliferation of international higher education providers is considered as a real threat to the growth of public HEIs.

Finally, the broader higher education transformation agenda is being operationalised at institutions, and a framework for the quality assurance and management system needs to be developed in order to accomplish the broader policy goals.

8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the problem statement as stated in **Chapter 1**, section 1.6 and the findings as indicated above, the following recommendations are made:

8.3.1 ON THE BASIS OF THE NEED TO PROMOTE GOOD PRACTICE IN INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND MANAGEMENT AS MENTIONED IN PARAGRAPH 8.2.1.3, IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT

The framework within which governance structures should evaluate themselves needs to be developed along the lines of mandated responsibilities for Councils as outlined in **Chapter 2, section 2.6.1.3.**

This framework will enable councils to become more focused on accountability issues and allow structures such as senates to focus more on the improvement aspects for which they would be accountable to councils. This will enhance the principle of cooperative governance.

8.3.2 ON THE BASIS OF THE DISCUSSIONS MADE IN SECTIONS 8.2.4.1 AND 8.2.4.2 IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT

Prominence of Quality Assurance in other structures of governance should be developed through further investigation and research.

The reason for this recommendation is that QA should not be viewed as an 'add-on' to all other functions in HEIs. Structures of governance should be seen to be efficient, productive and trusted, and it is from this approach that the international dimensions to quality can flourish.

8.3.3 ON THE BASIS OF THE FINDINGS MADE IN SECTION 8.2.6.5 IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT

The unevenness of HEIs as historically significant can be addressed by institutional quality assurance mechanisms that recognises the damage caused by influences geared toward thwarting progress and quality outcomes in different types of institutions. The DoE can play a supportive role to institutions by recognising and implementing strategies that will enhance quality systems, without perpetuating discrimination.

The data shows that the majority of the HEIs have positive perceptions of the DoE, and it is on that basis that it can play a supporting role without itself not falling into the trap of the micro-managing institutions.

8.3.4 ON THE BASIS OF THE FINDINGS MADE IN SECTION 8.2.6.6 IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT

Quality Assurance should be funded adequately both at the systems and institutional levels as was initially done in Australia. This would be a return

in investment for the country and a burgeoning learning society would enable institutional structures to have more impact on quality assurance at their institutions.

8.3.5 ON THE BASIS OF THE FINDINGS MADE IN SECTION 8.2.3 IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT

Elements of the questionnaire developed in this study could form the basis of the framework for the institutional quality assurance and management system that governance structures could incorporate in their policies.

8.3.6 ON THE BASIS OF THE FINDINGS MADE IN 8.2.7.5 IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT

An extensive investigation be initiated and research be conducted to determine whether the sustenance of the IF would benefit the higher education system, and international perspectives should be sought in this respect.

8.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

8.4.1 There are some shortcomings associated with the methodology in the study such as (i) the difficulty of gaining access to institutions for in-depth studies, and (ii) the problem of interpretation where institutionally the reality is interpreted through the eyes of the respondents.

The researcher continued with this methodology in spite of the above because it has more utility for the higher education sector. To find out in a probing manner what the factors that play themselves out are, and how this could improve the systems-thinking in this transformation era. In order

to address this shortcoming, the triangulation of the results was performed to develop meaning out of the data.

8.4.2 HEIs were asked to each complete and return 3 questionnaires. The institutional responses varied between 1 and 3, with a limited number of institutions reporting that they decided to collectively formulate one response per institution, when the intention was to have multiple observations to the issues raised in the instrument. It may be possible that the objectivity, reliability and validity of the responses from those institutions were compromised by having one instead of three [possibly different] responses.

8.4.3 Some respondents provided their "expert" opinion as opposed to the 'institutional' view/approaches that were as far as possible sought by the researcher. The reasoning behind this negligible deviation was that there was no 'official' institutional position/statements on some of the questions raised in the questionnaire.

8.4.4 Additionally, a small group (6 HEIs) of institutions was selected on the basis of their availability within the broad classifications of HDIs and HAIs, and further Emerging-Stable, Uncertain-Unstable, Entrepreneurial-Expanding and Traditional-Elite. There was an even spread of the technikon and university sector, and yet the researcher recognises that no over-generalisation should be made based on the responses although this was a fairly representative and credible group in the higher education sector. The results can however, be generalised to include the entire higher education sector.

