

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Communicating the findings

#### 7.1 Introduction

*How do academics in a historically black South African university in transition engage with and implement internal and external quality assurance processes and policies?*

I approached this research question with some tentative ideas about what I expected to find, based on the 20 years of experience I had working in various capacities at the University of the Western Cape. These ideas formed the basis of my initial research propositions, which were as follows:

1. *The high level of prescriptiveness by the Evaluative State in the areas of quality, planning and funding diminishes academics' freedom to make decisions and to be innovative.*
2. *Demands for compliance with quality assurance requirements frustrate academics' efforts to improve teaching and learning in historically disadvantaged universities.*
3. *Historically disadvantaged institutions' aspirations for excellence and competitiveness often conflict with national policy goals and intentions.*
4. *These aspirations, articulated in mission and vision statements, are often not known to academics and sometimes conflict with academics' beliefs and practices.*

A study of the literature led me to the theory of the Evaluative State, as an appropriate conceptual framework for understanding the dynamics of the relationships between the state, the University of the Western Cape and its academics and institutional managers. My study was further guided by a by a set of research sub-questions:

*How do academics' views of quality and how it ought to be improved differ from those embedded in state policy and those promoted by university managers? How do these competing conceptions of quality relate to academics' attitudes towards the implementation of quality assurance policy and practices? To what extent does the state's focus on routine and strategic quality evaluation engender tension and conflict between and amongst academics and university managers?*

The study investigated the impact of the Evaluative State and its demands on academics and academic work by exploring a) tensions and contradictions around different views of quality held by academics, university managers and the state, b) the range of responses academics evince towards quality policy implementation, and c) the behaviour of the university's senior managers in the context of driving UWC's transition from an historically disadvantaged institution to a university of quality.

Ultimately, this study was an exploration of the changing nature of university work from multiple perspectives, namely from the standpoint of the state, institutional managers, UWC's academics and, of course, my own. The findings of the study reveal a series of tensions and contestations between and amongst UWC's academics, managers and the state, which this chapter will explore.

## **7.2 Revisiting the conceptual framework: The Evaluative State in South Africa**

Neave and Von Vught (2001) have noted that higher education systems in developing countries for the most part represent the transfer of one or more models from the west. The introduction into South Africa of a form of state steering that incorporated globalised ideas of how state systems should be transformed and modernised serves as an example.

The South African state, in its relationship with higher education, reflects key characteristics of the Evaluative State in Europe, as described by Neave, Van Vught, Maassen and others. Remote steering, output evaluation, the use of performance indicators as instruments of surveillance, the establishment of intermediary bodies which perform quality control functions on behalf of the state, the rise of managerialism and the creation of an audit culture are key elements of the Evaluative State (Neave, 1991).

The intention of the new state in South Africa is to exert control over institutions in order to facilitate change in the direction of critical national social and economic goals, while achieving global competitiveness. This study has identified the impact of the Evaluative State on one university, has described the complexity of responses to the state, and has demonstrated the depth of incursion of the Evaluative State into the work of academics.

The Evaluative State arose in Europe in a context where higher education was regarded as a major lever of social change (Neave, 1991). This is similarly the case in South Africa, except that the state is far more anxious about the pace of social change - change has to occur rapidly rather in an evolutionary manner, to ensure that South Africa does not fall even further behind the rest of the world in terms of the research and development capacity required to ensure a competitive position in the global economy. Castells (DOE, 2001: 5) described universities in South Africa as the *power sources on which a new development process must rely* in a global context where *knowledge is the electricity of the new informational international economy*, hence the intense depth and breadth of the state's incursion into academic work.

The Evaluative State in Europe introduced conditions which made higher education more responsive to the market. For example, a decrease in state funding demanded diversification of higher education's income streams, and in turn encouraged sensitivity to the needs of, amongst others, business and industry. The new state in South Africa not only applies evaluation frameworks that link planning, performance and rewards more effectively to market demands but also resorts to regular legislative activity, through the enactment of various Acts, Bills, Government Notices and Regulations which govern behaviour and enforce practices that facilitate reform.

The degree of recourse to legislation is much more intense in South Africa, signaling state control that is strongly interventionist. Maassen (1997) argued that the Evaluative State achieves control more through focusing on shaping the products and outputs of universities and less through legislation or regulation, leading to a description of state steering as remote rather than direct. It is clear that state steering in South Africa has been achieved through the exercise of both remote and direct control, which accounts for the intensity with which the presence of the state is felt in higher education.

### **7.3 Central findings of this study**

Four central findings characterise contestation between the state, academics and institutional managers at UWC. First, the imperatives driving transition at the University of the Western Cape conflict with notions of quality espoused by the Evaluative State, leading to ambivalence as overzealous responsiveness encounters intransigence.

Second, academics' loyalty to the state's agenda for social change is severely challenged by their disappointment that the state's quality evaluation system is unable to address and evaluate their work with disadvantaged students.

Third, quality assurance practices adopted at UWC in the interest of accountability result in an increase in monitoring performance rather than an improvement in quality.

Fourth, there is contestation between managers' accountability to the Evaluative State and academics' accountability to student success, expressed in contestation around institutional mission.

In this chapter, I will discuss each finding as it emerged from my study, and also explore each in relation to the conceptual framework of the study. I will also provide an analysis of what I consider to be the failure of the Evaluative State in higher education in South Africa.

#### **7.4 The imperatives driving transition at the University of the Western Cape conflict with notions of quality espoused by the Evaluative State, leading to ambivalence as overzealous responsiveness encounters intransigence.**

The case study of UWC was of a university in transition from an historically disadvantaged institution to a university of quality, and from a university well-known for its struggle against control and repression by the apartheid state, to one that is determined to support the reform efforts of the new, post-apartheid state. The central point to be made about the university's transition from HBU to excellence, is that it is achieved through a conscious effort to *ditch its HBU label* and through its responsiveness to the demands of the state. The transition is a complex one, and reflects a series of incongruencies which result in UWC's leadership evoking different and contradictory institutional identities, depending on the circumstances.

