

# **The effect of the Higher Education Quality Committee's institutional audits on public higher education institutions**

by

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## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis, being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in the University of Pretoria, is my original independent work and it has not been submitted before for any degree or any other examination at this or any other university.

Emmanuel Mogoboya Matsebatlela

April 2015

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Mashile John and Motlatso Paulina Matsebatlela, for impressing on me the priceless value of education and lifelong learning.

## Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Professor Sarah Howie and Professor Emeritus Tjeerd Plomp, for their expert guidance and constant encouragement. There were times when I doubted myself, but their critical, yet constructive, feedback, positive attitude and belief in me urged me on.

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## Abstract

Institutional audits constitute one of the ways through which South Africa's Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) executes its quality assurance mandate. The HEQC's institutional audits ran from 2004 to 2011 and focused on institutional policies, systems, procedures, strategies and resources for managing the three core functions of teaching and learning, research, and community engagement as well as academic support services (CHE, 2007).

Due to the HEQC's seemingly superficial mechanisms for monitoring progress made by higher education institutions in the implementation of their improvement plans, the study aimed to investigate the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience across different types of higher education institutions. The main research question is: *What effect have the HEQC's institutional audits had on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience across different types of higher education institutions?*

As this study is the first in South Africa to investigate how higher education institutions have responded to and followed-up on the institutional audits, it was considered important to conduct an in-depth study of a few institutions so as to get an indication of the effect of institutional audits on a variety of areas at South African universities. A case study design was therefore the most appropriate research design for this investigation. The universities were taken from each of the three South African public higher education institutional types to ensure a wide variation of coverage, and thus comprised a traditional university, a comprehensive university, and a university of technology. Interviews were held with senior management, academic staff and students at each of the three universities.

The study's findings indicate that the HEQC's institutional audits have had limited but positive effect on relevant aspects of teaching and learning, and support functions across different types of higher education institutions, albeit at varied levels of acceptance and implementation. The effects on the quality of student experience, however appears to be quite limited. There appears to have been progress in various areas since the institutional audits were conducted at the three universities. While some universities seem to have made considerable progress in some areas, others appear to be struggling to implement their improvement plans effectively and seem to be

in need of more focused support. Contextual factors seem to play a role in the institutional audit process as there seems to be a difference in the manner in which a historically black and a historically white university responds to the HEQC institutional audit recommendations. Some of the recommendations based on the study's findings are that the HEQC should put in place more robust follow-up and monitoring mechanisms which include compulsory follow-up site visits pertaining to institutional audits and that further research should be conducted on a similar topic covering more institutions and a wider spread of participants at each institution.

**Key words:** institutional audits, institutional culture, postgraduate education, public higher education institutions, quality, quality assurance, self-evaluation, systems theory, total quality management, universities.

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## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ASSAf	Academy of Science of South Africa
AUQA	The Australian Universities Quality Agency
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DOE	Department of Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
IAD	Institutional Audits Directorate
INQAAHE	International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
NOKUT	Norwegian quality assurance agency
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
TQM	Total Quality Management
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WIL	Work-integrated Learning

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTORY ORIENTATION

This chapter introduces the study on the effect of the Higher Education Quality Committee's institutional audits on three South African universities. In section 1.1 of this chapter, the research problem is introduced and a brief background to the study is provided; a more historical and contextual background is discussed in detail in Chapter 2. Section 1.2 elaborates on the problem statement and rationale for the study. In section 1.3, the study's research aims and research questions are presented. Section 1.4 highlights the research methodology used in this study. The delimitations of the study and clarification of concepts are presented in sections 1.5 and 1.6 respectively. Section 1.7 presents an overview of the study.

#### 1.1 Introduction and brief background to the study

Institutional audits constitute one of the ways through which South Africa's Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) executes its quality assurance mandate. The HEQC is a permanent sub-committee of the Council on Higher Education (CHE). The CHE is an independent statutory body that was instituted in accordance with the Higher Education Act (Act No 101 of 1997) as amended and serves as the quality council for higher education in South Africa (CHE, 2004a). Many countries use institutional audits as a quality assurance mechanism aimed at improving and enhancing quality in their higher education (CHE, 2004a). Concomitantly, the main purpose of institutional audits is to evaluate the effectiveness of the quality management systems that have been established by higher education institutions to manage quality of their core functions, and identify strengths and weaknesses (CHE, 2007a). The ultimate outcome of institutional audits is continuous quality improvement and development. It is thus essential to establish the extent to which institutional audits have led to quality improvement and enhancement. Studies about the effects of the HEQC's institutional audits and their role in quality improvement and enhancement in South African higher education have been scant. In the light of the above, this study aims to investigate the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience across different types

of higher education institutions. Due to its historical legacy, South Africa has been characterised by disparities on many fronts. On the social front, there are glaring inequalities that spring directly from the apartheid legacy. According to Statistics South Africa's Income and Expenditure Survey (2005/2006), there is a high prevalence of inequality between different population groups and within individual population groups. South Africa's Gini coefficient<sup>1</sup>, which takes into consideration disposable income derived from work and social grants for the entire country was 0.72 (Statistics South Africa, 2008). Of all racial groups in the country, black African households had the highest Gini coefficient score of 0.63, while for the other population groups it ranged between 0.56 and 0.59. In fact, if social grants and taxes were not considered, the entire country's Gini coefficient would increase to 0.80 instead of 0.72; this means using redistributive policies as a mechanism to reduce inequality results in a reduction of the Gini coefficient by eight percentage points (Statistics South Africa, 2008).

Disparities in the education sector, which were strategically orchestrated by the apartheid government, played a pivotal role in further creating varied forms of social injustice. The quality of education for black people was carefully planned to be inferior to that of whites both in terms of content and resources. Higher education makes these disparities even more conspicuous as it lies at the interface of formal schooling and preparedness for employment. It is undeniable that there are differences in the quality of South Africa's public higher education institutions as the historically white institutions were better funded than historically black institutions. Indeed, the apartheid government's University Extension Act of 1959 extended racial discrimination to the higher education sector and resulted in historically black universities being under-privileged institutions in terms of resources (Ilorah, 2006). At the same time, historically white Afrikaans universities, during the apartheid government, received a disproportionately high percentage of state funding and also enjoyed some of the best academic facilities in South Africa (Mabokela, 2007). What exacerbated the situation for the historically black universities were the constant student protests which caused disruptions in academic programmes, as these politically fuelled activities were often violent.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Gini index measures the extent to which the distribution of income or consumption expenditure among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality' ([www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)).



The quality difference among South Africa's public higher education institutions has been demonstrated partly by employers who tend to prefer graduates from certain higher education institutions and not others. Often these preferences were more in favour of historically white institutions than historically black institutions due to employers' stereotypes about the former's superiority and the latter's inferiority. These educational disparities were not only between institutions, they were also within institutions (Ogude, 2001).

It is the function of a national quality assurance agency to alleviate these educational disparities by putting in place measures to ensure an equivalent quality provision across the national higher education landscape. Moreover, an external quality assurance agency must provide accountability for public money and private resources invested in higher education by encouraging institutions to reflect on their own practices (Randall, 2001). This view is corroborated and taken a step further by Brennan and Shah (in Stensaker, 2003) whose empirical research suggests that quality assurance agencies have resulted in positive changes in higher education such as ensuring increased accountability using public funds, improving the quality provided by higher education institutions, ensuring that students and employers are kept informed about pertinent developments, stimulating competitiveness between and within institutions, enhancing student mobility, and making comparisons with international institutions and higher education systems due to increased cross-border movement of students and staff.

In its endeavour to address the quality issues in the South African higher education, the CHE was established in May 1998 in accordance with the Higher Education Act, No 101 of 1997 (Higher Education Act 101 of 1997). The main responsibilities assigned to the CHE by the Higher Education Act and the Education White Paper 3 of 1997 were to give advice to the minister of higher education on higher education policy matters and to be responsible for quality assurance and quality promotion in South African higher education (Department of Education, 1997).

The CHE's quality assurance functions are carried out by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) – its permanent sub-committee. The HEQC was mandated to conduct institutional audits on the country's higher education institutions within the context of ongoing reform and restructuring with the goal of producing a high quality and transformed national higher education system, which can address South Africa's intricate knowledge and development

needs (CHE, 2007a). The HEQC's institutional audits took cognisance of the continuing disparities that were prevalent in South Africa's higher education sector, and the institutional audits are in line with the principles underpinning restructuring (CHE, 2007a).

The HEQC's institutional audits ran from 2004 to 2011. These audits focused on institutional policies, systems, procedures, strategies and resources for managing the three core functions of teaching and learning, research, and community engagement as well as support services for the university's functions (CHE, 2007a).

This study focuses on the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience. It utilises executive summaries of institutional audit reports and interview data to establish this effect.

## **1.2 Problem statement and rationale for the study**

The primary purpose of the HEQC's institutional audits is to facilitate systematic and continuous improvement and development of quality in higher education and enhance the capacity of higher education institutions to plan, act and report on quality-related objectives and achievements (CHE, 2004a). The HEQC's institutional audit process requires that, after receiving an institutional audit report, institutions should develop and implement a quality improvement plan which responds to the recommendations made in the audit reports (CHE, 2004a). Although the HEQC monitored progress in the implementation of the improvement plans by analysing the progress reports from the audited higher education institutions, three years after conducting the institutional audit, the process is primarily paper-based and, except for very few exceptional cases of concern, institutions are not subjected to follow-up visits to verify what is said in the progress reports (CHE, 2004a). In addition, the HEQC's monitoring mechanisms focus on engagements with the institutions' senior management members. Further, since the institutional audits were concluded in 2011, there have hardly been any studies that sought to establish the effects of institutional audits on South African's higher education institutions.

Various international studies point to a mixed bag of both positive and negative effects of institutional audits on higher education. Some studies have found that external quality assurance mechanisms, including institutional audits, have facilitated quality improvement (Kristensen, 2010; Nilsson & Wallen, 2000; Ewell, 2010; Askling, Lycke & Stave, 2004; Shah, Nair & Wilson, 2011). Other studies, however, point out that external quality assurance interventions engender negative and unintended consequences (Stephenson, 2004; Newton, 2002; Mohrman, 2011; Cheng, 2009; Jones & De Saram, 2005; Hoecht, 2006; Mammen, 2006; and Minelli, Reborra, Turri & Huisman, 2006). For example, Stephenson (2004) points out that quality assurance systems usually start with good intentions but in many cases they end up engendering a compliance or ‘tick-box’ mentality, which further leads to the disillusionment of many academics and causing damage to the public standing of the higher education sector. Stephenson’s assertion is consonant with Newton (2002) who notes that those who were subjected to external quality assurance were mainly preoccupied with learning the rules of the game, that preparations for external quality assessments were often aimed at shielding reality from the view of external assessors. Newton (2002) adds that by the late 1990s there had been increased doubts and resistance from many academics regarding quality assurance interventions.

Studies that have been conducted about the institutional audits in South Africa have focused primarily on the audit process rather than the effects of the audits. This study therefore attempts to fill this void as it seeks to establish the effect of the Higher Education Quality Committee’s institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience. The study also includes representation from each of South Africa’s three university types: a traditional university, a comprehensive university, and a university of technology. A more comprehensive discussion on the three university types is done in section 2.1. The study sought the opinions of students and staff at these universities on the performance of their institutions regarding various areas pointed out in the HEQC’s institutional audit reports. The juxtaposition of feedback from these participants and the recommendations made in the audit reports of their institutions could shed light on the effects of institutional audits.

### 1.3 Research aims and questions

This section presents the research aims and questions. These aims and questions are largely premised on the HEQC criteria for institutional audits. According to the HEQC criteria for institutional audits (CHE, 2004a), the following two broad areas form the focus of evaluation in the audits:

- Area 1: Mission of the institution, links between planning, resource allocation and quality management.
- Area 2: Teaching and learning, research and community engagement.

To this end, although the study is mainly based on the two broad areas that form the focus of the evaluation in the institutional audits, it does not cover all the aspects of each area. Aspects such as community engagement, planning and benchmarking are not covered in this study.

Given that one of the primary functions of higher education is teaching and learning, it was considered important to investigate first how the institutional audits have influenced teaching and learning, and factors that have a bearing on the efficacy of teaching and learning. Although aspects that are not covered in this study, such as community engagement, research, planning and benchmarking, are important and relevant, this study was narrowed down to focus on aspects of the two broad areas that form the focus of the evaluation in the institutional audits. (see section 3.14 for a detailed discussion of these aspects). The study thus focuses on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience across different types of higher education institutions.

The study's main interest is to investigate the extent to which the institutional audits have had an influence on the quality of the core activities of teaching and learning, such as assessment, teaching of large classes and postgraduate supervision. In addition it is important to focus on how teaching and learning activities are being managed and supported as well as other factors that have a direct or indirect bearing on teaching and learning such as the mission and quality management. Finally, since students are central to the teaching and learning process, the study also focuses on the effect of institutional audits on the quality of student experience.

These focus areas enable the study to provide a broader understanding of the effects of institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions; and student experience across different types of higher education institutions. The secondary aims are outlined below.

The secondary aims of this study are to:

- establish the effect of the HEQC institutional audits on the quality of aspects of teaching and learning policies, practices and behaviours of academics and senior management,
- investigate the effect of the HEQC institutional audits on the quality of aspects of support functions, and
- determine the effects of institutional audits on the quality of student experience.

These research aims led to the formulation of the research questions for this study. Research questions are central to the research process as they play a key role in (a) giving direction and coherence to the research project, (b) defining the boundaries of the project, (c) ensuring that the researcher is kept focused during the study, (d) providing the basis for the identification and development of the research instruments, and (e) giving structure and guidance to the writing up of the project (Punch, 2009; Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2014). In this study, the research questions served as a compass that gave direction to the research activities and added a level of specificity to the development of the research (Gay et al, 2014).

The main research question for this study is:

- What effect have the HEQC's institutional audits had on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning; support functions; and student experience across different types of higher education institutions?

The secondary research questions arising from the conceptual framework are listed and elaborated upon in Chapter 3 (3.16). The research questions were aimed at revealing the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions; and student experience across different types of higher education institutions.

The areas of focus in this study were further broken down into specific themes. These themes were identified from the HEQC's criteria for institutional audits, the analysis of summaries of institutional audit reports, literature review, and during data collection. A more detailed discussion on the identification of themes is provided in Chapter 3 (3.14). The themes identified in this study provide proper elaboration of the aspects mentioned in the research aims and questions. The participants were asked questions pertaining to the following themes: the self-evaluation process, mission and vision, resource allocation, postgraduate education, assessment of students and security of exams, professionalism of and private work by academics, management of work integrated learning (WIL), support given to black and female staff members, teaching of large classes, institutional culture, and the management of short courses.

The themes that are directly related to the HEQC's area of teaching and learning are assessment of students, postgraduate education, management of short courses, teaching of large classes, and management of WIL. In addition, private work by and professionalism of academics was categorised as a theme directly related to teaching and learning as the quality of teaching is to some extent influenced by academics' professionalism and the extent to which their private work impedes teaching and learning at the university. With the exclusion of the theme on postgraduate education, the themes categorised under the area of teaching and learning focus on undergraduate education. Themes identified under support functions are resource allocation, support given to black and female staff members, self-evaluation process, and mission and vision. Although institutional culture and student experience are discussed separately, they are contingent on all the aforementioned themes; for example resources allocated to lecture rooms and extramural activities contribute to the nature of student experience at an institution. Section 3.14 provides a more comprehensive discussion on the categorisation of these themes.

## **1.4 Research methodology**

In this section, the research methodology for this study is highlighted. A more detailed discussion of the research methodology is presented in Chapter 4.

### **1.4.1 Case study design**

This study investigates the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience across different types of higher education institutions. The study specifically focuses on three selected public higher education institutions. These institutions were selected from each of the three public higher education institutional types in South Africa: a traditional university, a university of technology, and a comprehensive university. As this study is the first in South Africa to investigate how higher education institutions have reacted to and followed-up on the institutional audits, it was considered important to conduct an in-depth study of a few institutions so as to get a good indication of the effect of institutional audits on a variety of areas at South African universities. A case study design was therefore the most appropriate research design to address the research question as it involves a systematic and in-depth investigation of a particular phenomenon and the use of a variety of sources of evidence, and with data having to be corroborated and converged by means of triangulation (Yin, 2009; Rule & John, 2011). As indicated earlier in this chapter, the in-depth focus that characterises case studies attempted to address the relatively superficial follow-up mechanisms employed by the HEQC as regards the implementation of the quality improvement plans by institutions to address recommendations in the institutional audit reports.

### **1.4.2 The unit of analysis**

The central unit of analysis in this study is a university. In studying this unit of analysis, the author sought the opinions and perceptions of senior management members, academics and students across three different public higher education institutions. The researcher interacted with the participants in both one-on-one and group sessions.

### **1.4.3 Research paradigm**

This study is viewed through the lens of the pragmatic paradigm. This paradigm foregrounds the research outcomes rather than the conditions that exist prior to the outcomes (Creswell, 2007). Concomitantly, this study attempts to unearth the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience

across different types of higher education institutions. Individuals who subscribe to pragmatism are free to choose any research methods, techniques and procedures that are best suited to their purposes or needs. One other reason for choosing the pragmatic paradigm in this study is that it resonates with the evaluative orientation of this research. Indeed, this approach is more concerned with delivering useful evaluation results than just with methodological rigour (Luckett, 2006). In evaluative research, a researcher might evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of institutional audits (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007); accordingly, responses from participants in this study are evaluated to ascertain the extent to which the institutional audits have had an effect on the relevant public higher education institutions.

#### **1.4.4 Population and sampling**

The population consists of all South African public higher education institutions that were audited during the HEQC's institutional audits that took place from 2004 to 2011. The study does not cover all 23 public higher education institutions in South Africa but only samples three public higher education institutions. Since South Africa's public higher education landscape consists of three institutional types, the sample includes representation from each of the institutional types to ensure variation of coverage. The sample therefore comprises a traditional university, a comprehensive university, and a university of technology which are referred to as University A, University B and University C respectively. Further, the sample includes both historically advantaged and historically disadvantaged institutions. In addition, the sample covers rural-based and urban-based institutions.

The extent of diversity among the three universities resulted in information-rich cases that provided an opportunity for maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002). The logic of maximum variation sampling is that when a researcher selects a highly diverse sample, the collection and analysis of data will produce detailed and high quality descriptions of each of the cases in the sample (Patton, 2002). For further details on maximum variation sampling, see section 4.3.3. It is, however, acknowledged that it would be ideal to conduct interviews with participants from all of South Africa's 23 public HEIs, but the intricacies and logistics of conducting such a study may be beyond the scope of this study; hence, a case study design was chosen. A description of each of the three universities is given in section 4.3.3.



As regards the sampling of participants, a total of 58 respondents were selected, comprising 12 senior management members, 12 academics and 34 students spread across the three South African public higher education institutions (see section 4.3.3).

#### **1.4.5 Data collection**

The collection of data was carried over eight months in 2012 and the 2013. Interviews were conducted with respondents from the three institutions. Interviews were held with 4 senior management members and 4 academics at each of the three selected institutions. Focus groups were also conducted with a group of between 10 to 12 students at each of the three universities. A sound recording device was used to record a verbatim account of the interviews for purposes of transcription and analysis.

During the collection of data, new themes emerged and these were included in the final list of identified themes for this study (see section 3.14).

#### **1.4.6 Data analysis**

This study is comprised of data from 27 interviews. After conducting the interviews, data from the digital recorder was played back and transcribed. Atlas.ti, a data-analysis software for qualitative data, was used to analyse data from the interviews. Further, Atlas.ti was used to code the data, write memos, and create code families and networks to display data from transcriptions. Data was also categorised into themes.

In addition, content analysis was used to thematically analyse information in the executive summaries of the audit reports that have been published on the CHE website.

For researchers to effectively determine the extent of trustworthiness in qualitative research, the criteria of credibility and transferability are recommended (Guba & Lincoln in Koch, 1994).

In this study, credibility was enhanced by safely storing all the notes and interview recordings, and data analysis done on the Atlas.ti software. The data was saved on a disk and submitted to the Centre for Assessment and Evaluation at the University of Pretoria.

Although the study was only conducted with students, academics and senior management staff at three public higher education institutions, the findings in this study could have the likelihood of transferability as regards the effects of institutional audits to other higher education institutions. Yin (2012) distinguishes between statistical generalisations and analytic generalisations and identifies the latter as applicable to case study research. Thomas (2011) corroborates Yin's view by stating that a case study provides a more complete and rich picture which allows researchers to gain analytical insights from it. Accordingly, analytic generalisations were used to show how the findings in this study have informed the relationships among theoretical constructs and concepts (Yin, 2012).

#### **1.4.7 Research ethics**

Before conducting the interviews, ethical clearance for this study was sought and obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria. Formal permission was further sought from the three institutions to conduct interviews with students, academics and senior management staff at these universities. In addition, informed consent of all interviewees was sought by providing them with sufficient information about the study and explaining the confidentiality aspect of it. Participants were then requested to sign confidentiality agreements. The information provided to the participants also enabled them to determine possible risks or discomfort. Further, permission was sought from participants to use a sound recording device during interviews. Subsequently, a consent form was signed by each participant to allow the interviewer to use a digital recorder during interviews. All participants were informed of the anonymity and confidentiality of their participation. Due to confidentiality in the referencing of the institutional audit report summaries of the three institutions, the in-text referencing of the reports has not included the year of publication to ensure that the identities of three universities are not revealed. The full references are, however, provided in the bibliography section.

## 1.5 Delimitations of the study

The study focused on three universities in the South African public higher education sector. The sector has a total of 23 universities. The study had to be delimited to three universities to make it manageable. By focusing on three universities, the researcher was able to ask the main questions and follow-up questions to the three groups of participants at each of the three universities. A qualitative study covering students, academics, and senior managers at all 23 South African universities would have been ideal but would have taken too long for a single PhD study.