8.4.5 Some of the institutional representatives were not comfortable to discuss some issues owing to the uncertainties that are lingering in higher education as outlined in Chapter 6 and 7, Section C (10) and 7.2.4 and

7.2.5 respectively. This affects a small number of institutions, and this may have compromised the objectivity, reliability and validity of the responses in those institutional climates.

In spite of all the shortcomings outlined above the study can still be relied upon based on the measures undertaken to ensure the objectivity, reliability and validity of the results as outlined in Chapter 5. Further, a triangulation of the results was performed, and a clear pattern has evolved that governance structures in both HDIs and HAIs do make an influence on the QA mechanisms in their institutions although differentially as a result of the histories of institutions.

8.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

The researcher is of the opinion that this study offers the governance and quality interface at institutional level a perspective that serves as a departure point for further study and research. In this regard further potential areas of research are listed below:

8.5.1 In order to verify and elaborate further on the findings and recommendations that were made in this study, more extensive research can be undertaken by the implementation of the framework provided **in Chapter 6** for the development of institutional quality assurance and management system for governance structures. The implementation of the framework can be undertaken on a limited scale taking into account the classifications of HEIs in the South African context.

8.5.2 Research regarding governance and quality imperatives within the framework of the reconfiguration of the higher education system (post National Working Group recommendations to the Minister of Education).

8.5.3 A study to assess the successes and shortcomings of institutional governance structures since the 1997 higher education dispensation.

8.5.4 An investigation to verify the elements of micro-management of institutions by their governing Councils (and to some extent the state interventions), and how this phenomenon impacts on the quality of provision in HEIs.

8.5.5 A project to determine the correlation between the different classes of HEIs and their demonstrated performance during the transformation process.

8.5.6 Research regarding quality management systems established in the transition process and how they could benefit the sector.

8.5.7 Research regarding the level of training and commitment provided to trustees (councillors) and other stakeholders in support of the quality assurance imperatives in South Africa.

8.5.8 A survey on how academic support units in HEIs could feed into good governance by applying the principles of TQM in higher education in South Africa.

8.5.9 Research on the funding of quality assurance *per se* in HEIs (taking into account the financial backlog of institutions) towards the fulfilment of broader institutional purposes.

8.6 CONCLUSION

In this study an attempt was made to propose a framework within which institutional governance structures could be evaluated for purposes of quality

assurance. It is remarkable to notice how the South African higher education system has transformed in a period of less than 5 years, and how HEIs have been responsive to the legal framework and quality assurance requirements. All of these are happening in the context of tensions in the system, financial constraints, historical divisions and the uneven quality assurance arrangements.

This study provides a framework within which institutions of higher learning can evaluate themselves at governance structural levels, and how, in that exercise they can apply international benchmarks in higher education for purposes of improvement and accountability in the system. It also raises the issue of institutional dynamics that inhibit progress in some institutions, and suggests further research that can enable the South African higher education system to compete with the best in the world in spite of the past discriminatory policies and practices. This study has the potential to nourish the envisaged inter-institutional co-operations in higher education in an attempt to address the unevenness in human, financial and physical resources.

Quality and quality assurance will remain on the agenda of academic institutions for a long time to come, and the burgeoning South African higher education system will improve on the basis of a 'good faith' effort by all stakeholders and role-players to add value and become a role model in the developing world. This line of reasoning has implications for the application of certain policy ideas, and clearly, the relationship between governance and quality needs to be re-stated in a system that was historically flawed in these dominating aspects of South African higher education. Many challenges, questions and answers confronting the South African higher education institutions can be contextualised in the statement made by Karl Popper [in Conjectures and Refutations] as cited by Phillips (1987:v) that

> *So my answer to the questions "How do you know? What is the source or the basis of your assertion? What observations have led you to it?" would be: "I do not know: my assertion was merely a*

guess.   Never mind the source ... if you are interested in the problem which I tried to solve by my tentative assertion, you may help me by criticizing it as severely as you can..."

Karl Popper *(Conjectures and Refutations)*

Whoso loveth correction loveth knowledge, but he that hateth reproof is brutish. (Proverbs, 12:1)