Senior managers constantly vacillate between competing descriptions of the institution, which on the one hand celebrate historical disadvantage and historical blackness, and on the other promote the abandonment of the historical labels of HBU and HDI in favour of a new discourse of great aspirations and excellence. This study has used the term institutional *schizophrenia* to describe the often confusing phenomenon observed when UWC's leadership shift, often in a single conversation, between different and contradictory representations of the institution's current reality.

On the one hand, UWC pursues a representation of itself as a place of exceptional quality, one which *achieves excellence in teaching and learning and great heights of distinction and competitiveness in selected areas (IOP: 2003)*, and associates this description with a view of itself as an *Engaged University*.

Within this description of its reality, UWC is at least an institution of equal quality and comparable standing to any other South African University, and in fact, surpasses other universities in terms of its quality in a number of areas.

Wangenge-Ouma and Langa (2010) argue that universities mobilise claims of excellence to achieve competitive advantage and to attract resources. I would argue that UWC's claim to excellence was motivated in the first place by the need to persuade the state in 2003 that it was a university of quality and that it should be allowed to continue to exist as an independent institution; and in the second place, UWC continued to portray itself as a place of exceptional quality, in an effort to attract attention and resources from the public and potential funders.

In 2001, the university faced closure or merger as a result of a leadership crisis coupled with financial instability and a dramatic decline in student numbers. Its new Rector commenced an intensive campaign during that year to change the perception of UWC as second-rate, in order to win back students and to encourage financial investment from private donors. However, these representations of UWC as having *ditched the HBU label*, rather than being underpinned by reality were based on a persuasive rhetoric, which constructed portrayals of UWC as potentially great and its exceptional quality as aspirational.

There is no doubt that these narratives were successful in changing the public perception of the university. The dazzling portrayal of UWC's *potential for greatness* captured the imagination of the state, private funders and the public. The result was that UWC remained independent and received recapitalisation funding from the state to rescue it from bankruptcy. New and extravagant buildings grew out of donors' support and the increase in student numbers ensured stability and growth.

While this study recognises UWC's claims to excellence as portrayals of itself not often grounded in reality, a central finding is that UWC's leadership indeed attempted to actualise these promises and assurances, through adopting what I have termed an overzealous response to the transformation demands of the state.

The irony was that, although UWC continued to make great strides in terms of its performance in relation to other South African universities, in areas such as graduate output, research output and the growth of student enrolments in science and technology, these actual improvements were not always enough to satisfy the state that UWC was indeed a place of exceptional quality. Other areas of performance, related to student performance against benchmarks such as throughput, graduation and completion rates, persistently detracted from UWC's overall quality picture.

I argue that the contradiction and mismatch between UWC's actual performance and its promise of future quality, created intense anxiety for the institution's leadership. Quality evaluation by the state demanded evidence of actual performance, yet UWC hoped to persuade the state to make allowances and grant special consideration for the fact that at UWC, in some areas, quality was still aspirational, and that a successful transition to excellence required time. When those appeals were unsuccessful, as they were during the 2006 HEQC audit, and the state insisted on evaluating real products and output, UWC's leadership reverted to an alternative representation of the university as historically black and disadvantaged.

Appealing to UWC's identity as historically black and disadvantaged served to signal the university's expectation that the state would demonstrate tolerance towards its transitional status, and that it would be granted special consideration for the challenges it faced on account of its past as an HBU when its present quality came to be evaluated. The representation of UWC as an HBU struggling with quality was called upon to persuade the state that it ought to judge the university, not only in terms of its current reality but with due consideration for the challenges it faced in building quality and in relation to its *aspiration for excellence*. This expectation was constantly thwarted, to the dismay of the university's leadership, as the state continued to demand evidence of UWC's actual and current performance against standard indicators and benchmarks.

In talking to me about the 2006 external audit of UWC, two senior managers appealed to both these conflicting representations of the university. The identity of UWC as equal and even superior to other South African universities was first marshalled in an effort to rebut the Audit Panel's description of the university as an HBU in the profile it had prepared. When the initial report from the Audit Panel was presented to the institutional managers, the other representation of UWC, that of an HBU struggling to build quality, was evoked as a defense against the panel's identification of quality problems in certain areas.

Reverting to a portrayal of itself as an HBU, allowed the institutional leadership to express anger at the state's expectation that UWC should perform at the same level as historically white institutions, which, unlike UWC, were more affluent and were not working with mainly black, poor and under-prepared students.

The state's expectation of quality performance from UWC in areas such as first-year pass rates was perceived to be unjust, prompting a senior member of UWC's leadership team to declare that the state's expectation *'(showed) an absolute lack of any kind of understanding of the reality of the struggle that they claim is our greatest triumph.'*

A significant degree of ambivalence was found in institutional managers' conversations about their interactions and relationship with the state. This is related in part to their disappointment when the state fails to act in ways that support the transition goals and objectives of the university. This disappointment contrasts strongly with the university's commitment that its transition will also involve compliance with the state's demands for change and that it will support the achievement of the state's transformation goals related to equity, development and democratisation.

The powerful words of a senior manager, that UWC *'must become a university that supports government and does not fight it,'* captures the texture of the university's transition and speaks eloquently of this commitment to change. The phrase captures three significant elements of current reality. Firstly, UWC, renowned for its history of challenge and resistance to the demands of the apartheid state, will transform itself into an institution that will comply with the demands of the Evaluative State, without much challenge or struggle.