## 1.6 Clarification of terminology and concepts

For the purpose of this study, the following concepts and key words need to be defined:

- **Council on Higher Education**

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) is a quality council for higher education in South Africa established in accordance with the Higher Education Act of 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997). The main responsibilities assigned to the CHE are to give advice to the minister of higher education on higher education policy matters and to be responsible for quality assurance and quality promotion in South African higher education, (Department of Education, 1997) (see also section 2.1)

- **Higher Education Quality Committee**

The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) is a permanent sub-committee of the CHE and is responsible for carrying out the role of quality assurance in higher education (CHE, 2004a) (see also section 2.1).

- **Institutional Audits**

The institutional audits function of the HEQC is charged with the responsibility of auditing the quality assurance mechanisms at South Africa's higher education institutions, which includes both public and private providers (CHE, 2004a) (see also section 2.5.4).

- **Public higher education institutions**

These are universities that fall within the authority of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and governed by the Higher Education Act, 101 of 1997 and its amendments.

- **Quality and quality assurance**

Quality is a concept that is often used and interpreted differently in various contexts. The study adopts the HEQC's definition of quality. The HEQC defines quality as '*fitness for purpose, fitness of purpose, value for money and transformation*' (CHE, 2007a, p. 3-4). Fitness for purpose is assessed in terms of a higher education institution's mission and goals and definition of its identity (CHE, 2007a). Fitness of purpose is assessed in terms of the responsiveness of an institution's mission and academic activities to the country's priorities and needs; value for money focuses on the degree to which an institution embeds efficiency, effectiveness and economies of scale in the quality management of its core functions (CHE, 2007a). Transformation is examined in accordance with an institution's commitment to developing individual students and the extent to which it meets South Africa's requirements for social and economic development (CHE, 2007a) (see also section 3.3).

- **Self-evaluation**

The self-evaluation exercise implies that institutions develop an audit portfolio that comprises a self-evaluation report and supporting evidence (CHE, 2007a) (see also section 3.6).

- **Total Quality Management (TQM)**

Total Quality Management (TQM) is an approach that is aimed to improve both customer satisfaction and the manner in which organisations conduct their business (Arnold, Chapman &

Clive, 2008). TQM foregrounds a culture of quality where the aim of every member of an organisation is to keep customers happy; staff should design products and services which meet and exceed customers' expectations (Sallis, 1993). TQM has six basic concepts: a management that is committed and involved; giving focused attention to the customer, both internally and externally; participation of the entire workforce; continuous improvement; regarding suppliers as partners; and putting in place performance measures for processes (Besterfield, 2004) (see also section 3.13.1).

- **Work-integrated learning**

Work-integrated learning refers to *'an educational approach that aligns academic and workplace practices for the mutual benefit of students and workplaces'* (CHE, 2011, p. 78). The primary purpose of WIL is to ensure that the process of learning is enhanced so as to enable students to apply what they have learned academically in the workplace (CHE, 2011). In doing so, some innovative curricular, assessment and pedagogical forms have been developed in a quest to address concerns raised about employability, gradueness and civic responsibility (CHE, 2011) (see also section 5.6).

- **Xenophobia**

According to The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1978), xenophobia refers to an unreasonable fear and dislike of foreigners or strangers. Xenophobia has its roots in the institutionalised inequality engendered by the apartheid system in South Africa, which resulted in frustrations and bitterness about unmet high expectations of many black nationals for the new South Africa being taken out on foreigners (Shindondola, 2002) (see also section 6.6).

## **1.7 Overview of the study**

The study consists of seven chapters.

**Chapter 1:** This chapter introduces and provides a background of the study. The study also presents the problem statement, aims, the main research question, research design and

methodology. This chapter further provides the clarification of concepts and introduces the delimitations of the study and research ethics.

**Chapter 2** gives a comprehensive context of the study. The chapter provides a historical background of South Africa's education in general and the country's higher education in particular. It then proceeds to provide a rationale for the emergence of quality assurance in higher education, the global move towards quality assurance, the different quality assurance systems used in various countries, and South Africa's quality assurance system.

**Chapter 3** provides a review of literature. The chapter describes the concept of quality and provides the effect of external quality assurance interventions on teaching and learning, support areas and student experience. Further, the theoretical underpinnings for this study, the conceptual framework, and specific research questions are presented in this chapter.

**Chapter 4** discusses the research design and methodology used in this study. It further provides a detailed explanation of the research design that was used and the reason why it was chosen. The chapter proceeds to explain the data collection methods used. Data analysis, methodological norms and research ethics are also discussed in this chapter.

**Chapter 5** presents findings related to the secondary research question on the effect of institutional audits on the quality of teaching and learning. The findings are discussed under the following themes: student assessment and security of exams, postgraduate education, private work by and professionalism of academics, management of short courses, management of work integrated learning, and the teaching of large classes.

**Chapter 6** presents findings related to the secondary research questions on the effect of institutional audits on the quality of support functions and student experience. The findings in this chapter are discussed under the following themes: the mission and vision, the self-evaluation process, resource allocation, institutional culture and xenophobia, and support for black and female staff members.

**Chapter 7** presents the summary and main findings of this study, draws conclusions and makes recommendations. This chapter also reflects on the conceptual framework and research methodology.

## CHAPTER 2

# QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN AND GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXTS

### 2.1 Introduction and background

When the National Party, the main architect of the apartheid regime, rose to power in 1948, it racially segregated South African people; this resulted in disparities on both social and educational fronts (Ilorah, 2006). Disparities in the education sector, which were strategically orchestrated by the apartheid government, played a pivotal role in further creating varied forms of social injustice. The quality of education for black people was carefully planned to be inferior to that of whites both in terms of content and resources.

The apartheid system of segregated schooling was brought to the fore and eventually introduced in 1954, enshrined in law as Bantu Education Act of 1954 (Ilorah, 2006). The primary basis of the Bantu education system was the separate development of the races (Geber & Newman, 1980 in Ilorah, 2006). Subsequently, the apartheid regime extended its apartheid policies to the higher education sector by introducing the University Extension Act of 1959, which enabled the government to have total control over admissions, appointments, courses offered and the curricular contents at historically black universities (Ilorah, 2006).

By 1994, the South African higher education system comprised a total of 36 public higher education institutions (HEIs) that were structured according to race and ethnicity (see Table 2.1 below), and consisted of technikons (15) and universities (21) which were administered by different government departments. These departments were either in the Republic of South Africa or one of the ‘bantustans’ created by the apartheid government (CHE, 2004b). These 36 institutions consisted of universities and technikons that were originally established for each of South Africa’s different racial groups. As Table 2.1 below illustrates, four English-medium universities were specifically reserved for white students, six Afrikaans-medium for white and mainly Afrikaans-speaking students, seven technikons for white students, six universities and five technikons for African students, two urban universities and two technikons for coloured and



Indian students, two urban universities reserved for black students, and two distance-education providers (one university and one technikon) (CHE, 2004b). Table 2.1 below illustrates the public higher education landscape in South Africa by 1994.

**Table 2.1: The public higher education landscape in South Africa by 1994**

Authority	Universities	Technikons	Total
<i>House of Assembly (for whites)</i>	<p><b>English:</b> University of Cape Town, University of Natal, Rhodes University, University of the Witwatersrand</p> <p><b>Afrikaans:</b> University of the (Orange) Free State, University of Port Elizabeth, University of Pretoria, Potchefstroom University, Rand Afrikaans University, University of Stellenbosch</p> <p><b>Distance:</b> University of South Africa</p>	<p>Cape Technikon, Technikon (of the Orange) Free State, Natal Technikon, Port Elizabeth Technikon, Pretoria Technikon, Vaal Triangle Technikon, Technikon Witwatersrand</p> <p><b>Distance:</b> Technikon of South Africa</p>	19
<i>House of Representatives (for coloureds)</i>	University of the Western Cape	Peninsula Technikon	2
<i>House of Delegates (for Indians)</i>	University of Durban-Westville	ML Sultan Technikon	2
<i>Department of Education and Training (for Africans)</i>	University of the North, University of Zululand, Medical University of Southern Africa, Vista University	Mangosuthu Technikon, Technikon Northern Transvaal	6
<i>Republic of Transkei</i>	University of Transkei	Eastern Cape Technikon (Transkei Technikon)	2
<i>Republic of Bophuthatswana</i>	University of North-West (University of Bophuthatswana)	Technikon North-West (Setlogelo Technikon)	2
<i>Republic of Venda</i>	University of Venda	-	1
<i>Republic of Ciskei</i>	University of Fort Hare	Border Technikon (Ciskei Technikon)	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>36</b>

(Source: CHE, 2004b, p. 40)

South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy inevitably called for new values, practices and institutions which supported democratic principles and majority rule. To this end, one of the priorities of the newly elected democratic government was to ensure the restructuring and transformation of the higher education sector in order to address the disjointed, racially divided, inequitably funded and elitist nature of the higher education system (Venter, 2006). The racially segregated education was unfair because the distribution of resources favoured certain institutions along racial lines at the expense of others (Ilorah, 2006). This inequitable resource allocation led to disparities in the amount and quality of formal schooling between learners; for example, the apartheid regime's policy for non-whites ensured that there were limitations for black students in terms of their quest for intellectual excellence, and the historically black institutions were deliberately moulded to provide that limited knowledge (Ilorah, 2006).

It was imperative that, after the dismantling of the apartheid regime, the South African higher education system had to undergo transformation. Subsequently, a series of policies were developed to address this need for transformation, culminating in the White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (Le Grange, 2011). The need for a transformed higher education landscape is captured in the foreword to the White Paper by the then South African Minister of Education, Professor Sibusiso Bhengu as follows:

*'The transformation of the higher education system to reflect the changes that are taking place in our society and to strengthen the values and practices of our new democracy is...not negotiable. The higher education system must be transformed to redress past inequalities, to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs and to respond to new realities and opportunities.'* (Department of Education, 1997)

Indeed, the White paper and related policy point out that South African higher education is faced with major problems such as historical inequalities which resulted in unequal standards of provision among the higher education institutions; difficulties for people from disadvantaged communities in accessing higher education; the student and staff profiles which are not representative of the demographics of the country; inefficiency and ineffectiveness; high failure and drop-out rates particularly among black students; low throughput rates; inadequate

curriculum content for the South African and broader African contexts; and poor research productivity (Botha, Favish & Stephenson, 2008; Lockett, 2007).

In its endeavour to address the quality issues in the South African higher education sector, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) was established in May 1998 in accordance with the Higher Education Act, No 101 of 1997 (Higher Education Act 101 of 1997). The responsibilities assigned to the CHE by the Higher Education Act and the Education White Paper 3 of 1997 are as follows: to give advice to the minister of higher education on higher education policy matters; to take responsibility for the national higher education quality assurance and quality promotion functions such as programme accreditation, institutional audits, programme evaluation and capacity building; to monitor and evaluate the extent to which the vision, policy goals and objectives for the country's higher education are being realised; to contribute to the development of South African higher education by giving guidance on the main national and systemic issues; and to inform government and stakeholders about the various challenges that the higher education sector is faced with (Department of Education, 1997).

Accordingly, the CHE was mandated to give a proposal on the optimal size and shape of South Africa's higher education system, which would be presented for public comment (CHE, 2004b). After a chain of intense debates, deliberations and uncertainty regarding the future size and shape of the South African public higher education system, the CHE produced its report titled *'Towards a New Higher Education Landscape: Meeting the Equity, Quality and Social Development Imperatives of South Africa in the 21st Century'* (2000) (CHE, 2004b, p. 42). One of the report's arguments was that the way the South African higher education landscape was configured would not enable the country to meet its socio-economic needs and was no longer sustainable. The report's key recommendation was that the higher education system needed to be differentiated according to different mandates and types (CHE, 2004b).

Subsequently, the National Working Group (NWG) was appointed in 2001 to investigate and advise the Minister of Education on appropriate arrangements for the consolidation of higher education provision on a regional basis through the establishment of new institutional and organisational forms that included the feasibility of reducing the number of public higher education institutions (CHE, 2004b). The NWG's report was eventually released to the Minister

of Education in 2002. The report proposed a reduction in South Africa's public higher education institutions, also referred to as universities, from 36 to 21, and provided various reasons for this proposal on the basis of a regional analysis of higher education provision according to quality, sustainability and equity (CHE, 2004b). The curtailing of the higher education landscape is supported by Cele and Menon (2006) who assert that a reduction in the number of higher education institutions is an essential aspect of ensuring that South African higher education institutions are transformed.

Indeed, between 2003 and 2005 there were significant changes to the South African public higher education landscape. During this period public higher education institutions were merged and restructured, resulting in three institutional types: traditional universities, universities of technology and comprehensive universities (CHE, 2009). The following is a brief description of the three institutional types.

The traditional universities offer primarily discipline oriented university degrees. There are 11 traditional universities in South Africa: University of Cape Town, Rhodes University, University of Free State, Stellenbosch University, University of Limpopo, University of the Western Cape, University of KwaZulu-Natal, University of the Witwatersrand, University of Fort Hare, University of Pretoria, and North-West University.

South African universities of technology were previously known as technikons which provided career-focused programmes aimed at preparing graduates for the workplace (CHE, 2010). The technikons' close ties with the workplace ensured that their programmes stayed relevant, up-to-date, and the work-integrated learning component gave students exposure to the functioning of the world of work (CHE, 2010). South Africa has six universities of technology: Tshwane University of Technology, Central University of Technology, Durban University of Technology, Vaal University of Technology, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, and Mangosuthu University of Technology.

Comprehensive universities offer a wide range of academic programmes of both university and technikon type; these programmes comprise vocational, career-focused, professional and general formative (Department of Education, 2004). Further characteristics of comprehensive

universities are that they are more accessible as they provide opportunities for different entry and exit points, present vertical and horizontal articulation pathways which offer opportunities for student mobility, are more responsive as they develop a suite of educational programmes and research focus areas that are appropriate to local, regional and national needs, and provide more flexibility as they tend to develop a stronger partnership with community, civic, government, business, and industry for local and regional development (Department of Education, 2004). There are six comprehensive universities in South Africa: University of South Africa, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Walter Sisulu University, University of Johannesburg, University of Venda, and University of Zululand.

The number of South Africa's higher education institutions was eventually cut down from 36 to 23 institutions, comprising eleven traditional universities, six comprehensive universities and six universities of technology. Table 2.2 below shows the 23 public higher education institutions grouped according to institutional types.

**Table 2.2: The 23 public higher education institutions grouped according to institutional types**

	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Cities/ towns/ places in which campuses are located</b>	<b>Province(s) in which campuses are located</b>
<b>Traditional Universities</b>			
1	University of Cape Town	7 campuses in Cape Town	Western Cape
2	University of Fort Hare	3 campuses spread across Alice, Bisho and East London	Eastern Cape
3	University of the Free State	1 campus each in Bloemfontein, QwaQwa, and Vista	Free State
4	University of KwaZulu-Natal	1 camps each in Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Pinetown and Westville	KwaZulu-Natal
5	University of Limpopo	1 campus in each of Ga-Rankuwa and Polokwane	Limpopo, Gauteng
6	North West University	1 campus in Potchefstroom, Mafikeng and Vanderbijlpark	North West, Gauteng
7	University of Pretoria	6 campuses in Tshwane, 1 in Sandton	Gauteng
8	Rhodes University	1 campus in Grahamstown	Eastern Cape

	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Cities/ towns/ places in which campuses are located</b>	<b>Province(s) in which campuses are located</b>
9	University of Stellenbosch	Campuses in Bellville, Tygerberg, Saldanha and Stellenbosch	Western Cape
10	University of the Western Cape	One campus in Bellville	Western Cape
11	University of the Witwatersrand	4 campuses in Johannesburg	Gauteng
<b>Comprehensive Universities</b>			
12	University of South Africa (known as Unisa)	Main campus in Pretoria, Tshwane	All provinces
13	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University	1 campus in George and five in Port Elizabeth	Eastern Cape
14	University of Johannesburg	Three campuses in Johannesburg and one in Soweto	Gauteng
15	University of Venda	1 campus in Thohoyandou	Limpopo
16	Walter Sisulu University	Campuses in Buffalo City, Butterworth, Mthatha, Queenstown	Eastern Cape
17	University of Zululand	1 campus in KwaDlangezwa	KwaZulu-Natal
<b>Universities of Technology</b>			
18	Cape Peninsula University of Technology	4 campuses in Cape Town, 1 in Wellington	Western Cape
19	Central University of Technology	Campuses in Bloemfontein and Welkom	Free State
20	Durban University of Technology	4 campuses in Durban, 2 in Pietermaritzburg	KwaZulu-Natal
21	Mangosuthu University of Technology	1 campus in Umlazi	KwaZulu-Natal
22	Tshwane University of Technology	1 campus in eMalahleni, Ga-Rankuwa, Nelspruit and Polokwane; 2 campuses in Soshanguve; and 3 campuses in Tshwane	Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West
23	Vaal University of Technology	Main campus in Vanderbijlpark; delivery sites in Ekurhuleni, Klerksdorp, Secunda, Uppington	Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape

(Source: CHE, 2009, p. 7)

The main reasons, cited by the CHE, for the mergers of public higher education institutions were premised on South African higher education sector's apartheid legacy, the sector's failure to adequately respond to the country's human resources development needs, and the difficulties of managing the existing configuration of higher education institutions (Kraak, 2004).

In addition, like many countries the world over, South African higher education institutions have been under pressure due to increasing demand for equity, accessibility, relevancy, accountability, efficiency and greater contributions to socio-economic development; other challenges include declining government funding, democratisation, internationalisation, greater diversity and technological development, changes in academic employment, benchmarking and performance indicators (Pretorius, 2003; Strydom & Strydom, 2004). The situation in South Africa has been further compounded by the climate of political and social change, which compelled the higher education institutions to rethink their *raison d'être* (Pretorius, 2003).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, one of the main responsibilities of the CHE is to carry out the quality assurance and quality promotion function within South African higher education and training, which consists of programme accreditation, institutional audits, programme evaluation and capacity building. Thus, quality assurance was identified as one of the mechanisms to steer the higher education system towards addressing South Africa's transformation imperatives.

Indeed, within the higher education's new national framework that the government had put in place, quality assurance was identified as an important mechanism which was aimed at steering the higher education system towards the improvement of quality in all its component elements (CHE, 2008). In the post-1994 dispensation, the provision of quality education to all South Africans was one of the social and educational goals and objectives. From the onset, quality issues were therefore tied to the objectives of broader socio-political reform within the South African higher education sector (CHE, 2008).

In fact, external quality assurance mechanisms in higher education had already taken shape in other parts of the world even before the establishment of the Council on Higher Education in South Africa (Lewis, 2009; Lamara, 2009; Materu, 2007).

## **2.2 The emergence of quality assurance**

Increased concern about quality assurance in higher education was generally brought about by several factors such as declining financial resources, accountability to stakeholders, massification

and dramatic increases in student enrolments, internationalisation and globalisation (Jonathan, 2000). This section focuses on the three factors that accounted for the emergence of quality assurance in virtually every country that has established quality assurance mechanisms: accountability, massification, and declining financial resources.

In the last few decades, there has been an increased demand and expectation for higher education institutions to exercise public accountability (Singh & Lange, 2007). The concomitant development of external mechanisms for accountability in many countries emanated, inter alia, from the decline in public credibility of higher education. According to Singh and Lange (2007) the primacy of public accountability, which has spread globally, is given expression in the increasing need for higher education institutions to demonstrate how they provide value for money, how they ensure efficiency and effectiveness, and the extent to which they are responsive to the country's economic and social development needs.

Further, the ever increasing demands for state funding from various sectors (such as health, transport, housing, social services and education) necessitated the prioritisation of the allocation of resources and reduction of the budgets that governments are willing to dedicate to higher education (Lemaitre, 2010). Resultantly, state funding of higher education has also been aligned to the level of accountability demonstrated by higher education institutions. In South Africa, higher education institutions are funded in accordance with the extent to which they conform to stipulated performance standards of the relevant national education department (Soudien, 2007).

Indeed, reduction in state funding for higher education became a common occurrence in many countries throughout the world, and African countries were not exceptions. In sub-Saharan Africa, the amounts spent by governments on higher education, dropped by 28% between 1980 and 1995, while student enrolments in higher education in the region increased by 61% from 337 000 in 1980 to approximately 542 700 in 1990 (Jonathan, 2000). In other parts of the continent too there was an exponential growth in student enrolments. For example, in Ghana, student enrolments grew from 11 857 in 1991 /92 to 63 576 in 2003/2004, an increase of over 400 percent; in Nigeria the number of universities grew rapidly from six in 1970 to approximately 240 higher education institutions and an enrolment of over 1.5 million in 2006 (Materu, 2007). These exponential increases in student enrolments and the concomitant drop in public spending



on higher education gave rise to a variety of problems in African higher education. Resultantly, African higher education was characterised by decaying infrastructure, increasing unrest on university campuses and lack of quality and relevance of the training provided (Jonathan, 2000). The resultant general observation made about the decline of quality in African higher education institutions urged African governments to increasingly demand more accountability from higher education institutions and prioritise quality of higher education and its maintenance and improvement on the political and educational agenda.

### **2.3 The global emergence of quality assurance**

The concern about quality education translated into the establishment of external quality assurance agencies in various countries. External quality assurance agencies emerged in the 1980s in countries such as France, Hong Kong, Jamaica, The Netherlands, and Republic of Ireland (Lewis, 2009). However, these systems, as Lewis (2009) points out, were not necessarily comprehensive at the time. It was only in the 1990s that quality assurance became a central concern in higher education globally (Newton, 2000).