Secondly, the choice of compliance above resistance must be understood in the context of the university's perception in the post-apartheid era that the very survival of the HBU is under grave threat unless drastic measures are taken to persuade the state of the HBU's worth. Thirdly, the overlap between important elements of the values and ideology of the state, UWC's managers and its academics, enables sufficient convergence of their views of quality and the purpose of higher education to inspire loyalty and support for the state's transformation agenda.

The implications of becoming a university that supports government and does not fight it has vast consequences for the university.

Chief amongst these is the decision to cooperate with the state's agenda for change. In the discussion that follows, I argue that the decision to become a university that supports government and does not fight it emanates from a position of institutional vulnerability.

Most historically black institutions, unable to rise above the effects of racial planning and differential funding, faced the advent of democracy with huge financial, infrastructural and intellectual deficits. In 2001, the head of the Council of Higher Education, Badat (2004), warned the HBUs that expecting the new state to provide *institutional redress to overcome the legacy of disadvantage under apartheid* was not an option, and that *institutional survival at all costs* would not serve the *national interest* in transforming higher education (2004: 23-24).

Expecting compensation for its role in the struggle that brought the new state into existence, as well as for years of deliberate apartheid neglect and under-resourcing, UWC was instead faced with the harsh reality that the post-apartheid state would not tolerate the continued existence of second-class higher education institutions, nor would it provide the developmental support to build quality at UWC. Instead, the university faced the prospect of closure or merger with a more viable higher education institution. The prospect of merger or closure has become like a sword of Damocles, driving the institutional management's responses to the Evaluative State and controlling the direction and pace of transformation.

UWC found itself under pressure to demonstrate its potential to function as an independent institution of exceptional quality, at all levels of research, teaching and technology transfer. Further, after having suffered from its inability to develop capital reserves under the apartheid system, in the post-apartheid period UWC found itself overwhelmingly reliant on state funding for its continued existence, at least while it struggled to slowly build up the reserves that would secure its independence from state finance.

Moreover, the state's recapitalisation funding was granted on condition that UWC demonstrated financial viability into the future, and that it guaranteed the development of exceptional quality at all levels. So UWC's portrayal of itself as a place of quality had to shift from rhetoric to demonstrations of real performance through the provision of evidence that quality had indeed improved, if it were to remain viable.

As a result, UWC's transition was dominated by overzealous responsiveness to demands emanating from the state. The responses of the university's managers to the Evaluative State should be seen in the light of their role as mediators of the state's agenda for change.

In return for continued funding, the Evaluative State expects higher education institutions to take responsibility for their own fate, through putting in place the measures required to enable adequate performance against the state's goals. Managerial responses and behaviours are therefore designed to demonstrate that quality measures have in fact been implemented and are able to deliver the expected results, thus ensuring success in attracting rewards from the state.

At UWC, managerial responses to the Evaluative State are largely directed at ensuring the continued existence of the university in the post-apartheid era. The present higher education system will not tolerate the existence of historically disadvantaged institutions.

It has acted either to shut these down or to signal to the remaining few that their continued existence is contingent on abandoning the label of disadvantage and effecting a successful transition to institutions of excellence, in accordance with the standards of quality set by previously advantaged and white universities and inscribed in new benchmarks and indicators.

Given this context, UWC cannot afford to ignore state demands for quality improvement. Choosing to do so would be at great financial cost to the institution, more so than in the case of most universities in South Africa - *"There are people out there who hold our fate in their hands"* (Susan).

#### **7.4.1 UWC's transition in the context of the Evaluative State**

A central finding discussed above is that UWC's leadership adopted what I termed overzealous responsiveness to the transformation demands of the state, largely in an attempt to realise UWC's claims for excellence and live up to its promises of future quality. However, conflict and resentment arose when state evaluation of quality at UWC revealed that claims of excellence failed to correspond with actual performance measured against the Evaluative State's quality indicators. When the state interpreted this to mean that the claims mobilised failed to reflect current reality, UWC leadership responded with outrage against the unrealistic expectations of performance inscribed in the benchmarks and indicators employed by the Evaluative State to measure quality

I approached this research having identified conflict between the state and UWC's senior managers around the university's performance, and understood this conflict to be related to UWC's transition from an historically disadvantaged institution. From this I derived the proposition that *historically disadvantaged institutions' aspirations for excellence and competitiveness often conflict with national policy goals and intentions*. The theory of the Evaluative State enabled an interpretation of the conflict in ways which drew attention to the mismatch between the state's expectations of actual performance and UWC's hope that the state would make allowance for its challenging transition, by accepting its undertaking that, despite evidence to the contrary, exceptional quality would be realised in all areas in the future.

The measurement of institutional performance, through the evaluation of actual output, is central to the Evaluative State's response to individual institutions. In a sense, the state contracts institutions to provide particular products and outputs, and disburses funding only in relation to actual delivery of the outputs and products agreed upon.

Public funding is therefore conditional on performance, and the state's ability to steer higher education hinges on the consistency and inflexibility with which it applies its evaluative principles. The degree of influence the state will have on higher education and its ability to successfully steer institutions in the desired direction depends on the consistent application of output evaluation and the allocation of appropriate rewards and penalties. Evaluative State theory is therefore premised on the idea that failure to evaluate and reward performance appropriately will result in non-achievement of policy goals.

Given the Evaluative State's objectives for goal-achievement, it is clear that the refusal to reward UWC's on the basis of future claims for excellence is an indication that the Evaluative State will evaluate and reward quality only in terms of actual, demonstrated performance against clear indicators and therefore cannot accommodate UWC's notion of quality as *potential for greatness*. The intransigence of the Evaluative State in this regard is met with anger and disappointment by UWC's leadership, resulting in conflict and manifesting in ambivalence in the university's response towards the state.