The increase in the number of external quality assurance agencies is clearly evident when one looks at the growth in the membership of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). INQAAHE, which was established in 1991, comprises regional and national quality assurance and accreditation agencies, and organisations with a strong interest in quality assurance (Lewis, 2009). Lewis (2009) further points out that INQAAHE experienced exponential growth from 11 countries, when it was founded in 1991, to 154 members from 78 countries in July 2008.

In Latin American countries, a huge increase in the number of higher education institutions and enrolments with varied levels of quality gave rise to the creation of quality assurance agencies during the 1990s (Lamara, 2009). Some of the principal quality assurance agencies created in Latin America in the 1990s are highlighted by Lamara (2009) as follows: in Mexico in 1989 the National Commission for the Evaluation of Higher Education was created; in 1990, in Chile, the Higher Council of Education was created primarily with the intention of accrediting non-

autonomous private institutions (new private institutions); in Colombia in 1992 the National Council of Accreditation was created; in Brazil in 1993, the Institutional Evaluation Program for Brazilian Universities was formed; in Costa Rica the National System of Accreditation in Higher Education was founded in 1999; and in Argentina the National Commission for University Assessment and accreditation was formed in 1995/96.

In India, the University Grants Commission (UGC), which had statutory powers to maintain quality in Indian Higher Education Institutions, constituted a 15-member committee on Accreditation and assessment council in 1986; and in 1994, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) was established (NAAC, 2006). In 1999, the ministers in charge of higher education system in 29 European countries signed the Bologna Declaration, which had as its primary aim the establishment of the European Higher Education Area by 2010 (Karkoszka, 2009). Karkoszka (2009) points out that according to the Bologna Declaration the strategic aims of higher education are to prepare graduates in line with the needs of national, European and even global employment market; to entrench in society a mentality of advanced knowledge; to prepare students to be active in their own countries and European countries; and to enhance the personal development of students. The main aim of the Bologna Process is to promote quality assurance in higher education, which includes the implementation of the accreditation system (Karkoszka, 2009).

In Australia, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) was established in 2000 and tasked with the responsibility of promoting, auditing, and reporting on quality assurance in Australian higher education (AUQA, 2008).

Africa was not to be left behind in this global focus on quality assurance; various African countries established their own quality assurance agencies, as shown in Table 2.3 on the next page (Materu, 2007).

**Table 2.3: Establishment of quality assurance agencies in Africa**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Quality assurance agency</b>	<b>Year established</b>
Kenya	Commission for Higher Education (CHE)	1985
Nigeria	National Universities Commission (NUC)	1990
Cameroon	National Commission on Private Higher Education (NCPHE)	1991
Ghana	National Accreditation Board (NAB)	1993
Tanzania	The Higher Education Accreditation Council (HEAC)	1995
Tunisia	Comite National d'Evaluation (CNE)	1995
Mauritius	Tertiary Education Commission (TEC)	1997
Liberia	National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE)	2000
South Africa	Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE)	2001
Ethiopia	Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA)	2003
Mozambique	National Commission for Accreditation and Evaluation of Higher Education (CNAQ)	2003
Sudan	Evaluation and Accreditation Corporation (AVAC)	2003
Egypt	National Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee (NQAAC)	2004
Namibia	National Council for Higher Education (NCHE)	2004
Uganda	National Council for Higher Education (NCHE)	2005
Zimbabwe	National Council for Higher Education (NCHE)	2006

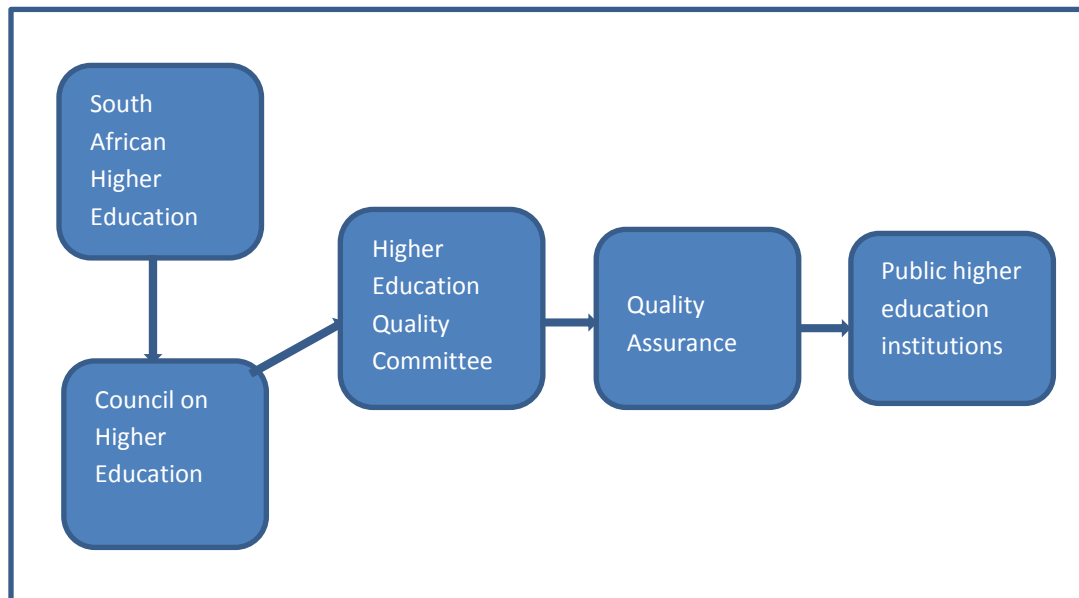
*(Source: Materu, 2007)*

Quality assurance in the South African higher education gained primacy in 1995, when the South African Universities' Vice Chancellors' Association decided to establish the Quality Promotion Unit that was aimed to assist universities to conduct effective institutional self-evaluation at different levels, and form a basis for programme accreditation in higher education for articulation purposes (Gouws & Waghid, 2006). Subsequently, the Higher Education Act of 1997 established a statutory body called the HEQC, which is the quality assurance body that falls under the auspices of the Council on Higher Education. More on the South African quality assurance systems will be discussed later in this section.

Although there may be variations in methodologies in international quality assurance systems, in most instances various quality assurance models use similar key methodologies for evaluations of institutions or programmes, which include self-evaluation, peer review, performance indicators or criteria and a quality audit (Van Damme, 2000).

## 2.4 South Africa’s movement towards quality assurance

As illustrated in Figure 2.1 below, the Higher Education Act of 1997 allocated the function of quality assurance in higher education to the CHE. This function is performed via the HEQC - the CHE’s permanent sub-committee (CHE, 2004a). The HEQC’s mandate includes quality promotion, institutional audits and programme accreditation (CHE, 2004a). All public higher education institutions in South Africa are subjected to the HEQC’s quality assurance processes. The quality assurance mandate of the HEQC is performed within the framework of Regulations for Education and Training Quality Assurers (ETQAs) of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), which is responsible for overseeing standard setting and quality assurance in support of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (CHE, 2004a).



(Source: Author)

**Figure 2.1: The South African higher education quality assurance system**

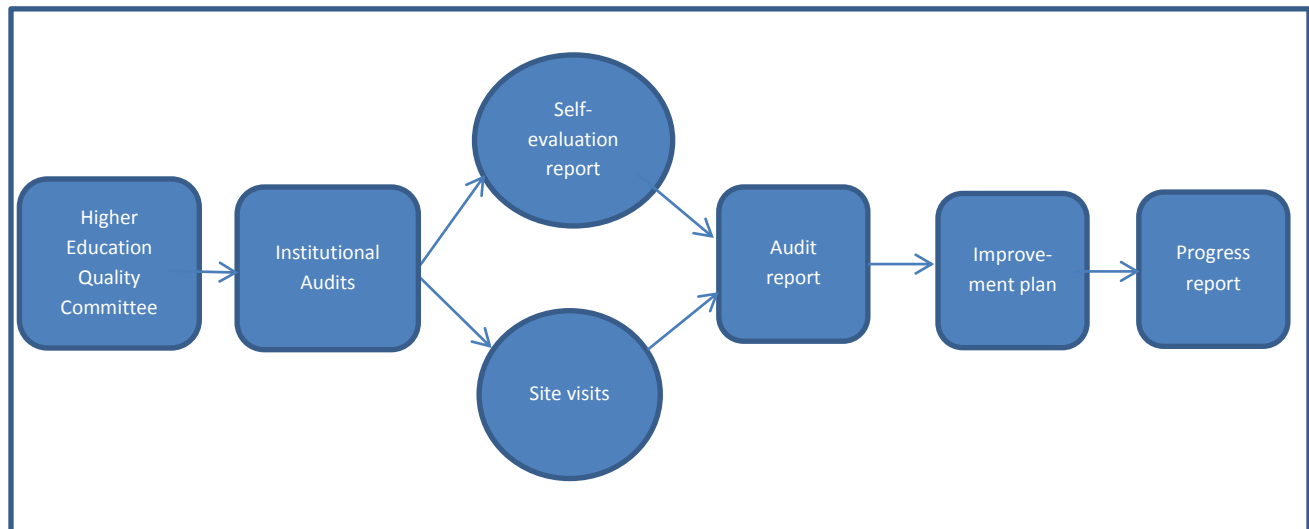
The HEQC’s quality assurance system was established in a context that took cognisance of international practice while at the same time pursuing national objectives and local needs (CHE, 2008). In addition to the usual challenges that quality assurance agencies are confronted with, the HEQC had to grapple with the historical legacies of racial inequities in higher education and the uncertainties that are often linked to mergers, incorporations and re-designations. According to Venter (2006), the HEQC has two purposes – to ensure public accountability and institutional

improvement. These two purposes require serious attention, particularly in the light of differences in access and provision of education that characterise South Africa's apartheid past (Venter, 2006).

This study primarily focuses on the institutional audits mandate of the HEQC. The institutional audits function of the HEQC is charged with the responsibility of auditing the quality assurance mechanisms at South Africa's higher education institutions, which includes both public and private providers (CHE, 2004a). The responsibility of conducting institutional audits is located in the Institutional Audits Directorate (IAD) of the HEQC (CHE, 2007a).

The IAD is responsible for executing the function of conducting institutional audits of higher education institutions with the intention of assessing the efficacy of the measures that have been put in place to manage the quality of teaching and learning, research, and community engagement in South Africa's public and private higher education institutions (CHE, 2007a). As part of the institutional audits process, institutions are expected to conduct a self-evaluation activity in line with the HEQC's institutional audit criteria (see Appendix A) and produce a self-evaluation report and supporting documentation (CHE, 2007a).

The South African institutional audits system is based on the peer review system, according to which a panel of peers from the South African higher education institutions as well as international institutions is constituted. The audit panel is comprised of senior academics and administrators from higher education institutions (CHE, 2008). The audit panel uses information gathered from the self-evaluation report and the site visits to produce the audit report. The site visits are undertaken to view the infrastructure that supports teaching and learning and to conduct interviews with various members of the university community. After receiving the audit report from the HEQC, the institution produces the improvement plan which shows how it plans to address the recommendations made in the audit report. Subsequently, the institution produces the progress report and sends it to the HEQC to indicate the progress made in implementing the improvement plan. Figure 2.2 shows how the HEQC's institutional audits process unfolds.



(Source: Author)

**Figure 2.2: The institutional audits process**

Areas of strengths are acknowledged in the form of commendations and areas of weakness are highlighted as recommendations that need to be addressed with different degrees of urgency. Both commendations and recommendations are included in the audit report produced for each audited institution. After the finalisation of the audit report, the HEQC requires institutions to draw up and implement an improvement plan which sets goals in response to the recommendations made in the audit report (CHE, 2007a). Three years after the institutional audit, institutions are expected to submit to the HEQC a progress report which indicates progress made in addressing the recommendations in the audit report (CHE, 2007a). Institutional audits are practised by many countries the world over, and are usually associated with the purposes of quality improvement and enhancement (CHE, 2004a).

The HEQC's approach to institutional audits is guided by the complex challenges that face higher education institutions such as the need for higher education transformation, amid radical restructuring within South African higher education (CHE, 2004a).

In developing the audit criteria, the HEQC took into consideration various contextual imperatives which include the national higher education policy as stipulated in a variety of Government White Papers, legislation, regulations and planning documents; and the HEQC's

policy stance as spelt out in the HEQC Founding Document, the Framework for Institutional Audits and other policy documents (CHE, 2008).

The HEQC institutional audits commenced in 2004 and ended in 2011. By the end of the institutional audit cycle, the HEQC had completed audits of all 23 public higher education institutions and 11 private higher education institutions. However, the institutional audit of one of the 23 universities was invalidated, which means that it is actually 22 universities that underwent authentic audits.

## **2.5 Institutional audit methodologies in different countries**

External quality assurance agencies in different countries use distinct institutional audits methodologies, in line with their national goals and unique contexts. This section discusses institutional audits methodologies in four countries: Australia, England, India and South Africa. The section further draws parallels among quality assurance systems in the four countries. All four countries are represented on the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). In fact the Board of INQAAHE found the agencies of selected countries, among which are South Africa and Australia, to be comprehensively adhering to the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice (INQAAHE, 2011). Further, the HEQC's institutional audits approach is primarily predicated on the Australian Universities Quality Agency's methodology.

### **2.5.1 The Australian Universities Quality Agency**

The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) is mandated with the function of promoting, auditing, and reporting on quality assurance in Australian higher education ([www.utas.edu.au](http://www.utas.edu.au), 2010). AUQA, which was established in 2000, is a central part of Australia's national quality assurance (QA) framework (AUQA, 2008).

AUQA does not prescribe externally determined set of standards on institutions to be audited but uses as its point of departure the objectives of each institution. This approach acknowledges the institutions' autonomy in setting their own objectives and in implementing their processes to

achieve the objectives within some overarching parameters such as national and sectoral guidelines (AUQA, 2008).

Most importantly, AQUA works closely with each audited institution to ensure that the audit process is tailor-made to take cognisance of the institution's unique situation and to reduce duplication of effort (AUQA, 2008).

According to AQUA, an institution's critical self-evaluation provides the basis on which the external quality audit is conducted. It is part of AUQA's vision to work co-operatively with audited institutions to ensure it adds value to quality arrangements of these institutions (AUQA, 2008). AUQA's quality audit normally goes through the following stages: selection of institutions to be audited, selection of the audit panel, discussing various parameters of the audit with the audited institution, compiling and submitting the self-evaluation, a discussion of the portfolio by the audit panel, a request by the panel for any additional supporting documentation, a visit to confirm the audit preparations with the audited institution before the audit visit, the panel visits the institution for the main audit visit (the panel may visit the institution's other sites of delivery prior to the main audit visit), finalising and producing the audit report, and conducting follow-up processes. (AUQA, 2008).

### **2.5.2 Quality assurance in India's higher education**

Quality assurance of India's higher education is carried out by the National Assurance and Accreditation Council. The National Assurance and Accreditation Council is a sub-agency of the University Grants Commission which is tasked with the responsibility of overseeing the overall functioning of India's higher education sector (Short, 2008). The National Assurance and Accreditation Council was established in 1994 and its mandate was mainly to assess and accredit India's higher education institutions (Short, 2008).

The functioning of the National Assurance and Accreditation Council mainly takes place via its General Council and Executive Committee. These two structures of the National Assurance and Accreditation Council comprise senior personnel from India's higher education sector including educational administrators, policy makers and senior academics (Short, 2008). The National Assurance and Accreditation Council mainly assesses the quality of higher education institutions



in India by following the following three-stage process which combines a self-evaluation process and peer review: the institution being audited submits a self-evaluation report; the audit panel conducts an audit site visit in order to confirm the claims made by the institution in its self-evaluation report; and the audit panel then makes recommendations about the outcomes of the audit to the National Assurance and Accreditation Council based on the self-evaluation report and the information gathered during the audit site visit. The Executive Committee of the National Assurance and Accreditation Council makes a final decision on the approval of the report by considering the self-evaluation report and peer review by the audit panel (Short, 2008).

Short (2008) points out that the self-evaluation report that is subjected to peer review lies at the core of the entire exercise. The National Assurance and Accreditation Council has made available manuals to guide institutions on the preparation of the self-evaluation report.

### **2.5.3 Quality assurance in England's higher education**

The Quality Assurance Agency has been conducting quality assurance of higher education institutions in England on behalf of Higher Education Funding Council for England (Quality Assurance Agency, 2002). The agency's mission is ensure that the public has confidence in the higher education offerings and to safeguard and enhance the qualifications and standards. The agency primarily carries out its mandate by conducting audits of academic performance of higher education institutions.

The Quality Assurance Agency's institutional audit is an evidence-based process which is conducted via peer reviews and, carefully strikes a balance between quality assurance by an external agency and the recognition of the credibility and rigour of an institution's internal quality assurance mechanisms in promoting the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards (Quality Assurance Agency, 2002). Central to the Quality Assurance Agency's institutional audits is the extent to which these audits meet students' needs in terms of the quality of information they receive regarding the programmes they are enrolled for, the ways in which the institution supports and facilitates their learning, and the academic standards they are expected to attain, and actually achieve in practice.

The aims of the Quality Assurance Agency's institutional audits are to provide assurance to the public higher education institutions in England (Quality Assurance Agency, 2002) to ensure that awards and qualifications provided meet appropriate quality and academic standards; and carry out their legal powers to award degrees properly.

The objectives of English institutional audits are to promote and enhance quality teaching and learning; inform students and employers about pertinent information regarding programmes, qualifications, academic standards and quality of higher education programmes; ensure that there are effective quality improvement processes in place to address programmes that are found to be deficient and that institutions are held accountable for the use of public funds. (Quality Assurance Agency, 2002).

The institutional audits in England go through the following stages: Quality Assurance Agency confirms membership of audit team with the institution; the audit panel meets with the vice-chancellor and his or executive team, selected academic and academic support staff, and representatives of students; a meeting is held with representatives of the institution tasked with organising the audit to discuss the audit visit; the panel may request any additional supporting documentation from the institution prior to the audit visit; the audit panel spends five days at the institution conducting interviews with various stakeholders as indicated in the finalised programme for the audit visit; the audit team holds meetings with staff and students to discuss institutional-level lines of inquiry and thematic enquiries; pairs of auditors focus specifically on discipline audit trails; the institution may be informed at the beginning of the penultimate audit visit day of any need to call in specialist advisers; if necessary, an assistant director agrees with the institution on the date(s) on which the specialist advisers will visit the institution; if necessary, specialist advisers visit the institution accompanied by a member of the audit panel or the assistant director; a draft audit report is sent to the institution; the institution is given an opportunity to respond to the draft audit report; and the final audit report is published (Quality Assurance Agency, 2002).

#### **2.5.4 South Africa's institutional audits methodology**

The HEQC established a set of criteria (see Appendix A) for the conduct of institutional audits after consultation with higher education institutions (CHE, 2007a). In line with standard international practice, the HEQC uses an audit methodology that comprises institutional self-evaluation, followed by an external validation process by an audit panel of experts and peers appointed by the HEQC.

After conducting a self-evaluation, institutions are required to develop an audit portfolio, comprising a self-evaluation report (SER) and supporting documentation. The SER as well as supporting evidence is used to assess the institution's effectiveness and efficiency of its core academic activities against the HEQC's audit criteria (see Appendix A) and any other relevant indicators or criteria that the institution has set for itself, such as its mission and vision (CHE, 2007a).

The audit panel then attends a portfolio meeting with HEQC staff to discuss the SER submitted and plan for the site visit (CHE, 2007a). After the portfolio meeting the audit sub-panel undertakes a campus visit to the institution being audited. The purpose of the campus visit is to inspect the infrastructure that supports teaching and learning. During the campus visits, the audit sub-panel does not conduct interviews but asks questions for clarity to various members of the university community in-situ. The university management and student leadership are each afforded an opportunity to make presentations to the sub-panel as regards the infrastructure that supports teaching and learning.

A report from the campus visit is then shared with all members of the audit panel during the audit visit at the audited institution. During the audit visit, the panel validates the institution's claims in the SER by checking on-site evidence made available by the institution in a dedicated area at the institution's premises (CHE, 2007a). The main focus of the audit visits is on the interviews that the panel conducts with a wide range of the institution's stakeholders, including senior management, academics, academic support staff, students, industry partners, employers and alumni (CHE, 2007a).

The panel then arrives at an independent judgment regarding the effectiveness of the institution's internal quality arrangements, which forms the basis for oral feedback and the audit report. The oral feedback, which is presented to the institution on the last day of the audit visit, is the audit panel's verbal account of its preliminary findings (CHE, 2007a). It is presented at the end of the audit visit at a meeting with the vice-chancellor and senior leadership of the institution, and other staff invited by the vice-chancellor (CHE, 2007a).

After the audit visit the HEQC produces an audit report with commendations and recommendations for the audited institutions, subsequent to which an executive summary of the report is published on the Council on Higher Education's website. Thereafter the HEQC embarks upon the post-audit processes, which consist of the submission of the improvement plan by institutions, post improvement plan visits (if necessary), submission of the progress report by the institution, and the closure of the audit.

### **2.5.5 Drawing parallels among the different quality assurance systems**

All institutional audits methodologies employed by the countries discussed in this section are driven by panels which conduct peer reviews. Although the panels vary in size, they are mainly drawn from the country's higher education sector. In addition, the panels include at least one international panel member. The panels are generally composed of senior administrators, managers and academics.

The institutions being audited are responsible for producing their self-evaluation reports. The self-review is used by the panel to verify the claims that the institution makes about itself. The panel then visits the institution and conducts interviews with various stakeholders of the institution and also examines on-site documents. The information contained in the self-evaluation report, interviews held during on-site visits and documentation provided on-site allow the panel to formulate commendations and recommendations, and eventually produce the audit report of the institution. All the quality assurance processes discussed in this section are evidenced- based. The commendations and recommendations which the panel arrive at are all backed up by evidence.

After the finalisation of the audit report, the institution is expected to act upon the recommendations by providing a detailed plan on how it plans to address them.