**7.5 Academics' loyalty to the state's agenda for social change is severely challenged by their disappointment that the state's quality evaluation system is unable to address and evaluate their work with disadvantaged students.**

I have shown that the notion of quality as transformation, and specifically as adding value to students' lives, is central to academics' work at UWC. But academics' notions of quality differ from those of the state. Academics' dedication to this approach to quality is intensely personal and the emotional rewards they receive in witnessing the academic development and social upliftment of individual black students, *'from squatter camp to CEO of a large company,'* is plain to see in the passionate way they speak about their work. University work, from the perspective of UWC's academics, entails dedication to both student success and the creation of opportunities for black students, who for the most part are poor and educationally under-prepared.

Regardless of the harsh conditions of academic work, and despite being underpaid and seriously overworked in a context of quite severe resource constraints, academics at UWC were passionate about their work and committed to being at the university.

Infrastructural constraints and the lack of financial stability over decades had resulted in overcrowded and under-ventilated lecture rooms and laboratories. Some buildings were in a state of disrepair, academics were forced to share office space, and understaffing had led to excessively high workloads compared with those of their peers at better-resourced universities in the region.

The constant refrain from academics was that witnessing the transformation of individual students under their tutelage, from first-year entrants who lacked cultural capital and intellectual preparation, to postgraduates *'cracking a genome'* after many years and much help, made their work worthwhile.

Many academics were attracted to the state's rhetoric of what policy documents repeatedly referred to as *the principles characterising a transformed higher education system* (DOE 1997; 2001; 2002a). Principles such as equity and redress, democratisation and development, supposedly guiding reform, resonated with academics' conceptions of the importance of their work with UWC students.

Academics at the university appeared *captured by the discourse* (Trowler, 2001) of redistributive social justice that framed state action, as improving the structural conditions and life chances of the marginalised and disadvantaged.

Having understood the passion with which academics at UWC take on the challenges of their work with disadvantaged students, I was able to comprehend the depth of their support for the state's goals and objectives with regard to equity, redress and development. Hence, the significance for academics of '*becoming a university that does not fight the state but supports it*' is related to the degree of congruence between the state's equity and development goals and academics' devotion to their work to ensure student success.

However, despite the enthusiasm with which UWC's academics embraced aspects of the state's priorities and goals, many felt aggrieved that the work they engaged in with students was devalued and not recognised by quality evaluation systems. They want a quality measurement system that acknowledges and evaluates their work in relation to the '*mopping up*' they engage in with students.

With this goes a desire for a different way of understanding and measuring quality, one which is connected to UWC's context and student intake and that acknowledges an important component of UWC's identity, that of an institution which excels in access and development.

Instead, academics constantly face pressure to perform in accordance with the expectations of the state and of institutional managers, against indicators which measure quality as efficiency and value for money, when in fact their work is centred around transformation and adding value to students' lives and futures.

As a result, academics approach implementation of quality-related policies with a significant degree of ambivalence. Their support for the state's goals translates into an orientation that reflects a certain degree of loyalty to the state. However, the displeasure they feel about the state's choice of quality evaluation system comes through clearly in their conversations, when they speak about '*feeling let down*' and disappointed, and express their dismay that the new state, whose development goals they support, appears to be unsupportive of their work with disadvantaged students.

I approached this research recognising the frustration experienced by academics in implementing quality assurance mechanisms. I also understood that they regarded these requirements as burdensome rather than as supporting the work they did with students, and I was aware of their perception of the opportunity costs related to complying with quality assurance requirements. Essentially, the academics did not regard quality assurance measures as contributing to their efforts to improve quality, but instead believed that these measures distracted them from the real task of improving students' performance and hence their quality.

These initial observations arose out of many years of work at UWC in evaluating the quality of academic departments, and led to the formulation of an initial research proposition as *demands for compliance with quality assurance requirements frustrate academics' efforts to improve teaching and learning in historically disadvantaged universities*. My research, guided by the conceptual framework provided by the theory of the Evaluative State, revealed the interconnectedness between academics' frustration and resentment towards quality evaluation and their feelings of disillusionment with the failure of the quality system to endorse and support their work with UWC's students.

### **7.5.1 Quality assessment and the Evaluative State**

The dilemma UWC faces in feeling unsupported while desiring to be *a university that supports the state*, is to be found in the fundamental characteristics of the new state as an Evaluative State. The post-apartheid state in South Africa wishes to transform the higher education system towards efficiently achieving the goals of economic growth, while encouraging institutions to be responsive to social and economic needs. It does this through rewarding increased participation and success of black students, through reducing public funding and thus encouraging diversification of institutional income streams, and through linking funding to goal achievement.

Achievement against benchmarks and performance indicators is constantly evaluated in order to gauge the progress of the higher education sector against policy goals. Fundamentally, the Evaluative State will not fund institutions in areas that do not deliver on key goals. Even its disbursement of development funding, designed to increase universities' ability to perform in critical areas, is consistent with its steering formula.

The Evaluative State therefore cannot accommodate academics' hopes that their tireless work with disadvantaged students will be rewarded, for the simple reason that adding value is inconsistent with promoting efficiency. Transformation, as it occurs with UWC's students and with the attendant '*mopping up*' activities, cannot happen quickly; it is resource intensive and requires patience. Hence centralising time-to-degree, pass rates and other efficiency indicators frustrates academics' achievement of cherished goals. The passion for transformation that they exhibit contradicts the aspiration of the Evaluative State in South Africa to steer higher education rapidly and efficiently. The interplay between these irreconcilable obligations generates frustration as academics begin to recognise that current quality assurance mechanisms, and what they measure, cannot speak to what they consider to be their real work, namely transforming students who enter the university facing major challenges into successful intellectuals.

Academics at UWC, despite their support for the state's goals of equity and social justice, are constantly engaged in contestation with the Evaluative State, as they struggle for the right to define, in Nina's terms, *what excellence is for (our) university, in (our) country*.

They feel anger and frustration that the state's evaluation of quality consistently rewards the achievements of other South African universities, but not UWC, *when in actual fact the work that is being done here is so much more important than anything (those universities) can dream of* (Nina).

Orr (1997) has suggested that quality is a contested, political concept. This research has shown that quality is indeed a political concept in the context of the Evaluative State in South Africa, where the state determines that the conceptualisation of quality as efficiency and value for money should dominate evaluation. Further, the state has the power to decide what the evaluative system should measure, in this case, student completion and success rates, and also decides what the benchmarks and indicators of that performance should be. Academics at UWC are thus unable to assert their notions of quality as transformation, as adding value to ensure the success of black students and deciding how quality is best improved with their students.

Singh (2006) and Lange (2006) have proposed that the tools of the Evaluative State, namely the performance indicators that rationalise the evaluation system, have the potential to measure progressive goals, such as the achievement of equity and democracy in South Africa.

On the basis of that premise, they propose that the use of what they agree to be conservative performance indicators characteristic of the Evaluative State is justified on account of the intended aims, mainly the promotion of social justice and the achievement of equity.

However, my research has shown that the existing performance indicators which constitute the state's quality evaluation system are effective in measuring only certain policy goals, namely those associated with accountability, efficiency and increased productivity. Therefore, the fundamental assumption upon which state policy is based, that the Evaluative State's mechanisms of performance evaluation and accountability will ensure success in the achievement of key policy goals, is inherently flawed. In South Africa, the use of conservative means serves to ensure that the higher education sector achieves only the conservative and technical goals embedded in state policy, those of steering the higher education system towards the market and the achievement of efficiency and increased productivity.

#### **7.6 Quality assurance practices adopted in the interest of accountability result in an increase in monitoring and policing performance rather than an improvement in quality.**

*In a panopticon prison, a tower is situated in the centre of a courtyard surrounded by buildings of cells, with each cell window under direct scrutiny of the tower and each inmate visible to the surveillant alone. The cells are theatres in which the actor is alone, individualised and constantly visible...Such a prison is a model for understanding the new management practices in higher education and how these function to control, classify and contain teachers (Shore & Roberts, 1993).*

National and international demands that higher education should provide a supply of graduates with high-level skills to meet the advancing technological challenges of the global economy resulted in a shift to skills-based knowledge. Universities are now expected to equip students with skills required by the market, and to ensure that those skills are honed towards maximising graduates' performance in the workplace. The National Qualifications Framework was introduced in South Africa as a means of organising qualifications around sets of competencies or outcomes that are required in specific areas of employment. A system of level specification on the NQF ensures that higher level qualifications reflect increased complexity of skills and competencies. The NQF is also designed around the achievement of principles such as transparency, portability of credits, and mobility of learners through learning pathways.

A system of outcomes based education, conforming to the requirements of the NQF, has been introduced at UWC, through initiatives such as modularisation within a credit framework and curriculum restructuring. Outcomes, assessment methods and learning materials are aligned to ensure the achievement of the module outcomes. While modularisation and a credit system have been enforced throughout the University, curriculum restructuring has proceeded with varying degrees of success across the faculties.

Modularisation and outcomes based education at UWC have achieved a number of the transformation goals desired by the state. Firstly, outcomes based education represents a shift in focus from content to skills-based learning in a way which links the lecture room to the workplace (Malcolm, 2001). Academics are required to articulate the links between learning in specific modules and the practical usefulness of these skills in society and the economy. Linking intended outcomes to assessment serves to measure what students actually know and can do at the end of a module with the skills the module is designed to develop.

Curriculum alignment requires that learning outcomes are precisely articulated and that assessment specifically measures the skills and knowledge embedded in the outcomes. The concept of alignment implies a direct association between, or a lining up of, learning, outcomes and assessment in a configuration which allows little deviation.

Avis (2000) has argued that outcomes over-specify and *render visible what the learner is to achieve on completion* and lead to a technicised practice which limits creative and critical engagement with the curriculum. At UWC, curriculum alignment was introduced as a quality assurance measure directed at improving student performance in order to improve pass rates and degree completion. It was hoped that clarifying outcomes and assessment upfront would make it easier for under-prepared students to successfully decode the academic requirements of modules. Academics, on the whole, were eager to support the curriculum restructuring initiatives for two reasons. Their work at UWC was devoted to helping students pass and the focus on student success as a performance indicator compelled them to cooperate, lest they be accused of failing to act to remedy under-performance. The implicit assumption that low module pass rates indicated a failure of academics to achieve against a critical performance indicator resulted in performance anxiety amongst many UWC academics.

Despite supporting the restructuring initiative, academics at UWC were resentful of the negative impact of curriculum alignment on actual quality improvement and the resulting curtailment of academic freedom in the classroom. One academic's reference to curriculum alignment as a *double-edge sword* captured the ambivalence many felt in complying with this quality improvement measure, considering it administratively burdensome and intellectually oppressive. Academics at UWC rejected the tendency of the learning outcomes approach to '*narrow learning and restrict student empowerment*' (Avis, 2000: 46) through the over-specification of outcomes, content, methods and assessment. One academic spoke of '*straitjacketing*' and an approach to teaching that resembled a '*paint-by-numbers*' method, rather than encouraging more flexible and innovative methods.

Herein lay the *double-edged sword*, for in as much as the Evaluative State had the effect of encouraging institutions to adopt innovations directed at improving teaching and learning (Dill, 1998: 370), such innovations served as powerful instruments of policing and surveillance, rendering visible academics' efforts to attain the desired performance indicators (Avis, 2000), while simultaneously disabling academic creativity and eroding intellectual autonomy.