All the higher education quality assurance mechanisms are essentially in the best interest of students by ensuring that the quality of academic provision and student experience are at least of an acceptable standard. These institutional audits also allow countries to transform their higher education sector so that it is aligned with international standards and practices. This alignment is all the more important in ensuring that the graduates who are sent into both the national and international employment sectors are competitive.

South Africa's HEQC uses the institutional audits approach that is primarily modelled on the Australian Universities Quality Agency's methodology. The approach has proved to be largely effective, although there have also been shortcomings, some of which were mentioned in the HEQC's own evaluative study of Institutional audits which was conducted between 2004 and 2006. According to the HEQC Evaluative Study of Institutional Audits (CHE, 2007b) which was based on interviews with staff members from three public higher education institutions and two private higher education providers, interviews with staff revealed that the approach to audit preparations had been, for the most part, top-down. The study also revealed that in some institutions, the self-evaluation process appeared to be more superficial and technical, following a compliance approach rather than a critical analysis. It further emerged in the study that the period of six months between the audit visit and the arrival of the audit report was viewed as being too long (CHE, 2007b).

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has given a fairly comprehensive background on South Africa's political transition from the apartheid era which spanned the late 1940s up to the early 1990s. It is evident that the policies introduced by the South African government during this period played a central role in creating imbalances on many fronts. As we have seen in this chapter, the education sector did not escape this blight. In fact, it is the imbalances created in the education sector that served as a catalyst for embedding the resultant social inequalities among various racial groups. It was

therefore imperative for the post-1994 government to find ways to decisively address injustices in the education sector. The chapter has shown how various interventions were introduced in the higher education sector in attempting to correct the situation and alleviate the extent of the disparities. The Council on Higher Education was not only established to redress the imbalances in the South African higher education, but also to keep up with international practices in the higher education milieu. One such practice was higher education quality assurance which helps to safeguard the quality of provisions. The chapter further provided a context to the South African higher education environment, its quality assurance practices, as well as the quality assurance practices in other parts of the globe. In the next chapter, a review of literature is conducted on the effect of quality assurance on teaching and learning, support functions and student experience in higher education.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter uses literature as a driving force for this research investigation by making connections between related research and theory, and where this study is positioned (Ridley, 2012). To this end, the chapter provides a review of the available literature on quality assurance, particularly on the effect of institutional audits on higher education institutions. In doing so, the chapter firstly discusses the concept of quality and quality assurance in higher education in general. Second, the effect of external quality assurance on higher education is discussed broadly. Third, the role of self-evaluation in quality assurance is highlighted. Fourth, the chapter discusses the perceptions of quality assurance interventions by senior managers, academics and students. Fifth, the discussion on the effect of quality assurance focuses specifically on (i) the effect of external quality assurance on teaching and learning policies, practices and behaviours; (ii) the effect of external quality assurance on support functions; and (iii) the effects of external quality assurance on student experience. Sixth, perceptions and effect of quality assurance in South Africa are discussed. Finally, the chapter focuses on the theoretical underpinnings of the study, identification of themes and presents the conceptual framework.

#### **3.2 Changes in the context of higher education**

Human beings live in a world that is constantly undergoing changes; accordingly, higher education the world over has been subject to notable changes. From a social perspective, higher education has experienced a number of changes – it has moved from being centred in universities to being offered by different providers, is now offered to a student population which has largely increased and diversified, and is offered in a wider variety of teaching, research, consultancy and service functions (Lemaitre, 2010).

The social, economic and political upheavals of the 1970s and 1980s (a period widely known as the world economic crisis) necessitated a renewed approach to higher education throughout the world (Jonathan, 2000). Further, the advent of the 21st century brought with it socio-political and economic changes, and the predominant role of information and communication technologies both locally and globally (Thaver, 2006). All these and other forces have led to quality and relevance of higher education receiving greater attention across the globe. At the same time, each nation and its higher education graduates compete in an environment aligned to their local and national needs as well as international expectations and standards (Materu, 2007). Globalisation has brought with it an increasing impact of international standards and a rising demand for transparency and accountability. In fact, increasing focus on accountability and performance was one of the major trends in higher education identified by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), alongside expansion of tertiary education systems, diversification of provision, more heterogeneous student bodies, new forms of institutional governance, and global networking, mobility and collaboration (Lemaitre, 2010).

The subject of quality assurance in higher education in many parts of the world has received increasing attention as a result of the rapid expansion of this sector (Law, 2010); the global market for higher education has been growing at an average rate of seven per cent per annum (Materu, 2007). The necessity for accountability in higher education is given credence by the growing public interest in the quality and standards of higher education, and a need for more publicly available information and assurance (McClaran, 2010). It thus presents a challenge for educators and policymakers to set appropriate standards which draw on the needs and expectations of their stakeholders (Materu, 2007). Further, there is an expectation of these educators and policymakers to put in place mechanisms to enforce those standards and to monitor performance of their higher education systems with a view to taking appropriate and timely measures to adapt to new realities.

Moreover, these trends and other world changes have put pressure on higher education institutions to adapt to ensure relevance. The urgency for higher education to adapt to these changes is aptly captured in the following statement by Candy and Maconachie (in Jonathan, 2000, p. 45):



*“These are dangerous times for nations and universities because the consequences of failure to change will surely be for countries a significant diminution in the quality of life, and for higher education irrelevance”* (Candy & Maconachie in Jonathan, 2000, p. 45).

The aforementioned global changes and an increased level of accountability associated with higher education contributed to the emergence of quality assurance in the higher education sector. The emergence of quality assurance is aimed to bring about quality improvements in higher education to ensure that stakeholders are protected against mediocrity. The ultimate goals of many national quality assurance agencies have always been to contribute to the higher education sector planning process, to ensure publicly available information on quality and standards (Billing, 2004), and to strike a balance between accountability and quality improvement (Kristensen, 2010). Accountability has gained increased primacy due to two reasons: (1) democratic societies require governments and those using public funding, including higher education institutions to provide evidence of optimum use of these funds, and (2) an increase in institutional autonomy is expected to be balanced by accountability (Kristensen, 2010). According to Stensaker, Langfeldt, Harvey, Huisman, and Westerheijden (2011), a key function of external quality assurance is to stimulate change and improvement of teaching and learning; they, however, lament the fact that there are relatively few studies focusing on the effect of external quality assurance schemes related to this function.

Before discussing the effects of quality assurance in higher education, it is prudent that the concept of quality is defined.

### **3.3 The concept of ‘quality’**

The concept of quality, according to Harvey and Green (1993), is relative to the person who uses it and the circumstances in which it is used. They add that quality holds different meanings to different people, and the same person may even conceptualise it differently at various moments. Each of the various higher education stakeholders (including students, academics, and management) may have a different perspective on quality (Harvey and Green, 1993). Becher (1994) corroborates the views of Harvey and Green by adding that quality often engenders

different interpretations and generates diverse approaches to its assessment. Assessment of what is and what isn't good quality depends upon the objectives and criteria that are judged by a person or group to be relevant in a particular context (Ntshoe, Higgs, Wolhuter & Higgs, 2010). In fact, Becher (1994) finds quality to be highly elusive. The elusive nature of quality is further echoed by Bigalke and Neubauer (2009) who find quality difficult to define and measure. Bigalke and Neubauer (2009) further assert that due to their inability to specify exactly what they mean by quality but determined to define it nonetheless, many argue that they know it when they see it. Indeed, according to Van Vught (1995), there is no final and definite definition of quality.

Harvey and Green's (1993) definition includes the following elements that are widely known: quality as exceptional (as something distinctive, excellent and special), quality as perfection or consistency (conformance to specifications and standards, and prevention of faults), quality as fitness for purpose (related to fulfilling customers' requirements), quality as value for money (return on investment), and quality as transformation (development and empowerment of students). Indeed, the HEQC's understanding of quality largely echoes that of Harvey and Green.

Mammen (2006) extends the fitness for purpose aspect to encompass responsiveness to local contexts and adherence to international standards as follows:

*'The capacity to respond actively to the needs of local contexts within South Africa, making effective and efficient use of the available resources to achieve predefined goals and purposes for which students are enrolled, and are able to acquire qualifications that conform to comparable national and international standards' (Mammen, 2006, p. 642).*

Like Harvey and Green's (1993) definition, the HEQC definition of quality encompasses fitness for purpose, fitness of purpose, value for money and transformation (CHE, 2007a, p. 3-4).

*"Fitness for purpose is examined in the light of the institution's mission and goals and definition of its identity; fitness of purpose is examined with regard to the manner and extent to which an institution's mission and academic activities are responsive to national priorities and needs; value for money is assessed by considering the extent to which efficiency, effectiveness and economies of scale are embedded in the quality*

*management of the core functions of the institution; and transformation is assessed with regard to the development of individual students as well as the country's requirements for social and economic development” (CHE, 2007a, p. 3-4).*

Quality of education therefore embraces certain basic knowledge, values, competencies and behaviour that are aligned to globalisation but still reflect the beauty and richness of diversity that are given expression in various forms of beliefs, spirituality, culture and language (Gathuthi, Mukwa & Kimengi, 2010). Gathuthi et al (2010) further point out that a good quality of education is essential for equity, equality, a good quality of life, and is holistic as it embraces values of human rights and sustainable development. On the converse, education which is of poor quality anywhere in the world is bad for the entire humankind (UNESCO, 2003).

For the purposes of this study, the preferred definition of quality is that of the HEQC. This is primarily because this definition is connected to the main research question as well as the theoretical underpinnings of the study (see section 3.13). For example, the notion of satisfying the customer emanates from Total Quality Management whose central notion is continuous improvement (see section 3.13.1), and is consonant with notions such as value for money, and transformation (Fourie, 2000). When these notions are applied to the systems approach, a customer should not only be seen as the student but should include other stakeholders at an institution such as academics, management, and the broader community (Fourie, 2000). Fourie (2000) adds that, in the context of the systems approach to quality management, continuous improvement, value-addedness and transformation need to occur at different levels and in different areas of an institution. The next section discusses the notion of quality assurance in the higher education context.

### **3.4 Quality assurance in higher education**

Higher education quality is referred to as a “moving target” (Westerheijden, 2005, p. 53). It is a discursive field whose dimensions and sub-fields continue to evolve (Singh & Lange, 2007). To this end, quality assurance should be tackled using approaches that are continuous and developmental in nature. It is therefore important that quality assurance is not just viewed as

something which is done occasionally for compliance purposes and then put aside; instead it should be regarded as a process which requires a continuous process of checking, reviewing and documenting (Jonathan, 2000). The main reasons for quality assurance, as pointed out by Strydom (2001) include the need for transformation; the increased need for institutions to enrol higher numbers of students, the increase in the number of private higher education providers, professionalising academia, ensuring that programmes meet employment needs, and making optimal use of increasingly cut state subsidies and dwindling resources.

The purpose of quality assurance is to engender various forms of improvement and/or accountability pertaining to quality in higher education at both the institutional and national levels. (Strydom, 2001). Strydom (2001) adds that quality assurance also has very specific purposes that may put emphasis on accountability and improvement in different ways by emphasising high academic standards, fitness for purpose, fitness of purpose, value for money, and transformation. The characteristics of a quality assurance system are largely influenced by the reasons for and purposes of quality assurance. In turn, these characteristics determine the kinds of procedures, processes and actions that need to be put in place to ensure that the selected reasons and purposes are supported.

Quality assurance, according to Jonathan (2000), is seen as having four components: maintaining quality – everyone at an institution has a responsibility to maintain quality; enhancing quality – everyone at an institution has a responsibility to enhance quality; ownership – everyone understands, takes and uses ownership of systems in place for enhancing and maintaining quality; and continual quality improvement – effective structures and mechanisms for quality improvement are put in place.

In many countries globally, higher education systems and institutions have embraced quality assurance and improvement (Fourie, 2000). Indeed, the need for continuous quality checking and improvement as pointed out by Singh and Lange (2007) and Jonathan (2000) may have engendered the emergence of quality assurance in higher education. Le Grange (2006) adds that quality assurance may have also resulted from a growing culture of performativity in society in general and more specifically in education. Performativity is centred on the practices of efficiency and effectiveness, quality assurance and control, inspection and accountability that

have gained primacy in contemporary educational regimes (Barnett & Standish in Le Grange, 2006). Like Jonathan (2000), Le Grange's performativity is given credence by continuous checking and reviewing. Other reasons for the introduction of quality assurance are: to assist the governments to make funding decisions and to inform potential students and employers about standards (Billing, 2004).

Lamarra (2009) asserts that most countries have similar quality assurance procedures. Indeed, Van Vught and Westerheijden (1993) point out that methods used in many national systems of higher education quality assurance follow a common model of quality assurance. This common model consists of the following main elements: a national co-ordinating agency, self-evaluation conducted by institutions, external evaluation conducted by higher education peers, and published reports (Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1993). However, Brennan and Shah (2000) contend that in practice these common methods of higher education quality assurance are different on a number of dimensions. There are differences on what is being assessed, who assesses, how, and how often (Brennan & Shah, 2000). The question on what is being assessed looks at level (i.e. whether it is the whole institution, a faculty, a department, a programme, or an individual staff member), areas of focus (teaching, research, administration, etc.) (Brennan & Shah, 2000). These areas of focus can be further broken down; for example teaching may focus on content, pedagogy or both, administration may include quality management or general institutional management and administration, and research may focus on intrinsic academic quality or application and relevance (Brennan & Shah, 2000).

As mentioned in section 2.3, quality assurance interventions are being used in higher education institutions in many countries globally to improve accountability for quality education and transparency external of public funding of higher education (Shah, 2012).

### **3.5 The effect of external quality assurance on higher education**

This section and the next (3.6) provide an international viewpoint on the effect of external quality assurance on higher education. Although quality assurance processes reveal useful information and create more self-awareness for institutions, measuring the effect of external

quality assurance processes is not easy (Harvey, 2006; Stensaker, 2003). This is complicated by several factors. These factors include the complex nature of higher education institutions, and methodological problems due to the difficulty of separating the effects of external quality assurance from those of other processes that impinge on higher education (Rosa, Tavares & Amaral, 2006). This view is corroborated by Carr, Hamilton and Meade (2005) who assert that it is not possible to untangle the influence of external quality assurance compared with other external initiatives. Although it is possible to scrutinise the combination of external quality assurance together with other influences, it is very difficult to isolate specific evidence of the impact that external quality assurance has had on higher education institutions. Harvey (2006) adds to this conundrum of measuring the effect of external quality assurance by pointing out that the effect of external quality assurance processes is often based on anecdotal evidence and rarely on any systematic analysis.

Despite the complexities around the measurement of the effect of external quality assurance, Kristensen (2010) contends that external quality assurance has led to an improvement in quality in higher education in the last 20 years. In fact, there are indications that quality assurance processes contribute to enhancements at different levels of an institution (Nilsson & Wallen, 2000). Kristensen (2010) further points out that the effect of quality assurance on quality improvement could have been more pronounced had there been a better balance between external and internal quality assurance, and quality enhancement. There is a need for synergy between internal and external quality assurance, and this synergy will only be effective if the higher education institutions and the external quality assurance agencies meet on equal terms (Kristensen, 2010).

Although external quality assurance systems of many countries follow the common methodology which encompasses self-assessment, peer review, audit report and follow up mechanisms, which provide an institution under review with a wealth of useful information, the effect that the information has on quality improvements depends largely on the quality culture of the institution as well as the extent to which the institution's internal quality system is developed (Kristensen, 2010). To this end, an innovative and comprehensive internal quality system, and a more favourable institutional quality culture, will increase the likelihood of an institution being more

responsive to demands for accountability, credibility, transparency and quality improvement (Kristensen, 2010).

Indeed, external quality assurance has increased the level of attention given by higher education institutions to the documentation of internal quality processes, conscious planning and the establishment and assessment of academic goals (Ewell, 2010). Askling, Lycke and Stave (2004) corroborate the positive effects of external quality assurance by adding that quality assurance processes expose strengths and weakness in institutional quality work via self-evaluations and institutional reports on internal quality work.

Further, in a study by Shah, Nair and Wilson (2011), their discussion with 40 participants in the Australian Universities Quality Assurance Agency (AUQA) revealed that institutional audits have been of benefit in various aspects at institutional level. Some of these benefits were that the audits have played a key role in inculcating a quality culture, resulted in the establishment of quality committees and ensured that key positions were created in the area of quality such as Pro Vice Chancellor: Quality, Quality Director and Quality Managers, to provide leadership in the area of quality, ensuring that there is a synergistic link between strategic planning and quality assurance; ensuring closer links between high level strategic planning and lower level planning processes; embedding a culture of making decisions based on evidence; ensuring that surveys and feedback methods are strengthened; and ensuring that the quality office is empowered to play a greater role in supporting the institution's quality initiatives (Shah et al, 2011).

However, external quality assurance interventions do not always yield positive and intended results but sometimes engender negative and unintended consequences. Stephenson (2004) points out that the systems for higher education quality assurance usually start with good intentions but more often than not end up cultivating a compliance or 'tick-box' mentality, which further leads to the disaffection of university staff and causing damage to the public reputation of the higher education sector. Stephenson's assertion is consonant with Newton (2002) who notes that those who were subjected to external quality assurance were mainly preoccupied with learning the rules of the game, that preparations for external quality assessments were aimed at shielding reality from the view of external assessors. Newton (2002) further adds that by the late

1990s, many academic staff members were becoming increasingly doubtful and no longer in favour of quality assurance mechanisms.

Further, Mohrman's (2011) research on quality assurance in China, which found that critics of Chinese higher education are concerned that the country's higher education institutions have not woven quality assurance into the fabric of the institution but instead dedicate most of their efforts to processes pertaining to the site visit, which occurs once every five years. As a result of these perceptions, academics, departments and universities often concealed their mistakes and problems when institutional audits occurred; this constrained the effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms to improve the quality of teaching (Cheng, 2009). This finding on the masking of shortcomings is corroborated by Mohrman (2011) who found that Chinese higher education institutions falsified data to avoid a possible reduction in funding and the lowering of enrolment quotas.

According to Jones and De Saram (2005), some of the unintended consequences of external quality assurance are that they may result in a preoccupation with compliance, which is engendered by the tendency for quality assurance activities to place emphasis on administrative requirements and documentation. (Jones & De Saram, 2005). And, as a result of this compliance mentality, academics were often not honest about their shortcomings and concealed their mistakes and problems during institutional audits; this undermined the effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms (Cheng, 2009). Newton (2002) supports the views of Stephenson (2004) and Cheng (2009) by pointing out that those who were subjected to external quality assurance were mainly preoccupied with learning the rules of the game, and that preparations for external quality assessments were aimed at shielding reality from the view of external assessors.

According to Stensaker (2003), the findings on transformational effects of external quality assurance as regards quality improvement in higher education are ambiguous or not very positive; for example, money spent on external quality assurance processes outweighs potential benefits for institutions and different systems used to evaluate and monitor higher education institutions may result in increased centralisation and growth in bureaucratic management approaches in higher education institutions.



In Hoecht's (2006) study on higher education quality assurance in the UK, academics regarded quality assurance processes as a means for the authorities to have greater control and impinge on their professional autonomy. And, when academics view quality assurance practices as elements of corporate hegemony, they tend to exhibit strategies of resistance (Mammen, 2006). Further, the resultant increase in paperwork from quality assurance activities may lead to the development of defensive behaviour among academics (Minelli, Rebora, Turri & Huisman, 2006). Lomas (2004) advises that instead of this worrisome culture of compliance, it is important to ensure that quality is embedded in a higher education institution by developing an institutional culture where staff continually make efforts to improve the quality of their offerings without being forced to do so and where the quest for excellence is so entrenched that it comes naturally.

The view that quality assurance may fail to produce its intended results is further echoed by Massaro (2010) who indicates that a review of the Australian higher education after institutional audits conducted by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) concluded that the quality assurance system, which was mainly focused on inputs and processes, had not produced the intended results.

In order for quality assurance processes to be truly effective, the culture of quality management and improvement needs to be embedded within an institution. In many countries, the role played by external quality assurance agencies is too dominant, and if a real turning point is to be visible, higher education institutions need to improve and take the initiative and the lead within quality assurance and quality enhancement (Kristensen, 2010). Billing (2004) adds that the effectiveness and usefulness of quality assurance schemes appear to increase with a decrease in the use of performance indicators and links with direct funding.

In the next section, the effect of external quality assurance on higher education institutions is further discussed through the lens of self-evaluation activities.

### 3.6 The role of self-evaluation in institutional audits

This section, like the previous section, continues with the international perspective on quality assurance by discussing the role of self-evaluation in institutional audits. The processes used in external quality assurance include self-evaluations or reviews, the audit visit, and post audit follow-up processes. Potter and Tanner (1996) regard the self-evaluation process as ‘health checks’ for organisations. A self-evaluation affords organisations an opportunity to review the status quo as regards their processes and performance levels (Brits, 2005). According to Tari and Madeleine (2010), although institutions may choose various approaches to self-evaluation, the generic stages for self-evaluation are as follows: (1) developing the commitment of management, (2) communicating self-evaluation plans, (3) planning the self-evaluation process, (4) forming project teams and conducting training, (5) conducting the self-evaluation process, (6) putting together action plans, (7) executing action plans, and (8) reviewing.

Studies on higher education institutions identified establishing senior level commitment and customer delivery as major issues to address in self-assessment (Tari & Madeleine, 2010). The importance of the commitment of management is given further credence by Tari and Madeleine (2010) who point out that literature lists it as one of the success factors for successful self-evaluation, alongside the involvement of staff, using open communication, providing training and development opportunities for staff and reviewing an improvement plan.

Self-evaluation activities which precede the actual site visits and reviews are often considered to have greater effect than the external review itself (Stensaker et al, 2011). Indeed, a study on the effect of quality assurance based on the discussion between representatives of external quality assurance agencies found that there tended to be a general agreement that the self-evaluation report was the main benefit of external quality assurance processes (Harvey, 2006).