The introduction of quality assurance measures at UWC also saw the emergence of a new class of professionals, academics with an interest in pedagogical issues, who, by virtue of fulfilling leadership roles in faculties, were able to exploit opportunities for curriculum reform. The shift towards standardising curriculum alignment as an approach to curriculum design was thrust upon academics by academic leaders who had the power to cajole others to comply with at least the procedural demands of this particular quality assurance measure. The potential for strengthening collegiality and encouraging intellectual debate around teaching and the curriculum was reduced by the adoption of an approach that foregrounded accountability and demanded compliance.

Together, modularisation and curriculum alignment enabled more sophisticated monitoring of academic work and performance. Academics were required to submit module templates for perusal by committees of Senate and compile module files which detailed learning outcomes, planned and actual assessments, learning materials, academic reflection, self-assessment and improvement plans. In some faculties, the curriculum information in module files had to be made available for inspection when requested, and this exposed to external scrutiny what had previously been regarded as largely private academic work.

Senior academics justified this form of policing by arguing that they needed to inspect aspects of academics' work in order to offer advice about improvements. The overall intention, however, was to introduce accountability into teaching. The underpinning belief was that aligning exit outcomes with assessment, combined with the ability to inspect academics' teaching and their work with students, allowed for more accurate evaluation of academics' efforts to improve the university's performance against key indicators.

Hence the notion of the panoptican paradigm which likens management and quality control in universities to acts of surveillance and policing, through laying academic work open to scrutiny and available for inspection by institutional managers, and even by the state (Shore & Roberts, 1993).

The requirement to be explicit about learning outcomes and to make academics' pedagogic decisions available for monitoring and inspection amounted to a breakdown of an ethos of trust and the end of an era at UWC, one which had seen the goodwill and integrity of academics as being central to assuring academic quality.

*'Management by ideology was the modus operandi – you were assumed to be on the team,'* was how one professor described the apartheid-era quality model. Academics at UWC have become victims of a form of quality assurance that places more emphasis on monitoring and inspection than on quality improvement, and a culture of trust and tolerance has been replaced by an ethos of policing and surveillance (Morley, 2003).

### **7.7 There is contestation between managers' accountability to the Evaluative State and academics' accountability to student success**

The university's mission of promoting and achieving redistributive social justice through access and redress is central to academics' understanding of the purpose of a university education and their views of quality. A second element of the institutional mission, namely a commitment to community engagement and social development, was also deeply cherished by the academics included in this study.

The centrality of an understanding of the institutional mission to the conceptualisation of quality pointed strongly to the situatedness of quality meanings in a way that suggested that context and internal factors were powerful factors shaping academics' views of the purpose of higher education, their views of quality, and their understanding of how quality ought to be measured and improved.

Significant overlap exists between the fitness for purpose approach to quality and that of quality as transformation, and the analysis has argued that academics' views indicate the centrality of the transformative elements of the mission-in-use to their conception of quality. Harvey and Green (1993: 19) argue that, within a fitness for purpose approach, *'a high quality institution is one which clearly states its mission (or purpose) and is efficient and effective in meeting the goals which it has set itself.'*

The problem for the achievement of quality in the approach taken at UWC is that there is a lack of consensus between academics and managers about what the mission of the institution is or ought to be. Academics prefer a mission-in-use which favours a strong focus on community engagement, public service, and student transformation.

However, the leadership of the institution has captured the notion of engagement, disengaged it from its association with public service, and linked it instead to serving the needs of the state and the global economy and to notions of quality as efficiency:

*The Engaged University envisions a future that transcends past struggles in favour of an institution that is shaped by the congruencies and contradictions between transformation and global competitiveness... The Engaged University...offers academically viable and financially sustainable programmes, achieves excellence in teaching and learning and greater heights of distinction and competitiveness in selected priority areas (UWC, IOP 2004-2009).*

The Engaged University values excellence, financial stability, and competitiveness, and identifies priority areas which connect higher education with industry and the skills needs of the national and global economy. Academics and institutional managers express clear preferences for different aspects of the university's mission, and their choice of mission is related to their view of their role within the university. Academics and managers occupy distinctly different worlds. While managers work on reporting to the Evaluative State, academics have to deal with the internal and contextual issues, such as the nature of students' backgrounds.

As a result, one view of how quality ought to be improved constantly comes up against the other. Academics resent being held accountable for the achievement of efficiency and excellence, while institutional managers express dismay at the lack of support by academics for their efforts to reconfigure UWC's mission and future direction around satisfying the demands of the Evaluative State.

UWC's story of institutional change is an account of the development and entrenchment of managerialism. Its leadership chooses to continuously embark on strategic action which serves to accrue rewards from the Evaluative State, within the terms and conditions embedded in the multiple performance contracts that exist between state and university. The sheer intensity and pace of compliance aimed at transformation makes change at UWC so powerful and dramatic. Within a short space of time, every aspect of intellectual life has felt the impact of managerialism, as the leadership has determined that transformation ought to happen quickly and visibly, in areas that matter to the state, against performance indicators that count and where the financial rewards are most powerful.

For example, changing enrolment patterns reflect growth in the university in the areas of science, technology and commerce, areas deemed critical by the state for economic growth and global competitiveness and which therefore draw the largest per capita funding. In this regard, the concepts of enrolment planning, planned growth and the development of excellence in strategic areas dominate the discourse of the university's leadership, and render academic voices silent. *Compliance has muted criticism*, according to one senior academic.

Responses from academics to the new managerialism have been remarkably low-key, marked by a lack of debate and an absence of challenge. The reasons for such a response can only be assumed. Perhaps the leadership has acquired legitimacy through its various triumphs. A merger was successfully fought off, the standing of science in the university has been raised, private donations flow in from local and overseas agencies, subsidy earned from research and teaching output has increased, new extravagant buildings proliferate, and the perception of quality at UWC has increased in the public sphere. Perhaps the triumphs inspire faith in the ability of UWC's managers to attract the resources necessary for the university's survival. Or perhaps it is simply a case of change being so rapid, happening on multiple fronts, that the sheer pace of it leaves academics reeling and unable to identify the most relevant issues or decide which they should respond to.