The importance of self-evaluations is further emphasised by Materu (2007) who states that institutions see the process of self-evaluations as the most valuable aspect of quality assurance processes as it empowers them and their staff to take charge of quality assurance without the pressure that normally comes with an external review, and also assists institutions to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. This is consonant with an analysis of Australian

Universities Quality Agency's (AUQA) first cycle audit reports which suggests that the opportunity for institutions to undertake self-reviews and identify their own shortcomings has been beneficial (Shar, Nair & Wilson, 2011). Indeed, the self-evaluation enables institutions to professionally reflect on their practices, get to know themselves better and identify the best way forward for their students (Croxford, Grek & Shaik, 2009). The self-review also allows institutions to come up with strategies for self-remediation and begin to address the identified areas of weakness even before the actual audit takes place (Shar et al, 2011).

In corroborating Shar et al's (2011) views, Croxford et al (2009) assert that self-evaluations provide higher education institutions with opportunities for professional reflection and are also intended to bring about change and improvement. Furthermore, self-evaluation does not only play a crucial role for institutions that are determined to learn and improve, but it can also provide a strong foundation which can enhance an institution's capacity to satisfy the requirements of external quality assurance (Shar et al, 2011). Weusthof (in Stensaker, 2003) adds that an effectively conducted self-evaluation, which is fully controlled by a faculty, tends to result in improved and sustained quality.

### **3.7 The effect of the HEQC's self-evaluation process on higher education institutions**

While the previous two sections (3.5 and 3.6) provided an international perspective on the effect of external quality assurance on higher education, this section has a local orientation as it focuses specifically on South Africa.

The HEQC institutional audits, which were conducted from 2004 to 2011, were part of the CHE's quality assurance processes. The institutional audits, which covered all 23 public higher education institutions and 11 private higher education providers, included a self-evaluation exercise conducted by the institution and a site visit by an audit panel constituted by the CHE. After conducting self-evaluations, institutions were expected to submit a self-evaluation report (SER) to the CHE, subsequent to which the report is sent to panel members to read in preparation for the site visit. It was the main responsibility of the audit panel to validate the claims that the

institution makes in the SER by conducting interviews with various members of the institution's community, and scrutinising and interpreting documents during the site visit (CHE, 2008).

During the HEQC Self-Review exercise (CHE, 2008) it emerged that the institutions generally agreed that the process of conducting a self-evaluation together with site visit interviews conducted by the audit panel with various members of institutions' communities were highly valuable and provided opportunities for institutions to think about themselves critically.

In his case study on the pilot audit experience of the Vaal University of Technology, Brits (2005) observes that the self-evaluation exercise provided the institution an opportunity to judge itself through objective self-analysis. Indeed, according to the HEQC Evaluative Study of Institutional Audits (CHE, 2007b), one of the significant lessons emanating from self-evaluation practices of five South African higher education institutions was that the informal systems and practices previously followed in some academic departments at certain higher education institutions needed to be made explicit. This allowed institutions to begin to share internally their good practices and develop broader institutional self-knowledge. The evaluative study also revealed that the self-evaluation process resulted in some institutions giving more attention to issues of diversity and equity (CHE, 2007b).

Despite these shared positive sentiments about the self-evaluation activity, there were also negative effects and perceptions of institutional audits. According to the HEQC Evaluative Study of Institutional Audits (CHE, 2007b), interviews with staff revealed that the approach to audit preparations had been, for the most part, top-down. The evaluative study also found that in some institutions, the self-evaluation process tended to be more superficial and technical, following a compliance approach rather than a critical analysis. To this end, some of the staff members were quite critical of both the process and the final product. For example, one staff member said that the SER had been written to 'highlight the successes of the past' without 'focusing on the challenges of the future'; some staff members viewed the SER as a 'whitewash' of the weaknesses in the institutions rather than an honest assessment of the institutions (CHE, 2007b). These opinions of the SER mesh with Fraser's (in Billing, 2004) observation that the meaning of self-review is increasingly becoming distorted by the pressure of accountability, and is being interpreted by some to mean 'presentation of self to external body' and in the best possible light,

rather than self-reflection. It therefore seems that to some extent the potential for the self-evaluation as a mechanism for reflective thinking and improvement was lost.

On the whole, however, the self-evaluation process seems to have played an important role in affording higher education institutions an opportunity for self-reflection and to subsequently put in place the necessary interventions to address the identified shortcomings.

### **3.8 The perceptions of quality assurance mechanisms by senior managers, academics and students**

This section focuses on the perceived effects of quality assurance mechanisms on higher education institutions from the point of view of senior managers, academics and students. Various studies pointed to different perceptions among these three internal higher education role players.

Studies by Kleijnen, Dolmans, Willems and Van Hout (2011) and Stensaker et al (2011) pointed to a more positive perception of quality assurance by academics. In a survey conducted to determine institutional academic faculties' perceptions of internal quality management, Kleijnen et al (2011) point out that academics in various faculties indicated that internal quality management improves both their work and educational quality within their departments. Stensaker et al (2011) even found academics to be more positive than senior management about the effects of quality assurance. In their study on the effect of the external quality assurance evaluations conducted by the Norwegian quality assurance agency (NOKUT), Stensaker et al (2011) found that academics were more positive than senior management and students about the effects of external quality assurance on staff engagement in teaching and learning. Academic staff were also the most positive group as regards the effect of quality assurance on setting priorities for research, and on the resources and facilities for research (Stensaker et al, 2011).

On the converse, however, academics have not always perceived quality assurance interventions favourably. In a study by Worthington and Hodgson (2005), academics resented the time they spent on producing documentation for quality assurance and considered it a waste of time. Their

research also points to a dichotomy between how academics perform when under the scrutiny of the quality assurance officials during quality audits and what they actually do in practice once they are beyond the scrutiny. Many of the academics who were interviewed reported that they have had no real involvement in quality assurance besides providing the requisite course documentation for those who ‘do the quality stuff’, and when under the scrutiny of the quality inspectors (Worthington & Hodgson, 2005).

These findings are corroborated by Anderson (2006) who conducted a study on academics’ responses to quality in some Australian universities. Like academics in Worthington and Hodgson’s (2005) research, academics in Anderson’s (2006) study hated the amount of time they spent on quality assurance mechanisms. This was because they regarded quality assurance as undermining academic notions of quality excellence and threatening to replace them with ‘quality’ notions, which they perceived to be minimalist, mediocre, and ineffective in genuinely assuring quality (Anderson, 2006). In fact, Australian academics’ ambivalence towards quality assurance, which was initially identified in the early 1990s, appears undiminished by the passage of time (Anderson, 2006)

This ambivalence could be the result of some academics’ perception that institutional audits are a symbol that they were not trusted. This point is affirmed by Cheng (2009), who investigated academics’ attitudes towards audit-related quality mechanisms. Cheng’s (2009) findings revealed that academics did not like being subjected to external scrutiny and viewed institutional audit mechanisms as signifying a decline of trust in their professional conduct. The study further revealed that the existence of a quality audit induced feelings of fear among academics; they feared that the audit was a fault finding exercise. Cheng (2009) further points out that this distrust for institutional audits led to academics treating these audits as a game in which they simply fulfil the requirements of quality procedures. Some academics even referred to this game playing as a form of ‘intellectual sport’ (Hoecht, 2006). To this end, Billing (2004) observes that university staff members tend to act in a more mature manner if they are treated as responsible adults than as mischievous children; they then voluntarily take charge of evaluation and self-control.

Cheng's findings are supported by Mohrman's (2011) research on quality assurance in China, which revealed that the tendency by academics to simply comply with the processes pertaining to the site visit, which occurs once every five years, resulted in the failure of the Chinese higher education institutions to embed quality assurance in the institutional processes. According to Huisman and Westerheijden (2010) academics' tendency of compliance and box ticking may have been invited by the stress on oversight. In fact some academics from the UK higher education institutions felt that the quality assurance system, which focused on a greater need for documentation and box-ticking, was overly bureaucratic and only addressed quality at a superficial level (Hoecht, 2006,). The academics commented that this superficial approach to quality assurance was at the expense of more direct quality enhancing activities such as teaching preparation. This revelation is consonant with a study by Jones and De Saram (2005), which investigated academic staff's views of quality systems for teaching and learning in Hong Kong. The findings in this study revealed that academic staff felt that quality assurance processes divert effort to marginal administrative requirements instead of allowing and encouraging academics to focus on authentic, core elements of quality improvement.

A study by Stensaker et al (2011), which investigated the effect of the external quality assurance activities conducted by the Norwegian quality assurance agency (NOKUT), revealed the perceptions of different institutional stakeholders on the evaluations. The results reveal that members of executive management were more positive in their assessment of the external quality assurance results than staff and students. For example, the executive management saw more positive effects of the evaluations as regards the quality of teaching, on the internal quality assurance system, on the discussions of teaching and learning, on governance structures, and on the establishment of new routines and procedures; interestingly, on the effects of quality assurance on student involvement in teaching and learning, only 14% of students were able to identify positive effects of evaluations, whereas approximately 30% of executive management staff indicated that the evaluations had positive effects on student engagement in teaching and learning.

In their research analysing the opinions of Portuguese university rectors and academics on the quality assurance system and its effects at the institutional level, Rosa et al (2006) found that: (a) although both university rectors and academics had an optimistic view of the positive effect of

quality assurance, the former were more optimistic than the latter; (b) rectors had a more positive attitude than academics about the institutions' capacity to implement recommendations made by external review panels and undertake quality improvement and quality management measures; (c) rectors focused more on results and decision-making and management mechanisms whereas academics paid more attention to processes and the core business of universities - teaching and research; and (d) the leadership of the universities focused more on internal procedures and services, strategic management and institutional management structures than to the actual student experience. Academics' tendency to view quality assurance negatively is corroborated by Singh (2010) who observes that quality assurance has been viewed by some academics as signifying a fall of trust in academics and declining academic power.

### **3.9 The effect of external quality assurance on teaching and learning policies, practices and behaviours**

Various studies show that the effects of quality assurance on teaching and learning policies, practices and behaviours in higher education have been largely positive. Indeed, Stensaker (2003) points out that early studies from the Netherlands found positive effects of external quality assurance processes on teaching and learning at higher education institutions. Other studies found that the tendency for external quality assurance to focus its lens mainly on teaching has, to some extent, redressed the historical imbalance between teaching and research, which has been created by the value placed on research by the higher education prestige economy over teaching, particularly at traditional universities (Ewell, 2010,). This focus on teaching is likely to have contributed to the importance accorded to undergraduate teaching and learning on several fronts, including an increased focus on active pedagogies and involvement of students, and the development of more effective structures that support teaching such as teaching and learning centres that are appropriately staffed. Ewell's (2010) observation is corroborated by Minelli et al (2006) and Mohrman (2011).

Further, a study by Minelli et al (2006), which investigated the effect of external quality assurance at an Italian and a Dutch university, found that quality assurance interventions led to,



inter alia, more transparent processes; improved professional practices such as more effective teaching methodologies; enhancement in the decision-making process of teaching departments; and an increase in teamwork. In addition, Mohrman's (2011) research on quality assurance in Chinese higher education, found that, the quality assurance process on the whole had a positive effect on higher education in China. Mohrman's (2011) study further revealed that quality assurance activities resulted in higher education institutions paying more attention to undergraduate education, which included the expectation for professors to regularly teach undergraduate students; institutions also improved their resource allocation to libraries, laboratories, classrooms, faculty development and various other improvements.

### **3.10 The effect of external quality assurance on support functions**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, senior management, academics and students in Stensaker et al's study (2011) were generally positive about the effects of external quality assurance on the resources and facilities for research. Stensaker (2011) adds that external quality assurance processes seem to give more support to centralised decision-making structures in higher education institutions, to promote debate on matters pertaining to quality, play a role in ensuring that administration and support structures increasingly become more professional, and to create new routines and systems for handling data on educational performance and quality. In essence, the impact of external quality assurance tends to be largely related to structural, organisational and managerial processes within higher education institutions, with little impact on the core processes (Stensaker et al, 2011).

The fact that the effect of external quality assurance is related to structural, organisational and managerial processes in higher education institutions could be interpreted in two ways: first, external quality assurance could be seen as an instrument used by governments to strengthen institutional autonomy and the institutional capacity for self-government; secondly, the governmental rhetoric associated with external quality assurance is strongly related to the notion that quality should be controlled directly, and that governmental initiatives in quality assurance could be seen as attempts to inform students about the quality of education they receive, and as

such protect public interest (Stensaker et al, 2011). These two perspectives are not mutually exclusive, and can be, and have, to a certain extent, been combined in various forms in recent decades (Stensaker et al, 2011).

The positive effects of external quality assurance on support functions are further corroborated by Minelli et al's (2006) study, which investigated the effect of external quality assurance in Italian and Dutch Universities. The findings of the study revealed, inter alia, the following: increased transparency of processes; enhanced decision-making capabilities of the universities' governing bodies; reinforced the universities' overall transformation; significantly influenced resource development, particularly on the financial and human resource allocation process; and led to an increase in teamwork (Minelli et al, 2006). In addition, Askling, Lycke and Stave (2004) submit that external quality assurance makes the distribution of authority, the outcomes of the institution's work and the execution of leadership more transparent.

### **3.11 The effects of external quality assurance on student experience**

There is a growing focus on student experience as an essential aspect of higher education institutions that cuts across all other institutional areas; this presents more challenges for quality assurance, particularly in the light of student diversity and learning environments found in many higher education institutions (Baird & Gordon, 2009). According to Baird and Gordon (2009), student experience of higher education has many facets, some of which (such interactivity) are not necessarily captured within the standard quality assurance processes. One way of viewing student experience is to look at the expectations and wants of students from their time spent at a higher education institution.

Baird and Gordon (2009) further distinguish between student-centred ways of defining the student experience and institution-centred perspectives on a quality student experience. They assert that a good student experience is not entirely defined from students' perspective, but also from the viewpoint of academics regarding what should be demonstrated by students to show that they have learnt to meet the requirements of a qualification (Baird & Gordon, 2009). According to Baird and Gordon (2009, p. 5), student experience broadly refers to:

*'all experiences of an individual student, including wider life experiences; all experiences of an individual student while in their identity as a 'student'; all experiences of individual students that contribute to their personal development as learners; all experiences of facets of the institution experienced by an individual; and 'consumer' experiences of an individual student, i.e. facilities and services.'* (Baird & Gordon, 2009, p. 5)

Research has been conducted about the effect of quality assurance on students' experiences in higher education (see Mohrman, 2011; Harvey, 2006; and Gift & Bell-Hutchinson, 2007). In Hoecht's study (2006) on higher education quality assurance in the UK, most of the academics interviewed felt that quality assurance had resulted in some benefits for students. This chimes with Mohrman's study (2011) which found that the quality assurance process contributed towards the improvements of students' experiences in Chinese higher education as it resulted in the expectation for professors to regularly teach undergraduate students; institutions also improved their resource allocation to libraries, laboratories, classrooms, faculty development and various other improvements. Harvey (2006) gives credence to Mohrman's findings by pointing out that there are various effects of institutional audits processes on student learning, including the following: higher education institutions are held fully accountable for students enrolled; there have been adjustments to curricula as a result of institutional audit processes; increased attention has been given to the issue of attrition rates; course evaluations have been introduced; institutions have put in place appeals and complaints procedures; teachers have thought about innovative and more effective pedagogies which have often resulted in better teaching; and there has been an improvement in the standards of student achievement in many countries – this includes competencies, knowledge and academic skills.

Gift and Bell-Hutchinson (2007) add to Mohrman's (2011) and Harvey's (2006) list of effects of quality assurance processes on students' learning. In their paper, which examines the impact of quality assurance processes on the quality of student experiences at the University of the West Indies, they reveal that the quality assurance process resulted, inter alia, in the following actions being taken: a more structured programme on academic advising was introduced; forging closer partnerships with various organisations that employed graduates to ensure that students are adequately placed in industry for their internship and work-integrated learning programmes;

forming smaller tutorial groups; recruiting graduate students who perform exceptionally well to serve as tutors; and increasingly and innovatively using technology and online platforms to enhance teaching and learning.

Shah et al' s (2011) discussion with 40 participants from the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) revealed, inter alia, that institutional audits resulted in the closing of the loop on reviews and student feedback, and encouraged institutions to implement a wide range of inventive teaching and learning projects such as student retention projects.

Stensaker et al's study (2011), which investigated senior management, academics and students' perceptions of external quality assurance evaluations conducted by the Norwegian quality assurance agency (NOKUT), revealed that while the executive management were quite positive about the effect of external quality assurance on the quality of education and teaching, students were far less positive on this issue. Students were also less positive than academic staff and senior management staff on the effect of quality assurance on staff engagement in teaching and learning, on the internal resource allocation, on new routines and procedures, on setting priorities for research, on the resources and facilities for research, on the cooperation between administrative and scholarly staff, on the development of new courses or programmes, on the governance structures of the institution, on student involvement in learning and teaching questions, on the scholarly discussion on teaching and learning, and on the scholarly reputation of the institution.

### **3.12 Perceptions and effect of quality assurance in South Africa**

In a study by Botha, Favish and Stephenson (2008) which focused on the comparison of the experiences of three South African universities (the University of Cape Town, Stellenbosch University and Rhodes University), it emerged that the different institutional contexts within which the preparation of institutional audit processes were conducted had a bearing on the way in which each of the three institutions approached the institutional audit and used it to advance their institutional agendas. Despite the uniqueness of each institution's context and approach, the participants' experience of the audit process in the three universities was similar in various

respects (Botha et al, 2008). Participants in all three universities found the process of preparing for an institutional audit to be more valuable and developmental than the actual audit visit by the institutional audit panel (Botha et al, 2008)

The comparative analysis further revealed that the HEQC managed to find a good balance between ‘fitness for purpose’ and ‘fitness of purpose’ goals in the three institutions’ audit reports taken together. Botha et al (2008) conclude that it is only during the consideration of the implementation of the quality improvement plan, in which institutions indicate how they intend to address the recommendations in the audit reports, that institutions can assess the extent to which institutional audits have influenced the quality of provisions at an institution.

A more focused study was conducted by Monnapula-Mapesela and Moraka (2008) who investigated the perceptions of academics on the process of institutional audits at one South African university that was engaged in a self-evaluation in preparation of an institutional audit by the HEQC. The findings indicated that academics viewed the audit processes as government’s effort to police them and interfere with their academic freedom (Monnapula-Mapesela & Moraka, 2008). In fact, a study conducted at selected universities in the Free State and Eastern Cape provinces reveal that academics felt disempowered by quality assurance systems (Hay & Herselman, 2001).

There were also opinions that the planning and preparation activities for the audit are labour-intensive, time-consuming and a burden on the normal workloads of academics (Monnapula-Mapesela & Moraka, 2008). This is corroborated by a study conducted at the University of the Free State which found that the workload of programme directors in the larger programmes as well as the limited time available proved to be major constraints in the self-evaluation exercise (Wilkinson, 2003). The study by Monnapula-Mapesela and Moraka (2008) also points to resistance from academics (see also Wilkinson, 2003) in certain faculties who still believed that they are autonomous and questioned the CHE’s right to “prescribe things”.

However, the academics’ perceptions were not only concentrated on the negative side. Academics also indicated that institutional audits forced them to be more responsible, responsive and accountable; made them more focused on what they do; made them to be aware of policies

and procedures; allowed critical reflection on programmes; presented time for reflection on performance and approach to teaching and learning; and presented an opportunity for them to know their shortcomings and improve them to enhance the quality of teaching (Monnapula-Mapesela & Moraka, 2008). This is supported by the findings from Wilkinson's (2003) study which indicate that most of the programme directors at the University of the Free State found the self-evaluation exercise to be an "eye opening" learning experience. Further evidence of the positive effects of the quality assurance processes is provided by the pilot audit exercise at Vaal University of Technology, which revealed, inter alia, that the institutional audit processes enhanced a culture of quality and created a culture of continuous improvement at the institution (Brits, 2005).

Implementing a quality assurance system in a merged university can be fraught with various challenges. This is evident in a study by Mentz and Mentz (2006) which was conducted at the newly merged North West University in South Africa. The study was aimed to determine the expectations and perceptions of the directors/heads of department regarding the issue of quality assurance. The results reveal that there are notable differences between the views of directors/heads of department at the University's two campuses – the Mafikeng and Potchefstroom campuses (Mentz & Mentz, 2006). For example, respondents from the Mafikeng Campus emphasised the importance of the role and input of all stakeholders in setting up a quality assurance system, whereas the Potchefstroom campus respondents did not regard this as an important issue. According to Mentz and Mentz (2006), the survey has not only revealed deep-seated differences between the approaches of heads of departments and school directors at the two campuses, but has also uncovered that there are many facets of quality assurance that have not yet been discussed in the context of a newly formed university. In the light of the above, a merged university needs to deal with several issues before an effective quality assurance system can be implemented (Mentz & Mentz, 2006). Increased emphasis on monitoring and supervision may engender a compliance mentality where merely ticking the boxes gains more prominence than actually improving the quality of education (Huisman & Westerheijden, 2010).

### **3.13 Theoretical underpinnings of this study**

The conceptual framework for this study is underpinned by the Total Quality Management (TQM) and systems approaches. The following discussion demonstrates how the two approaches resonate with the HEQC's institutional audits process. The conceptual framework will further show how emerging issues from literature review fit in with the two theories. In addition to TQM and the systems theory, the study employs Michael Fullan's theory on the change process to provide more insight into the conclusions drawn in Chapter 7. A detailed description of Fullan's theory is provided in section 7.8.