Universities are complex organisations, many things happen at the same time, people become distracted, and it is possible, in the words of one academic, that *'we may have taken our eyes off the ball.'*

### **7.7.1 The Evaluative State: managerialism and performativity**

The Evaluative State in South Africa holds universities accountable for the achievement of policy goals and national priorities. National demands for undergraduate and postgraduate success, especially in the areas of science, technology and commerce, address the need to provide highly-skilled human capital for the development of the national and global economy. State demands for efficiency and cost-effectiveness, while achieving high productivity, are underscored by a reduction in state funding and the application of performance-based funding. These funding and efficiency measures serve to steer higher education towards the needs of the market, through inducing sensitivity to the requirements of the national economy and the regional needs of business and industry. Funding from the state needs to be supplemented by third stream income, from private donors, national research councils, business and industry.

Institutional managers at UWC are ever-mindful of the need to demonstrate accountability to the Evaluative State, by ensuring that the university deliver on key goals and priorities. They are acutely aware of the need to secure the university's financial stability through demonstrating accountability and achieving successful performance in areas of national priority. Not only is accountability a matter of survival but in the context of UWC's transition, it has become a matter of institutional pride to demonstrate the university's shift from HBU to excellence and competitiveness.

The work of university managers is therefore directed at reporting to the Evaluative State the success UWC has achieved in terms of its performance in relation to national targets. In this regard, the Evaluative State has succeeded in causing the institution to change its behaviour and reconfigure its mission, as an Engaged University, to achieve accountability. UWC as an Engaged University pledges to be guided by the goals of global competitiveness, excellence, efficiency and sustainability and the needs of the national economy in priority areas.

The Evaluative State's framework of goals and targets, and its system of evaluation against performance indicators, forms the backdrop against which institutions are expected to be productive, and creates the conditions for the rise of managerialism (Deem, 1998 and 2001; and Deem & Brehony, 2005). Institutions require strong central leadership to create the strategies and circumstances required to attract funding, to achieve goals and targets, and to produce the teaching and research outputs expected by the state (Teichler, 1994).

The study of UWC demonstrates that academics and managers are driven by contradictory goals and ambitions. The work of academics with their students focuses on the needs of equity in access and success, and prioritises the achievement of the development goals of social justice and democratisation. UWC's leadership, on the other hand, is driven by external pressure from the Evaluative State and works on improving institutional accountability and achieving greater efficiency. High achievement and performance in teaching and research dominates institutional managers' priorities, and signals the rise of a culture of performativity (Peters, 1992) at UWC, one which counteracts academics' efforts to improve student performance.

UWC has improved its position in relation to other universities, increasing its competitiveness nationally and even globally. Its national rankings have improved in the areas of third stream income as a percentage of total income, research publications by staff, postgraduate enrolments, and staff ratings and doctoral qualifications. UWC has also directed change in enrolment patterns to address the high skills requirements of science and technology. However, it has been less successful in its attempts to improve teaching output through increasing graduate success, completion and pass rates.

At UWC, student success, undergraduate completion rates and first-year pass rates lag behind those of other institutions. It remains one of only two HBUs still in existence and its black students constitute 95% of enrolment. UWC's poor performance in terms of graduate success must alert the institution to possible opportunity costs related to pursuing goals related to research output and privatisation of income. Further, the university's poor record in critical areas of student performance must alert it to the necessity of shifting its focus and resources to the needs of the majority of South Africa's population and to the goals of equity of access and success.

Managerial responses to the demands of the Evaluative State have eclipsed responsiveness to the demands of social justice and democracy, and UWC faces the dangers of completely abandoning aspects of the mission upon which its reputation was built, namely dedication to achieving access and equity and serving the marginalised communities from which its students come.

In the past, the fear was that poor leadership, financial instability and inefficiency would signal the death of HBUs like UWC. Today, the fear is that pursuing entrepreneurialism, efficiency and competitiveness will lead to the demise of the principles HBUs proudly struggled to assert.

### **7.8. Analysis: The failure of the Evaluative State in South Africa**

While the ideas of the Evaluative State had their roots in neo-liberalism and globalisation, the interesting feature of South Africa's adoption of this organisational rationality was its interface with a set of goals and priorities more in line with a crucial principle of the developmental state, namely that education and the acquisition of middle- and high-level skills is the only way for the country's poor to access better jobs and a route out of poverty.

The belief that *the skills deficit amongst the black population is the primary cause of extensive poverty* and hence that *education is the most important determinant of level of earnings and status in the labour market* (Buhlungu et al, 2007) lies at the heart of education reform in the post-apartheid era and is a basic principle driving the state's goals with regard to education reform.

This commitment to reform which benefits the poor and marginalised characterises the operations of the Evaluative State in higher education in South Africa. Singh (2006) recognised that the evaluation system adopted by the state bore strong hallmarks of a neo-liberal, conservative framework, with its focus on efficiency and productivity. Yet Singh and Lange (2006), both senior officers at the HEQC, argued that the progressive ends desired by the state outweighed the conservative means adopted, and suggested strongly that *efficiency can also be invoked to enhance equity and redress gains*. Lange proposed to critics of the Evaluative State that in South Africa the ends justified the means (Lange, 2006), since the presence of democratic transformation goals excused the use of bureaucratic and technicist forms of evaluation and control.

However, in South Africa, the choice of means has impacted severely upon the achievement of the desired ends. The misguided choice of a quality assurance system that promoted efficiency and accountability has led to the most negative consequences, the most central being the failure of the higher education system to improve the success, throughput, retention and completion rates of poor, black students in South Africa.