#### **3.13.1 Total Quality Management**

Total Quality Management (TQM) is the original idea of an American statistician named William Edwards Deming (Smit & Cronje, 2002). TQM is an approach of organising the whole to attain excellence; it is based on the participatory management philosophy (Farooq, Akhtar, Ullar & Memon, 2007). Deming asserts that people work in a system and management is responsible for creating that system. In TQM's definition of quality, the customer is supreme (Sallis, 1993). In concurrence, Harvey and Eisner (2011) add that TQM's aim is to optimise the achievement of goals through customer satisfaction, continuous improvement, empowerment and feedback. In essence, TQM is an approach aimed to improve both customer satisfaction and the manner in which organisations function (Arnold, Chapman & Clive, 2008). Indeed, TQM foregrounds a culture of quality where the aim of every member of an organisation is to keep customers satisfied; staff should design products and services which meet and exceed customers' expectations (Sallis, 1993).

In TQM, the term "customer" is extended to include everyone who interacts with an organisation's offering, either internally or externally. To this end, an organisation's staff members, suppliers and users of products or services are all included in TQM (Smit & Cronje, 2002).

TQM has six basic concepts: a committed and involved management; a focus on the customer, both internally and externally; involvement of the entire workforce; continuous process

improvement; treating suppliers as partners; and establishing performance measures for the processes (Besterfield, 2004).

In addition to these concepts, Deming has contributed fourteen points in TQM: generate reliability of function for perfection of merchandise and service, implement innovative ideas, stop dependence on mass inspection, end grading practice, develop persistent and everlasting system of production and service, institute continuous training on the job for staff, develop leadership by foregrounding a shift from inspection to supervision, drive out fear in all walks of the organisation, maximise the effort of teamwork, remove slogans and catch phrases, shift the focus from the quantity of work done to the quality of work, eliminate barriers to staff satisfaction, encourage education and self-improvement for everyone, and accomplish the transformation (Farooq et al, 2007). In concurrence with Farooq et al, Smit & Cronje (2002) add that TQM is about creating learning organisations and promoting an intrinsic motivation for learning instead of merely relying on extrinsic punishments and rewards.

The goal of TQM is to create an organisation committed to continuous improvement (Smit & Cronje, 2002). Juran (in Farooq et al, 2007) proposes the three strategies or ‘quality trilogy’ for improvement of quality. The first, *quality planning*, requires management to identify the customer and ensure that their needs are properly determined, are addressed accordingly, are in understandable language and the product should be able to respond to the needs of the customer. The second, *quality improvements*, emphasises that optimisation of the process to produce the product is essential for the improvement of quality of goods or service. The third, *quality control*, requires the development of a process that can produce the product under operating conditions.

### **3.13.2 The systems approach to quality assurance in South African higher education**

The Open Systems Theory was derived from the General Systems Theory which was pioneered by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in his work on an organismic theory of biology in the 1930s (Rogers, 1973; Cullen, 1994). Bertalanffy defined systems as “*sets of elements standing in interaction*” (Rogers, 1973, p. 5). This is corroborated by Miller (1970, p. 11) who defines a system as “*a set of interacting units with relationships among them*”. Each part of the system, often called subsystems, is connected to the others and all the subsystems are part of a larger whole (Suchan



& Dulek, 1998). The subsystems are not only connected, but are also interdependent; thus, each part of the system affects the performance of the whole (Miller-Williams & Kritsonis, 2010). According to Rogers (1973), if this interaction of elements is entirely internal, the system is closed; and if the interaction involves both internal and external elements, it is open. The denotation “open” system puts emphasis on the fact that all living systems must be open to their environment, assimilating inputs from it and releasing output into it (Cullen, 1994).

In fact, according to Suchan and Dulek (1998), most open systems theorists describe a system as a set of two or more elements that satisfies three conditions. First, each element affects the behaviour of the whole. Second, because the subsystems are interrelated, the effect that each subsystem has on the whole depends on at least one other subsystem. Third, if one divides the system into subsystems, then each subsystem has the same two characteristics described above.

In essence, the systems theory foregrounds a holistic approach, where focus is on the way subsystems interrelate and how systems work over time and within the context of larger systems (Miller-Williams & Kritsonis, 2010). To this end, leaders in higher education are urged to continuously view the institution as a whole rather than its constituent parts, and also focus on how the institution fits into the national higher education system. This, for example, implies deans need to always be cognisant of the interrelationships between all the departments in their faculties as well as the relationship between their faculty and other faculties in the institution. Furthermore, they should understand how their faculty fits into the overall mission and vision of the institution. The mission and vision provides strategic direction for teaching and learning activities, and support areas. The nature of the student experience is also determined by the institution’s vision and mission. In essence, the vision and mission provide a synergistic connection among various parts of a whole within an organisation. The interconnections between various parts of the institution will determine the efficiency of its overall functioning. Indeed, wholes function the way they do because of the manner in which the parts are organised and interact with each other (Von Betalanffy, Ketchum & Trist in Wang, Solan & Ghods, 2010).

### **3.13.3 The nexus between TQM and the systems approach**

There is some meeting ground between the systems theory and TQM. One of the glaring commonalities between the two theories is that they both depend on synergistic relationships between various role players in an organisation. The actions of one part of an organisation exert an influence on other parts (Smit & Cronje, 2002). TQM's key concepts of management and teamwork are in tandem with the primacy given to the importance of leadership in holding the different parts of the system and the interrelationships of subsystems in the systems theory. Further, both theories include an organisation's interaction with both its internal and external environment. Indeed, for quality assurance processes to yield fruitful results, they require a commitment from all institutional stakeholders.

Some of TQM's essential elements resonate with the fundamentals of the systems theory. For example TQM's design, processes and product elements (Mammen, 2006) are consonant with the three main elements of the systems theory - input, process and output. De Guzman and Torres (2004) add that the emergence of vision, training and education, and recognition and rewards as the most observed TQM constructs of higher education institutions finds their resemblance to systems theory's input-process-output orientation. Further, TQM's assertion that people work in a system created by management is consonant with the core premise of the systems theory (Farooq, Akhtar, Ullar & Memon, 2007).

### **3.13.4 The link between TQM and teaching and learning**

The essence of TQM is the recognition that the quality of products and outcomes directly results from the quality of processes or systems that produce them (Algozzine, Audette, Marr & Algozzine, 2005). To this end, in order to change students' behaviour and academic achievements, it is important to improve or change the institutional and classroom processes that produce them (Algozzine et al, 2005). TQM incorporates the perspectives of quality, quality assurance, quality management, quality development, quality promotion and quality control, and endeavours to extend, develop and sustain a quest for quality enhancement (Mammen, 2006). Mammen (2006) asserts that quality assurance and quality in higher education are components of TQM and therefore cannot be treated in isolation from TQM.

Mammen (2006) adds that the way the personnel are organised; their own development; the way various structures are organised; design of educational courses and programmes; academic and administrative leadership; teaching, learning and the assessment process; the context in which these processes occur; and the product or graduate that evolves, are all essential in higher education.

Like education, TQM is essentially centred on learning (De Guzman & Torres, 2004). De Guzman and Torres (2004) point out that learning is a vital feature in a TQM programme because it requires the faculties and administrators to keep abreast of the activities and practices that prevail in the study programmes, and collect data to ascertain how these practices impact the quality of students' learning.

Ngware, Wamukuru and Odebero (2006) cite literature that points to a growing interest in applying TQM in education for a wide variety of reasons, some of which include: pressures from industry to continuously improve academic standards in line with changing technology; government schemes with allocation of funds, which encourage research and teaching in the field of quality; increasing competition between various public and private higher education institutions; and a dwindling pool of funds for research and teaching imply that only reputable institutions will have a better chance of gaining access to various funds. In fact, as Ngware et al (2006) observe, quality assurance forms an integral part of TQM in educational institutions. Ngware et al (2006) further assert that it is essential for teachers to constantly upgrade their skills and knowledge in various areas, including content, pedagogy, and institutional management.

TQM can improve two basic administrative goals in higher education institutions. Firstly, it can lead to the improvement in the student experience, thereby making learning easier; and, secondly, it can result in an improvement of the institutional culture and working environment for faculties, in order to make teaching and research easier (Munoz, 1999a). TQM also helps educational institutions to attain quality systematically by enhancing better management of quality. Further, Marchese (in Munoz, 1999a) argues that TQM has six important ideas for higher education: customer focus, continuous improvement, management by fact, benchmarking, human resources approach, and organisational structures. As regards the idea of management, there is a gradual shift by more higher education institutions from the transformation of

traditional practices of management to TQM (Lembcke in Munoz, 1999b). One of the main reasons for educational institutions to embrace TQM is that existing management systems are outmoded and can no longer ensure success in an increasingly competitive world (Lembcke in Munoz, 1999b).

Notwithstanding the stated role of TQM in higher education administration and management, Munoz (1997) observes that the total package of TQM can be implemented successfully in the effective management of the teaching and learning process. TQM foregrounds teaching and learning strategies that involve students actively in their own learning by way of creating learning communities and increasingly using collaboration (Munoz, 1997). Also, a teaching and learning model of TQM faces continuous improvement, discerning feedback, empowering teachers, empowered students, and pervasive teamwork (Munoz, 1997).

Application of TQM in an educational setting will achieve better results in all facets of the process of education (Farroq et al, 2007). Farroq et al (2007) add that the TQM philosophy encourages students, teachers and employees to perform extraordinarily. Further, TQM can play an important role in helping higher education institutions to effectively manage external audit processes. Actually, quality assurance is an integral part of TQM in educational institutions (Ngware et al, 2006). The use of a quality assurance system that is based on the principles of TQM, ensures the availability of appropriate tools, systems, relevant information and teams that create an enabling environment for the proper management and coordination of an external quality assurance exercise such as an institutional audit (Brits, 2005). In fact, the continuous improvement focus of TQM is a fundamental way of fulfilling the accountability requirements common to educational transformation (Farooq et al, 2007).

### **3.13.5 The concept of ‘customer’ in higher education**

Higher education institutions have a wide variety of customers such as students, academics, employers, the public, and a myriad of external suppliers and service providers. These customers may be categorised into internal and external customers. Internal customers of a service are individuals or entities whose product or service depends on that service; for example, the payroll department may be regarded as a customer of the information and communication technology

(ICT) department because without the computer and the ICT services the payroll may not get produced (Manivannan & Premila, 2009). Unlike internal customers who must use their service provider as it is their only option, external customers have the freedom to choose their supplier (Manivannan & Premila, 2009). This lack of competition between internal and external customers often engenders differences in the quality of service provided to the two categories of customers (Manivannan & Premila, 2009). Manivannan and Premila (2009) observe that when one begins to treat a person or entity as an external customer instead of an internal colleague or entity, one's attitude towards that person or entity changes favourably. It is therefore important to treat all customers as external customers because a customer is vital to the survival of an organisation. Indeed, one of the most important aspects of an organisation that foregrounds TQM is that departments start to regard and treat other departments as important customers by trying to meet their time schedules as valuable customers (Manivannan & Premila, 2009).

In their study on the application of TQM principles in nine colleges of education in India, Manivannan and Premila (2009) found that the idea of the student being the customer of a lecturer is a concept that makes many faculty members take a while to assimilate. In fact, many faculty members said that the student is not the customer, but is the product. However, upon closer review, it becomes clear that students are customers whereas the product is the learning of the students (Manivannan & Premila, 2009). Learning is a team effort between the lecturer and the student, and these parties jointly produce a product – the learning of the student (Manivannan & Premila in Harvey & Eisner, 2009).

Houston (2007), however, finds the definitions of quality that are focused on the customer to be problematic. Regarding students as customers implies that academics are service providers; this tends to downgrade the status of academic work from profession to processing and presentation, and academics' teaching role from educators to entertainers (Houston, 2007). Houston (2007) further points out that regarding students as customers amounts to a distortion of the fundamental nature of a student-academic relationship, as this is not simply a contractual or commercial relationship but involves covenant – the highest form of interaction. The academic-student relationship is further distorted and dehumanised by the industry-inspired concept of students as work-in-progress which ostensibly likens students to raw materials. Luizzi (in Houston, 2007) surmises that the business-centred customer-supplier relationship that forms the essence of TQM

fails to capture the complex and specific roles, obligations and responsibilities of these two main participants in the educational context. Although regarding students as customers can be a highly debatable perception in higher education, Brits (2005) found that this never stirred any heated debate for staff and students at the Vaal University of Technology in South Africa. Both staff and students agreed that quality lies in meeting the needs and expectations of customers (Brits, 2005).

Although the student and the faculty relationship is far more complex than that of a simple customer-supplier relationship, it is evident that one dimension of this relationship involves the student as customer (Manivannan & Premila, 2009). Unlike the traditional practice of largely leaving the task of defining quality up to the individual professor, TQM gives primacy to the customer's role in defining quality (Munoz, 1997). It therefore stands to reason that if an academic views the student as a customer, the lecturer is likely to become more tolerant, more interested in implementing ways to improve the learning process, more student-friendly and more accessible (Manivannan & Premila, 2009). In addition, viewing students as customers implies that academics give prominence to acquiring feedback from students as a means of determining their needs, and such feedback should yield concrete information that can be used to guide classroom management decisions concerning the teaching and learning process (Chizmar in Munoz, 1997). In some instances, research has indicated that students provide important inputs about an academic's communication skills, course organisation or even the textbook's appropriateness (Munoz, 1997). Indeed, as pointed out by Munoz (1997), TQM provides an opportunity to the customer, who is a student in this context, to be in constant communication with the decision-maker or the academic in order to ensure the continual improvement of the quality of the teaching and learning process. Thus, TQM advocates horizontal communication which is central to the success of the TQM model and discourages vertical communication which tends to exclude the student from the decision-making process.

### **3.13.6 The implementation of TQM**

In 1986, Delawere County Community College became one of the first colleges in the United States of America (USA) to implement TQM in an educational environment (Munoz, 1999a). Using TQM's philosophy and tools, the college administration established goals, outlined

strategies for accomplishing these goals, set priorities, and developed methods for measuring TQM's efficiency and effectiveness (Munoz, 1999a). At the University of Kansas in the USA, the process of implementing TQM follows the basic structure of continuous process improvement, which encompasses understanding the process, characterising the process, simplifying the process, and, if successful, institutionalising the changes (Munoz, 1999a). Some of the primary lessons learned at the University of Kansas were that team members need to be exposed to the concepts and principles of TQM before serving on a team, and that workshops on the principles of TQM should be carefully prepared, executed, and evaluated (Munoz, 1999a). Another university in the USA, Fox Valley Technical College, started applying TQM principles and tools to its management, service, and institutional processes which led to improvements to numerous educational processes, further resulting in more satisfied customers and a reduction in the costs of the college (Munoz, 1999a).

In 1990, Oregon State University in the USA piloted TQM in the University's administrative areas, the initial results of which were encouraging, thereby inspiring the university to extend TQM implementation to additional areas (Munoz, 1999a). At Oregon State University and the University of Illinois at Chicago, training played a key role in the implementation process (Munoz, 1999a). The training programme at Oregon State University consisted of components such as introductory training, strategic planning, team learning, and special topics; at the University of Illinois at Chicago they established programmes that included basic concepts of quality improvement, leader-facilitator training, team-member training, and leadership training (Munoz, 1999a). Furthermore, the University of Illinois at Chicago thought it was essential for top management both to be involved in and to show that they are committed to the process of improving the quality of provisions.

In their study that investigated how TQM is adopted in 414 American higher education institutions, Freed, Klugman and Fife (1994) received a response rate of approximately 50% on the questionnaire they had sent to the institutions. Of the surveys received, 70% indicated that TQM was being adopted on campus. The majority (52%) of the institutions cited a combination of external and internal forces as the driving force behind the implementation of TQM. External forces include accrediting organisations and the business community. Within the institutions, training on TQM is mostly given to support staff (90%), followed by administration (85%) and

then academic faculty (68%). In at least 13% of the institutions students are also receiving training. For each of the administrative areas such as top-level administration, registration, physical plant, admission and accounting, between 37% and 46% of the responding institutions indicated that they were using TQM. On the academic front, classroom instruction and Business Administration most frequently were indicated as using TQM by just less than 40% of the institutions, followed by Engineering (30%). The results of this study further reveal that some of the benefits of adopting TQM were improved communication and improved customer satisfaction (approximately 65% of the respondents); more coordination and increased morale (approximately 50% of the respondents); less re-work and a changed culture (approximately 30% of respondents); improved teaching and decreased costs (over 20% of respondents). Conversely, the survey also highlighted that TQM is not beyond reproach as there were major frustrations that were reported by the institutions. These included the complaint that the implementation of TQM is time-consuming (63%); people within institutions perceived it as a fad (65% of respondents); no extended commitment from the top (approximately 40% of respondents); not the right approach for higher education (approximately 40% of respondents); the perception that TQM adds no value (24% of the respondents); the idea that success is measured only in quantitative ways (14% of the institutions) (Freed, Klugman & Fife, 1994).

A study by De Guzman and Torres (2004) which aimed to describe and analyse how TQM as an educational management framework is adhered to at the University of Santo Tomas came up with the findings that clearly identified how collective attempts to effect continuous improvement may help institutions in defining parameters of quality education. In fact, as a philosophy in continuous improvement, TQM is not an individual effort; structuring and involving the whole organisation – every department, every activity, every single person at every level is what TQM is all about (De Guzman & Torres, 2004). The study further showed vision as the most adhered construct of TQM by all faculties at the University, followed by training and education, ownership and reward and recognition; continuous improvement and yearning for success ranked last.

In South Africa, Brits (2005) alludes to the important role played by TQM in a pilot institutional audit exercise. He ascribes the successful completion of the pilot institutional audits exercise conducted at the Vaal University of Technology by the HEQC to a centralised quality assurance



system and the introduction of TQM principles. Brits (2005) further asserts that a centralised system of quality assurance which is based on TQM principles is essential to creating the infrastructure, culture and system that meet the rigour of an external institutional audit.

### **3.13.7 The nexus between the HEQC's institutional audits and TQM**

TQM resonates with the HEQC's quality assurance system in various ways. First, the HEQC's approach to quality encompasses value for money which speaks directly to TQM's core principle of customer satisfaction. The HEQC's institutional audits seek to assess, inter alia, the extent to which an institution engages with and responds to the expectations and needs of various internal and external constituencies (CHE, 2007a). Internal customers would include students and academic staff members who are either studying towards formal qualifications, attending workshops or staff development programmes at the institution; external customers include employers and professional bodies. De Jager and Nieuwenhuis (2005) advise that institutions should include inputs from employers and professional bodies in decision making.

Secondly, one of TQM's basic concepts of continuous improvement is in concurrence with the primary purpose of the HEQC's institutional audits – to facilitate systematic and continuous quality development and improvement in higher education. Indeed the HEQC's processes, including institutional audits, constantly undergo a developmental improvement process; so are the individual higher education institutions as well as the academics and students (Mammen, 2006).

Thirdly, in line with TQM's requirement of the senior management's commitment, the HEQC's institutional audits also require commitment from senior management, particularly as regards the provision of a strategic direction, development and dissemination of policies, and allocation of resources for the management of quality of the core functions. Fourthly, like TQM, the HEQC requires the involvement of the entire workforce from including staff working in support services, deans, heads of departments, professors, lecturers and senior management.

### **3.13.8 The nexus between the HEQC's institutional audits and the systems approach**

The input for the institutional audits process is provided by the legislative framework and the HEQC's framework for institutional audits of South African higher education institutions (see Figure 3.3 in section 3.15). The framework, together with the Institutional Audits Manual, provides clear objectives and guidelines for the institutional audit process. In particular, the HEQC criteria for institutional audits (see Appendix A), which are comprehensively described in the manual, guide the self-evaluation process, the institutional audit site visit, and the institutional audit report structure. The self-evaluation process is conducted by the institution to be reviewed and results in the production of the self-evaluation report. The report is sent to the institutional audit panel and serves as the basis for the institutional audit site visit. The institutional audits site visit is carried out by a panel of auditors taken from higher education institutions. The audit panel is constituted by the HEQC using specific guidelines. The panel then scrutinises and interprets documents provided by the audited institution, conducts interviews with various stakeholders of the institution, inspects the infrastructure that supports teaching and learning, and then produces the audit report of the institution with commendations and recommendations. The final audit report is then sent to the audited institution, subsequent to which the institution produces an improvement plan which shows how the institution plans to address the recommendations contained in the audit report. Three years after the audit site visit, the institution is expected to submit a progress report which details how the institution implemented its improvement plan.

The HEQC's institutional audits process, consist of an interplay between various internal stakeholders. These internal stakeholders include academics, senior management and students who interact in a quest for continuous quality improvement. For example senior management, which is at the forefront of quality management, works closely with academics and students to communicate information and also receive inputs on how to improve the teaching and learning process, achieve transformation imperatives, work towards realising the mission and vision of the institution, and ensure that students receive their value for money.

The systems theory classifies the university as a system with the various academic entities (colleges) and non-academic departments as subsystems, each of which have subsystems of their

own (Barker, Sturdivant & Smith, 2000). All these constituent parts of the university are seen as interdependent (Wang, Solan & Ghads, 2010) and play a pivotal role in the university's overall performance. Concomitantly, the scope of the HEQC's institutional audits covers the manner in which various parts of an institution such as executive management, academic faculties, academic departments, student administration, library, student counselling, student residences and certification work together. The audits also focus on the way various institutional stakeholders such as the vice-chancellor, deans, heads of departments, academics, academic support staff, counsellors, employers and alumni interact with one another. The HEQC's institutional audits evaluate the interplay among these various sections and stakeholders, and how they all work together towards the realisation of the institution's mission and vision.

### **3.14 Emerging issues from literature review and identification of themes**

This section focuses on the issues that emerged from the review of literature as well as a discussion on how the study's themes were identified.

- **Emerging issues from literature**

The literature review on the effect of external quality assurance in higher education institutions in various countries around the world reveals that the institutional audits have produced a mixed bag of outcomes (Mohrman, 2011; Askling, Lycke & Stave, 2004; Billing, 2004; Nilsson & Wallen, 2000; Massaro, 2010; Singh, 2010; Rosa, Tavares & Amaral, 2006; Huisman & Westerheijden; 2010).

For senior management members, institutional audits have, for the most part, yielded positive results. The review of literature points out that most senior management members felt that the external quality assurance interventions resulted in the transparency of processes, a transparent execution of leadership and a more transparent distribution of authority; change in professional practices (new teaching methodologies and improvement actions); enhancement of the decision-making capabilities of teaching departments; enhancement of the decision-making capabilities of the universities' governing bodies; reinforcement of the universities' overall transformation;

influenced resource development, particularly on the financial and human resource allocation process; and an increase in teamwork. However the literature also points to some perceived negative effects of the external quality assurance interventions on senior management; these include loss of power and inertia, which in some instances led to the falsification of data.

There are possible indications of this inertia in Mohrman's (2011) research on quality assurance in China, which found that critics of Chinese higher education are concerned that the country's higher education institutions have not woven quality assurance into the fabric of the institution but instead dedicate most of their efforts to processes pertaining to the site visit, which occurs once every five years. As a result of these perceptions, academics, departments and universities often concealed their mistakes and problems when institutional audits occurred; this constrained the effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms to improve the quality of teaching (Cheng, 2009). This finding on the masking of shortcomings is corroborated by Mohrman (2011) who found that Chinese higher education institutions falsified data to avoid a possible reduction in funding and the lowering of enrolment quotas.

The effects of institutional audits on the quality of student experiences appear to have been overwhelmingly positive. These include institutions giving more attention to undergraduate education and improving their resource allocation to libraries, laboratories, classrooms, and faculty development; institutions being required to take responsibility for students enrolled; curricula being adjusted as the result of reviews; a growing concern about attrition rates; the introduction of course evaluations; appeals and complaints procedures being set up; teachers thinking about different ways of doing things, including pedagogy, which has possibly led to better teaching; and standards of student achievement being improved in many countries – this includes competencies, knowledge and academic skills. Other positive results of the audits on the quality of student experiences are : the introduction of a structured form of academic advising; the establishment of partnerships with the private sector to provide internships for students so that they are able to add a practical dimension to their learning experience; the establishment of smaller tutorial groups; recruitment of the more advanced graduate students as tutors; increased use of information technology in teaching and the introduction of online courses; and the recruitment of additional academic staff, teaching assistants, administrative, technical and support staff (Gift & Bell-Hutchinson, 2007); more attention to reviews and student feedback,

and implementation of various learning and teaching projects such as student retention project (Shah, Nair & Wilson, 2011).

Research has uncovered both positive and negative views of institutional audits by academics. On the one hand academics felt institutional audits improved both their work and educational quality within their departments (Kleijnen, Dolmans, Willems & Van Hout, 2011); they were also positive about the effects of external quality assurance on staff engagement in learning and teaching, the impact of quality assurance on setting priorities for research, and on the resources and facilities for research (Stensaker et al, 2011). On the other hand research revealed that academics perceived the audits as signifying a fall of trust in academics and declining academic power (Singh, 2010), some resented the time they spent on producing documentation for quality assurance and considered it a waste of time (Worthington & Hodgson, 2005) and others viewed quality assurance practices as elements of corporate hegemony (Mammen, 2006). In some cases, academics thought the audit was overly bureaucratic and only addressed quality at a superficial level (Hoecht, 2006), while in other instances they simply adopted a compliance attitude, were not honest about their shortcomings and concealed their mistakes and problems during institutional audits which undermined the effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms (Cheng, 2009).

It is, however, important to note that the self-evaluation process which is an integral part of the institutional audits was generally viewed as beneficial to institutions' quality assurance endeavours. Some institutions felt that the self-evaluation exercise afforded them a chance to judge themselves through objective self-analysis (Brits, 2005) and there were also views that the exercise provided institutions with a platform to begin to share internally their good practices and develop broader institutional self-knowledge (CHE, 2007b). There was general agreement amongst institutions that the combination of an extended period of self-evaluation and the probing by the audit panel of institutional claims and evidence during interviews with different categories of staff ranging from senior management to students have played a significant role in making institutions think critically about themselves and introduce new ways of thinking about institutional activities (CHE, 2008).

The results of research in quality assurance and the effect of quality assurance in higher education in other countries provide a glimpse of what could be expected in South Africa. However, as we know that each country is faced with its own unique challenges, to have more authentic information on the South African situation, a study would need to be conducted focusing on the South African higher education. This study attempts to investigate the effect of quality assurance on South African higher education by focusing on three universities.

- **The identification of themes**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the themes identified in this study were based on the HEQC's criteria for institutional audits, content analysis of audit report summaries, literature review and data emerging from interviews. Generally, the basis for these themes lies in the two broad areas of institutional audits, which are: 'Area 1: Mission of the institution, links between planning, resource allocation and quality management; and Area 2: Teaching and learning, research and community engagement' (CHE, 2004a, p. 6). The two broad areas are further broken down into more specific areas in the summarised criteria for the HEQC's institutional audit system (see Appendix A). The HEQC used these criteria and sub-areas to create the structure that was followed in writing the institutional audit reports.

While the summarised criteria provided an overview of areas covered during institutional audits, the manner in which some sub-areas were presented in the *Framework for institutional Audits* (CHE, 2004a) appeared cumbersome for the purposes of this study. As a result the structure of the audit reports, as it appears in the table of contents of institutional audit reports, was also used as it presented a clearer and more detailed breakdown of the criteria and sub-areas. Table 3.1 shows the structure of the institutional audit reports. In the table the sub-areas that are linked to the themes in this study are underlined. In addition to the audit report structure, the content of these report summaries, which included recommendations and supporting texts, was carefully perused for the identification of more themes. Further, during the literature review and data collection new themes were identified.

Although the wording of some sub-areas is similar to that of themes identified in this study, some themes do not use the exact wording used in the criteria and structure of audit reports. For

example the sub-area on the quality management system was changed to the theme on self-evaluation after the literature review, and the sub-area on transformation, equity and redress was changed to the theme focusing on support given to black and female staff. The reason for re-wording some of the themes was to narrow down the focus to reflect the specific aspects covered in this study.

**Table 3.1: Structure of the HEQC’s institutional audit report**

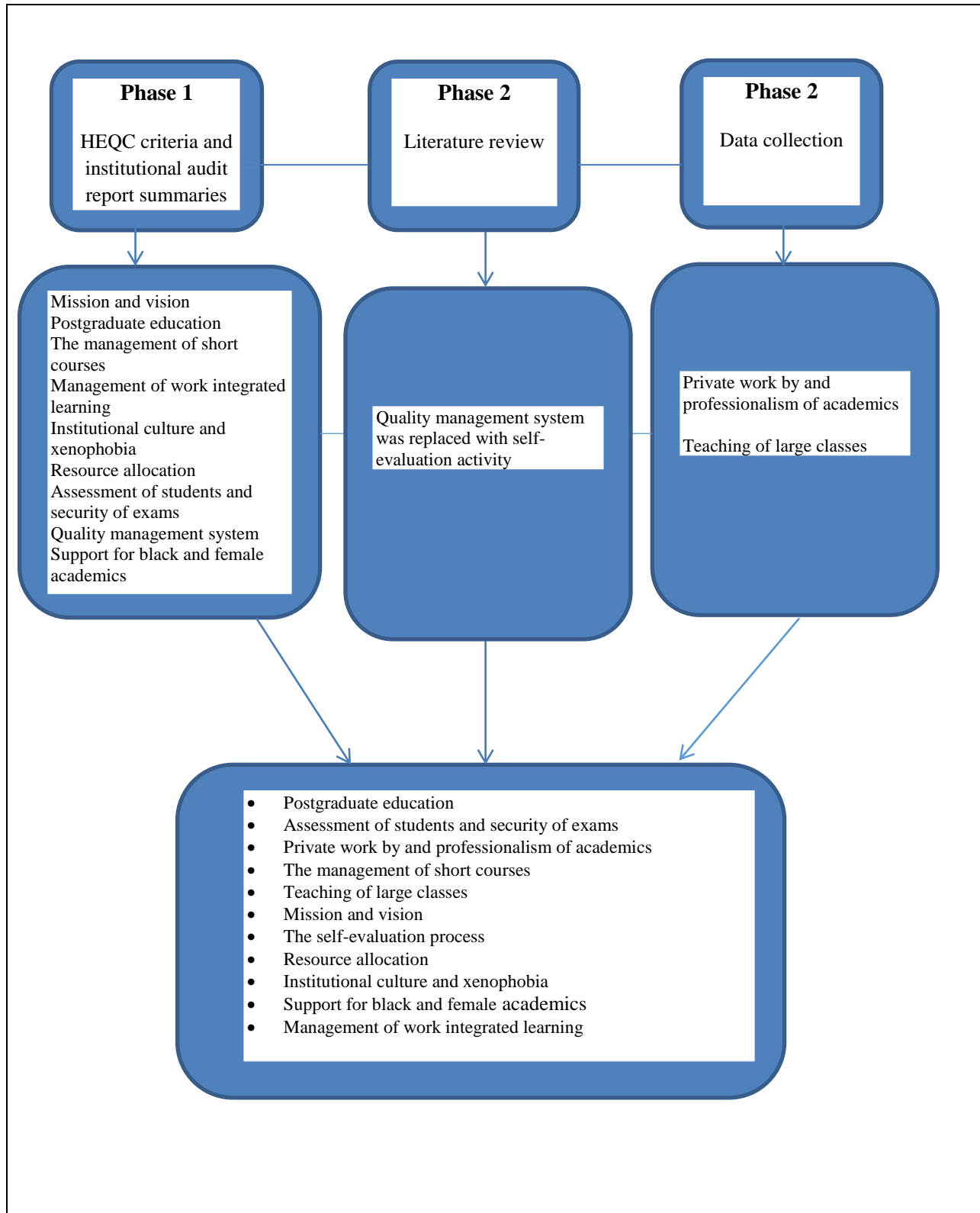
INTRODUCTION
The Audit Process
Summary of Findings
1. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE INSTITUTION
2. INSTITUTIONAL MISSION
2.1 <u>Mission and Identity</u>
2.2 <u>Transformation, Equity, Redress and Institutional Culture</u>
3. INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING, RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT
3.1 Governance, Management, Planning and <u>Resource Allocation</u>
3.2 <u>The Quality Management System</u>
3.3 Benchmarking and Surveys
4. GENERAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING QUALITY
4.1 <u>Conceptualisation of Teaching and Learning</u>
4.2 <u>The Organisation of Teaching and Learning</u>
4.3 <u>Management of Quality in Academic Support Services</u>
4.4 Management of Certification
4.5 <u>Management of the Quality of Short Courses</u>
4.6 Programme Development and Review
4.7 Staffing and Staff Development
4.8 <u>Management of Assessment</u>
5.1 Quality Related Arrangements for Research
5.2 <u>Postgraduate Education</u>
6. MANAGEMENT OF THE QUALITY OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
6.1 Conceptualising Community Engagement
6.2 Current Projects and Activities

(Source CHE, 2007a)

The process of identifying themes was divided into three phases. In the first phase, the themes were identified from the HEQC’s criteria for institutional audits (see Appendix A), the content analysis of institutional audit report summaries, and headings used in the structure of the institutional audit reports (see Table 3.1). As shown in Figure 3.1, the themes identified in the first stage are mission and vision, postgraduate education, the management of short courses, management of work integrated learning, institutional culture and xenophobia, resource allocation, assessment of students and security of exams, quality management, and support for black and female academics.

During the second phase, the literature review confirmed the themes identified in the HEQC criteria and audit report summaries. In addition, the literature review pointed out the central role of self-evaluation in quality management (Potter & Tanner, 1996; Brits, 2005; Harvey, 2006; Materu, 2007; and Stensaker, Langfeldt, Harvey, Huisman, and Westerheijden, 2011). To this end, the theme on quality management was narrowed down to the self-evaluation process. Figure 3.1 shows the phases in process of identifying themes in this study.





(Source: Author)

**Figure 3.1: The process of identifying themes**

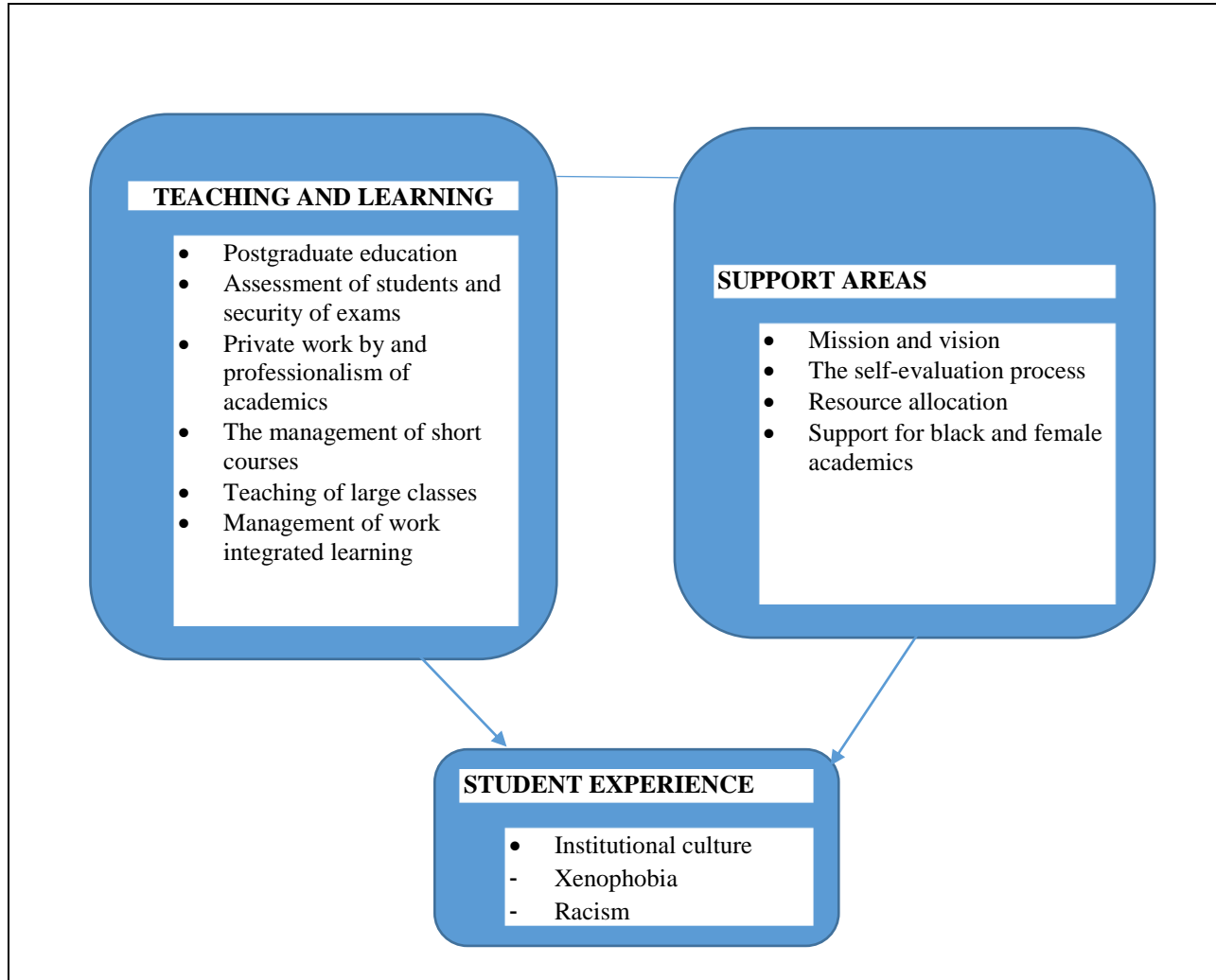
In the third phase, two themes were identified during the data collection stage. In particular, themes on private work and professionalism of academics and the teaching of large classes emerged during interviews with participants at University A and University B respectively (see section 4.3.6).

The identified themes were categorised into three main areas: teaching and learning, support areas, and student experience. Although the theme on postgraduate education is part of research in the HEQC criteria, for the purposes of this study it is discussed under teaching and learning. This is because the focus is narrowed down to postgraduate supervision which is essentially centred on the teaching and learning of research. In addition, a separate area on research could raise expectations that the study would discuss broader aspects of research at an institution, such as publications, rated researchers, etc., which is not the case in this study.

As depicted in Figure 3.2, the area on teaching and learning consists of assessment of students and security of exams, private work by and professionalism of academics, management of short courses, teaching of large classes, postgraduate supervision, and management of work integrated learning. As mentioned in Chapter 1, all the themes categorised under teaching and learning, save for postgraduate education, focus on undergraduate education. Support areas comprise the mission and vision, the self-evaluation process, resource allocation, institutional culture, and support given to black and female academics. The rationale for including the institutional mission under support functions is based on the fact that it provides overall direction to the institution, including matters related to teaching and learning. It is essential for all decisions and activities of an institution to be consistent with its mission (Peeke, 1994). Student experience focuses on institutional culture under which aspects such as xenophobia and racism are discussed. In addition, student experience is also broadly embedded in the areas on teaching and learning and support areas.

The theme on postgraduate education focuses mainly on the supervision of postgraduate students. Assessment looks at adherence to the assessment policy as well as procedures and practices of assessment. The management of short courses focuses on arrangements that have been put in place to manage short courses. The management of work-integrated learning (WIL)

looks at the placement of students in WIL programmes and the monitoring of WIL by the university. Teaching of large classes is about arrangements that are in place to ensure effective teaching and management of large classes.



(Source: Author)

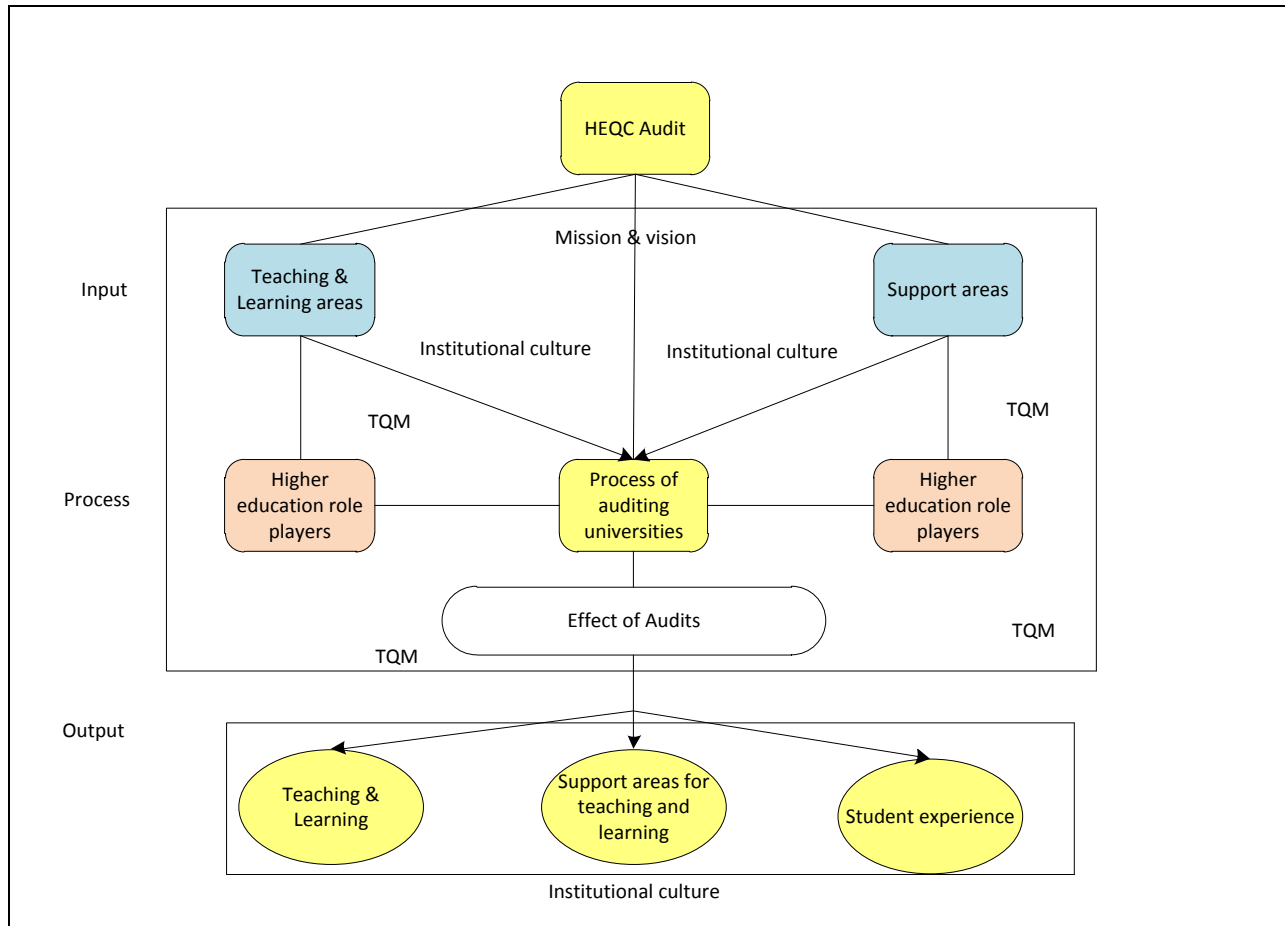
### Figure 3.2: Categorisation of themes

The theme on private work by and professionalism of academics focuses on the regulation of private work by the university and the extent to which engagement in private work affects the professionalism of academics. The theme on the mission and vision looks at the extent to which the crafting of the university's strategic direction was inclusive of various stakeholders and how effectively it was communicated to the university community. The self-evaluation process looks

at the value added by the self-evaluation activity conducted by an institution as part of the institutional audits process. Resource allocation focuses on the allocation of resources across various campuses of an institution and the extent to which resources allocated are adequate. The theme on institutional culture focuses on efforts made to create a conducive institutional culture and address the prevalence of xenophobia and racism among students and staff. The theme on support given to black and female academics looks at measures that have been put in place to provide research and professional support to these two previously marginalised groups.