The achievement of equity of outcomes is a primary goal of higher education transformation, and broadening participation from the current rate of 15% to the desired 20% requires the inclusion of more black students, more students from poor families, and more from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. The challenge of achieving equity in the context of massification, given the condition of disadvantage of South Africa's majority, is thus a huge one, and is possible only through implementing strategies which address the educational and economic deprivation of university students. This research has shown, through highlighting the work of UWC's academics, that efficiency goals counteract efforts to encourage the success of students from weak educational backgrounds, where time and the single-minded dedication of academic staff are critical elements for success.

A cursory evaluation of the non-achievement of higher education's goals over the past ten years leads to my conclusion that the Evaluative State has indeed failed South Africa. The OECD (2008) has pointed out that the critical goal of *producing the high quality human capital needed to propel and sustain the social and economic development of South Africa* remains far out of reach of the higher education system. In various places in its report, the OECD argues for the need for reflection and examination, on the ways in which exogenous and internal factors affect student performance, on the best strategies for dealing with the poor academic preparation of students (OECD, 2008: 362), and on the ways in which the views and needs of academics and students can be incorporated into quality assurance processes (2008: 353).

My study has shown that UWC's efforts to achieve fundamental development goals have been thwarted by the application of the Evaluative State's steering tools and mechanisms. Efficiency has worked against transformation, output evaluation has worked against quality improvement, and UWC academics' work with black and poorly-prepared students has been obstructed and not encouraged by the state's funding framework.

UWC academics' notion of quality as transformation and as adding value, their patient work in '*mopping up*' the disasters of the poor schooling system, and their success in building excellence through dedicating time and personal effort to improving student performance have not been adequately commended and acknowledged by the Evaluative State. .

Instead, the state's application of performance indicators that prioritise pass rates and completion rates distracts academics and ironically works against their achievement of the goals related to graduate success that these measures are meant to promote. Statistics on enrolments and graduations, in terms of race, show that black students in South African universities experience the lowest levels of success, and white students the highest. In 2007, black students comprised 63% of enrolments, but only 57% of graduates, while white students comprised 24% of enrolments, but 30% of graduates (FINWEEK, 2010).

The state's assumptions of the links between efficiency and student success, in the context of the huge challenges facing South Africa's black students, are thus fundamentally flawed and impact powerfully on the achievement of critical national priorities, most notably on the achievement of equity in human capital development in South Africa.

The inability to achieve fundamental transformation goals is essentially a failure of the Evaluative State and is related to the assumptions it makes about the link between human capital development, efficiency and the achievement of equity in South Africa. The new funding framework rewards output achievement against external benchmarks, such as completion and retention rates, while failing to recognise the input needs of equity, access and success of South Africa's majority population.

### **7.9. Recommendations for future research**

This study has revealed a number of areas which might require further research. Firstly, the study has focused on the impact of the Evaluative State on a particular historically black university. This raises the question of whether historically white universities in South Africa have experienced similar effects in the post-apartheid era, and this is a question which is worthy of further study. Secondly, my study has suggested that UWC has just begun to enter the race towards becoming an entrepreneurial university, and more research is required to examine the impact of that particular transition on academic life.

Thirdly, a closer investigation is required into the changing nature of academic work, as academics are required to shoulder greater responsibilities than was traditionally expected. This study has begun that examination by exploring the notion of encroachment, and this initial exploration has suggested that more in-depth work needs to be done in this area.

### **7.10. Suggestions**

This study's central findings around quality seem to suggest that a number of subtle changes in policy approaches are required in relation to both institutions and the academics within them. Firstly, a greater recognition of context is required by policy makers and those in state agencies, like the HEQC, who are tasked with implementation. Recognising context involves the realisation that the same quality judgments should not be applied across the higher education sector, but that a more mediated response and approach to institutions is required, which takes account of context, history and what the institution is trying to achieve.

Secondly, the presence of growing disappointment amongst academics at UWC in the inability of the quality evaluation system to value the work they do with students, suggests that the state and its agencies need to recognize that multiple views of quality do exist within institutions. Further, that multiple views of how quality ought to be improved also exist, and, importantly, should be accommodated and explicitly recognized by evaluation agencies, especially during transitional phases. Understanding academics' perceptions of quality and its improvement might serve to inform new evaluation measures and improve implementation strategies.

Thirdly, this study has also shown that the input needs of systemic transformation have been ignored at great cost. Further, that producing the human capital needs required to compete in the global economy requires far greater strategic investment of resources by the state into areas and strategies that have been shown to contribute to improving the chances of success of poor and black students.

The South African state has adopted an evaluation framework that is not context-bound, that is rigid and inflexible in relation to evaluation and reward. In this country, such a system will defeat the ends and goals of higher education transformation, and will not achieve progressive goals associated with democratisation, social justice, redress and equity.

## 7. 11. Concluding words

I suggest that the Evaluative State has indeed failed South Africa, primarily because it is insensitive to the needs and values of the people who are most central to its success, the academics and their students.

The Evaluative State sets the goals and targets and expects institutions to devise the strategies to achieve success. The state retains the power over the determination of systemic goals, but creates and fuels the illusion that power is in the hands of managers and academics, to choose the path and future direction of higher education institutions. In the current context and given its reliance on state funding, UWC has little choice but to comply and respond positively to the demands of the Evaluative State. However, the seeds of dissent have once again been planted by the state through its intransigence and unwillingness to recognise the contribution UWC makes to social transformation through its work with black and poor students.

As long as institutional pride remains invested in notching up achievements that will earn rewards from the Evaluative State, the voices of protest at UWC will remain muted. Only when, as an institution, UWC recognises that its past mission of service to the poor, disadvantaged and oppressed is still relevant today, and is being enacted powerfully in its classrooms and corridors, will it be ideologically empowered to challenge the Evaluative State's neo-liberal agenda for change.