### **3.15 Conceptual Framework**

This section presents the conceptual framework on the role of institutional audits in improving quality in higher education. Figure 3.3 shows that the framework is premised on the HEQC's institutional audits process. The audits covered various themes pertaining to teaching and learning, support areas, and student experience. The HEQC's institutional audits covered a wide range of themes that were primarily based on the institutional audits criteria (see Appendix A). These themes included institutional mission, transformation, resource allocation, quality management, library, programme development and review, benchmarking, management of certification, management of the quality of short courses, programme development and review, staff development, management of assessment, postgraduate education, management of community engagement, and management of work-integrated learning.



(Source: Author)

**Figure 3 3: Conceptual framework on the role of institutional audits in improving quality in higher education**

Some of the themes that were identified in the HEQC institutional audits criteria and during the analysis of the audit report summaries are not focused upon in this study. These themes included benchmarking, management of certification, and management of community engagement. In this study, themes were identified in the HEQC’s institutional audits criteria (see Appendix A), during the analysis of the HEQC audit report summaries, from the literature review, and during interviews. The themes are spread between the two main areas of the HEQC institutional audit criteria. The two broad areas that form the focus of evaluation in the HEQC criteria for institutional audits (CHE, 2004a) are:

- Area 1: Mission of the institution, links between planning, resource allocation and quality management.
- Area 2: Teaching and learning, research and community engagement.

The themes about core activity of teaching and learning are related to Area 2 of the broad aims of the HEQC criteria for institutional audits and have a direct effect on this core activity. These themes consisted of postgraduate education, student assessment and security of exams, private work by and professionalism of academics, the management of short courses, management of work integrated learning and teaching large classes. Themes about support areas are linked to Area 1 of the HEQC criteria for institutional audits and have an indirect influence on and are potential enablers for effective teaching and learning. These themes comprise the mission and vision, self-evaluation process, resource allocation, institutional culture, and support for black and female academics.

The HEQC's institutional audit covered a wide range of higher education role players such as university council members, the vice-chancellors and members of their executive team, academic and academic support staff, administrative staff, students, civic and community representatives, and alumni. However, this study focused on three categories of role players; these were senior management members, academics and students at each of the three universities. Interviews that were conducted with these three groups of role players were based on the identified themes and sought their experiences and opinions on various aspects of teaching and learning and support areas. It was envisaged that feedback from the three groups of role players would shed light on the possible effects of institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions and student experience at South African universities. Literature review, which was used in the process of identifying themes, played a pivotal role in the categorisation and finalisation of themes applicable to this study. A review of literature has highlighted that although institutional audits have engendered both positive and negative effects, the overall effect has been positive (Kleijnen, Dolmans, Willems & Hout, 2011; Singh, 2010; Worthington & Hodgson, 2005; Anderson, 2006; Cheng, 2009; Hoecht, 2006) (see sections 3.9, 3.10 & 3.11).

The establishment of a vision and mission enables an institution to develop a clear sense of purpose and also identify its fundamental *raison d'être* and specify its future plans (Peeke, 1994). It is important for all decisions and activities of an institution to be consistent with its mission (Peeke, 1994). Institutional culture “induces purpose, commitment, and order; provides meaning and social cohesion; and clarifies and explains behavioral expectations” (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 72). As the vision and mission are the key elements that provide the overall strategic direction of an institution, the two elements are therefore central in shaping institutional culture (Kezar & Eckel, 2000). As depicted in Figure 3.3, the areas on teaching and learning and support functions, are conditional on the mission and institutional culture.

As mentioned earlier in section 3.13, this study is underpinned by TQM and the systems theory. Figure 3.3 shows that TQM’s concepts need to be embedded in the higher education system and guide approaches and process so as to increase the likelihood of positive effects of the audits. TQM’s basic concepts consist of a committed and involved management; a focus on the customer, both internally and externally; involvement of the entire workforce; continuous process improvement; treating suppliers as partners; and establishing performance measures for the processes (Besterfield, 2004) (see section 3.13.1). These concepts were included from the early stages of this research project when various factors, which included the conceptual framework and literature review, played a role in instrument development (see section 4.3.5). The systems theory, on the other hand, is premised on a holistic approach, where focus is on the way subsystems interrelate and how systems work over time and within the context of larger systems (Miller-Williams & Kritsonis, 2010). Further, in line with the systems approach to quality assurance, different stakeholders at each institutional level need to accept and implement a culture of quality and self-valuation (Fourie, 2000), and work in a synergistic manner to produce envisaged outcomes.

As mentioned in section 3.3, there is a connection between the conceptual framework of this study and the HEQC’s notion of quality teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience. The notion of the customer satisfaction is derived from TQM and resonates with the notions of quality as identified by the HEQC such as value for money and transformation (Fourie, 2000). In the context of the systems approach to quality management, continuous

improvement, value-addedness and transformation need to occur at different levels and in different areas of an institution (Fourie, 2000).

The figure as a whole represents the audit process at system level and the big rectangle in the middle of figure represents the institutional level. The audit process at system level aims to result in good quality teaching and learning, more effective support functions and a positive student experience at all universities. This study aims to study these areas at institutional level, because understanding the process at this level may result in an in-depth understanding of the effects of institutional audits.

### **3.16 Specific research questions**

Based on the conceptual framework, three specific questions emerged. These secondary questions ensure that each aspect of the main question is given focused attention by dividing the main question into different sub-questions focusing on separate aspects. Before discussing the secondary research questions, it is imperative that the link between research aims and questions is briefly explained. The main aim of the study is directly related to the main research question in that both focus on the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions and student experience. As already mentioned in Chapter 1, the secondary aims of this study are to:

1. establish the effect of the HEQC institutional audits on the quality of aspects of teaching and learning policies, practices and behaviours of academics and senior management,
2. investigate the effect of the HEQC institutional audits on the quality of aspects of support functions, and
3. determine the effects of institutional audits on the quality of student experience.

The aforementioned secondary research aims led to the formulation of the specific research questions below. The first secondary aim is directly linked to the first specific question, the second secondary aim to the second specific question, and the third secondary aim to the third specific research question.



The three secondary research questions for this study are:

1. What discernible effect have the HEQC institutional audits had on the quality of aspects of teaching and learning policies, practices and behaviours of academics and senior management staff?
2. How have the HEQC institutional audits affected the quality of aspects of support functions?
3. What are the effects of institutional audits on the quality of student experience?

The secondary research questions were aimed at revealing the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions; and student experience across different types of higher education institutions. In attempting to answer the three secondary questions, literature was reviewed, institutional audit report summaries were analysed, and interviews were held with senior management staff, academics and students as part of the research design.

The first secondary question sought to reveal the extent to which the institutional audits have influenced teaching and learning policies, practices and behaviours of academics and senior management staff. The question is focused on the crafting of policies pertaining to the area of teaching and learning by senior management staff as well as practices and behaviors of academics within this area. To get a more complete picture of the teaching and learning area, questions were also posed to students as they are central to teaching and learning. This specific research question focused on the following aspects or themes: assessment of students, postgraduate education, management of short courses, teaching of large classes, management of work-integrated learning, and private work by and professionalism of academics.

The second specific question attempted to uncover the effect of institutional audits on the quality of support functions. As the quality of support functions is largely contingent on decisions by senior management, it was imperative that they be asked questions in this regard. Academics and students were also involved in this specific question as they are directly affected by the quality of support functions. In this question, only the following aspects or themes were considered:

mission and vision, self-evaluation process, resource allocation, and support given to black and female staff members.

In the third specific question, the study sought to reveal the quality of student experience at the three universities. This question focused on institutional culture. Although the quality of teaching and learning and support areas contribute to the institutional culture, this specific question focuses on xenophobia and racism. Since all institutional stakeholders are involved in the determination of the institutional culture, questions were posed to senior management, academics and students.

### 3.17 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a review of literature on the effect of external quality assurance mechanisms on the higher education institutions in various countries. In line with the research questions, the discussion was primarily focused on the perceptions of senior management members, academics and students on the effect of institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions and student experience at higher education institutions. The specific research questions for this study are discussed in detail in Section 3.16. Although, the literature has uncovered both positive and negative perceptions of institutional audits by all three groups of higher education role players, the effects of the audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions and student experience appear to be generally positive. The two theories that underpin this study have also been discussed; in particular, the discussion has demonstrated how the principles of Total Quality Management resonate with the *raison d'être* of the Higher Education Quality Committee's institutional audits. The research questions, literature review and theoretical underpinnings for this study were used to construct the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework serves as the compass, as it were, to the very end. This chapter also discusses the process followed in identifying themes in this study. The next chapter focuses on research methodology.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

#### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a discussion is provided of the research methodology for this study. The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience across different types of higher education institutions. The investigation specifically focuses on (i) discernible effects of the HEQC institutional audits on the quality of aspects of teaching and learning policies, practices and behaviours; (ii) the extent to which the HEQC institutional audits have influenced the quality of aspects of support functions; and (iii) the effects of institutional audits on the quality of student experience. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the study attempted to answer the following question: What effect have the HEQC's institutional audits had on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience across different types of higher education institutions? The secondary or specific research questions are mentioned and elaborated upon in section 3.16 in the previous chapter.

The three sub-questions seek to reveal the experiences of the three key groups of stakeholders – senior management members, academics and students – across different types of higher education institutions. The universities in this study comprise a traditional university, a comprehensive university and a university of technology (see section 2.1 for background information and descriptions of the three institutional types). The opinions of senior management, academics and students were primarily focused on the effects of the HEQC institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning policies, practices and behaviours; the effects of the institutional audits on the quality of aspects of support functions; and the consequences of institutional audits on the quality of student experience.

The chapter starts by arguing the choice of the research paradigm for this study in 4.2. This is followed by a discussion of the research design which includes the unit of analysis, population and sampling, instrument development, data collection and data analysis (4.3). In 4.4 a

discussion on the methodological norms pertaining to this study is presented. Lastly, the chapter presents the research ethics (4.5) and a discussion on the role of the researcher in this study (4.6).

## 4.2 The paradigm underlying this study

This study is viewed through the lens of the pragmatic paradigm. This paradigm foregrounds the research outcomes rather than the conditions that exist prior to the outcomes (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). Concomitantly, this study attempts to unearth the outcomes or effects of the HEQC's institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions and student experience at three public higher education institutions in South Africa. Pragmatism is not particularly concerned with methods being used to carry out research, but the problem being studied and the questions that are being asked about the problem guide the research design (Cresswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). Individuals who subscribe to this worldview are free to choose any research methods, techniques and procedures that are best suited to their purposes or needs. Thus, pragmatism frees the researcher of mental and practical constraints that are imposed by the *“forced choice dichotomy between post-positivism and constructivism”* (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007, p. 27). Indeed, being pragmatic allows the researcher to avoid methodological orthodoxy in favour of methodological appropriateness as the primary criterion for judging methodological quality, recognising that different methods are appropriate for different situations (Patton, 2002).

Although pragmatism is often associated with the mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods, it does not necessarily require mixed methods or a particular method, but is mainly aimed at interrogating a particular question, theory, or phenomenon by using the most suitable method of research (Feilzer, 2010). This study employed the qualitative research method so as to have an in-depth investigation of participants' opinions and perceptions of institutional audits. Instead of sending out questionnaires for participants to complete, it was thought best to collect information by directly speaking to them and observing their behaviour within their context (Cresswell, 2007). Quantitative measures, which tend to level all individual participants to a statistical mean, gloss over the uniqueness of individual participants and contexts (Cresswell,

2007). Qualitative research, on the other hand, strives for a deeper understanding of the uniqueness of situations as part of a specific context (Merriam, 2002). Indeed, the different institutional contexts presented by the three universities warranted a deeper engagement with the participants *in situ*. The qualitative nature of this study allowed the interviewer to be responsive and adaptive, process information instantly, clarify questions that were not clear to participants, and explore unusual or unexpected responses (Merriam, 2002). Further, the inductive and qualitative nature of this study is consonant with the pragmatic paradigm (Creemers, Kyriakides & Sammons, 2010).

One other reason for choosing the pragmatic paradigm is that it resonates with the evaluative orientation of this research. Indeed, this paradigm is more concerned with delivering useful evaluation results than with methodological rigour (Luckett, 2006). In evaluative research, a researcher might evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of projects (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000); concomitantly, responses from participants in this study are evaluated to ascertain the extent to which the institutional audits have had an effect across different types of institutions.

Pragmatists don't subscribe to the possibility of achieving certainty and insist that all knowledge is fallible (Floden, 2009). The epistemology in this paradigm is that knowledge can be established through reason or experience, but it is always provisional (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Thus, in this worldview, there is an element of subjectivity and both natural and social facts are open to revision (Floden, 2009). According to pragmatism, results from educational research should not be viewed as absolute but as yielding possible connections between actions and consequences (Floden, 2009). This is contrary to the post-positivist worldview which is grounded in the quantitative methods that are aimed at establishing the objective truth which can be generalised to the whole universe (Mertens, 2010).

In line with the pragmatic paradigm, the opinions or perceptions of participants in this study should be viewed as providing a possible link to the effect of institutional audits on public higher education institutions in South Africa. Pragmatists further hold the view that research results can also be used as plausible hypotheses about the consequences of actions, and also that research is an ongoing inquiry, where ideas about connections might be revised (Floden, 2009).

## 4.3 Research design and methodology

This section presents a comprehensive discussion of the research design and methodology for this study. The research design and methodology are discussed under six sub-sections. It is argued in section 4.3.1 that the study applies the case study as the research design (4.3.1). In section 4.3.2 the unit of analysis is presented. Population and sampling are discussed and argued in section 4.3.3. Section 4.3.4 presents a discussion on how the research instruments were developed in this study. Data collection strategies and the data collection process are then presented in sections 4.3.5 and 4.3.6 respectively. Lastly, a discussion on the data analysis process is presented in section 4.3.7.

### 4.3.1 Case study design

This study investigates the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience across different types of higher education institutions. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the focus of the study is narrowed down to three selected public higher education institutions. The three institutions are constituted by each of the three public higher education institutional types in South Africa: a traditional university, a university of technology, and a comprehensive university. Case studies are the most apposite research design to answer the research question as they involve a systematic and in-depth investigation of a particular phenomenon and the use of multiple sources of evidence with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion (Yin, 2009; Rule & John, 2011). The in-depth focus that characterises case studies attempted to address the relatively superficial follow-up mechanisms employed by the HEQC as regards the implementation of the quality improvement plans by institutions to address recommendations in the institutional audit reports.

Yin (2009, p. 18) defines a case study as:

*“An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”* (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

The study does not cover all 23 public higher education institutions in South Africa but only investigates selected institutions (see 4.3.3). It is, however, acknowledged that it would be ideal to conduct interviews with participants from all of South Africa's 23 public HEIs, but the intricacies and logistics of conducting such a study may be beyond the scope of this study; hence, a case study design was chosen.

Although a case study may be recognised among the array of qualitative research choices (Cresswell, 2007) regarded by some as a type of qualitative research, in truth it can include, and even be limited to, quantitative evidence (Yin, 2009). In fact, some case study research uses a mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence (Yin, 2009). Case study research does not only cover single case studies, it may also include multiple case studies (Yin, 2009). In addition, case studies may include multiple cases and then draw a single set of cross-case conclusions (Yin, 2009). Concomitantly, in this study a multiple case study research was used to conduct an investigation of three South African universities. A multiple-case study design takes place when a researcher studies two or more subjects, settings or depositories of data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The multiple case design was chosen, to a large extent, because it is often considered more compelling and robust, and also because it would cover the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on three different types of South African public higher education institutions – a traditional university, a university of technology and a comprehensive university (Yin, 2009). The findings from the three cases will then be used to draw a single set of cross-case conclusions. Multiple-case studies take various forms: some begin as a single case and then later the original work serves as the first in a series of studies or as a pilot study for the multiple-case study; other studies are basically single-case studies which include less intense and less extensive observations at other sites so as to address the question of generalisability; some researchers conduct comparative case studies where two or more case studies are conducted and then compared and contrasted (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Yin (2009) further asserts that case studies have a distinctive place in evaluation research. Indeed, case studies are a particularly good means of educational evaluation because they can provide explanations for the causal relationships in real-life interventions that are too complex for the survey of experimental strategies (Merriam, 1988). To this end, the case study style used in this research is an evaluative case study, as it provides a description, explanation, and also

produces judgement on the effect of institutional audits on higher education institutions (Merriam, 1988).

Like all studies, case studies have a number of strengths and weaknesses. One of the strengths of case studies is that they observe effects in real contexts, recognising that context plays a central role in determining causes and effects (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Other strengths are that research data from case studies are capable of serving multiple audiences than other kinds of research reports as they are often written in everyday, less esoteric language; they provide insights into other situations and cases that are similar, thereby assisting in the interpretation of parallel cases; they can be conducted by a single researcher without requiring a full research team; and they capture unique features that may otherwise be lost in larger scale data (Cohen et al, 2000).

However, case studies are not immune to criticism. One of the major criticisms of case studies has been over their lack of rigour because often case study investigators have been sloppy, have not followed systematic procedures, or have allowed opaque evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions (Yin, 2009). A second criticism of case studies is that they provide a scanty basis for scientific generalisation; in fact, some critics have questioned how one can generalise from a single case (Yin, 2009). Another concern regarding case studies is that they take too much time to conduct, and result in colossal and cumbersome documents (Yin, 2009). However, Yin (2009) retorts that case studies do not have to take too long nor do they need to result in traditional and lengthy narratives; in fact, he contends that case studies are often incorrectly confused with a specific method of data collection such as ethnography, which usually requires long periods of time in the field. Further criticisms of case studies are that it is not always feasible to cross-check them, hence they may be selective, subjective, biased and personal; and they are more susceptible to observer bias, despite efforts made to address reflexivity (Cohen et al, 2000).

In order to ensure the rigour of this study, a systematic process was followed throughout the course of this research. Robust research procedures which included interview schedules, data collection and analysis procedures were followed. Although the study presents rich data emanating from in-depth interviews with 58 participants across different types of universities, it



makes no claims about scientific generalisation from these cases. In fact, analytic generalisation (see section 4.4.2) rather than statistical generalisation is more applicable to case studies (Yin, 2009). Thus, the goal of a researcher in conducting a case study is often to expand and generalise theories (analytic generalisation) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalisation) (Yin, 2009). Indeed, this study was time-consuming and resulted in copious documents and interview data which were patiently and carefully processed for optimum results.

### **4.3.2 The unit of analysis**

A research design specifies the unit or units of analysis (Patton, 2002). Decisions about the choice and number of units of analysis exert an influence on decisions about samples, including sample size and sample strategies. The unit of analysis refers to the ‘what’ of your study – what object, entity, phenomenon, process or event a researcher is interested in investigating (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Therefore, the central unit of analysis in this study is a university. To get a good picture of each unit of analysis (i.e. each university), the opinions and perceptions of senior management members, academics and students at three institutions on relevant variables were sought. The researcher interacted with the participants in both one-on-one and group sessions.

Babbie and Mouton (2001) mention ways of characterising units of analysis. In taking a leaf out of Babbie and Mouton’s (2001) book, the following three elements can be used to describe some of the individuals, groups and organisations in this study:

*Characteristics:* Individuals can be characterised by gender, age, height, region of origin, etc.; while groups might be characterised by size, structure, location and aggregated descriptions of their members. This study is comprised of three universities, each of which falls under a distinctive institutional type – a university of technology, a comprehensive university, and a traditional university. There are three categories of participants that were interviewed at each institution; these were senior management staff, academic staff and students.

*Orientations:* These are general tendencies, inclinations or predispositions. Individuals might be characterised by their attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, values, personality traits, predispositions, etc. Similarly, social groups and organisations can be characterised by their purposes, policies, regulations, or aggregated orientations of their members. In this study, individual opinions and

perceptions regarding the HEQC's institutional audits and the various aspects of the three universities were uncovered by posing several questions to relevant stakeholders during the interviews.

*Actions:* Individuals and organisations might describe their actions as the researcher may not be there to observe the actions first hand. In this study, the interviewer relied on the second hand accounts of the participants as regards the manner in which some processes were carried out and what their experiences were.

### **4.3.3 Sampling of universities and participants**

The population consists of all South African public higher education institutions that were audited during the HEQC's institutional audits. Non-probability sampling was used as the selection of elements was not determined by the statistical principle of randomness (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). Purposive sampling was used as a non-probability sampling technique; this is because a small subset of a larger population of higher education institutions, academics, students, and senior management members were involved in the collection of data for the purposes of this study (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Non-probability forms of sampling and inductive data analysis are consistent with goals and assumptions of the qualitative paradigm (Merriam, 1988). This section presents separate discussions on sampling of participants and universities. A short description of the three universities is also provided.

- **Sampling of universities**

Purposive sampling was used to select the three public higher education institutions. In purpose sampling the researchers use their judgement to choose cases with a particular purpose in mind (Neuman, 2003). Since South Africa's public higher education landscape consists of three institutional types, the sample includes representation from each of the institutional types (a traditional university, a comprehensive university, and a university of technology) to ensure that the study covers the possible effects of institutional audits on the three ostensibly disparate institutional contexts. This variation of contexts is supported by Botha, Favish and Stephenson (2008) whose study on the comparison of the institutional audit experiences of three South African universities (the University of Cape Town, Stellenbosch University and Rhodes

University) found that the different institutional contexts influenced the way in which each of the three universities responded to the institutional audit. The sample also covered both rural- and urban-based universities as well as historically advantaged and disadvantaged institutions. The three universities were located in two provinces in South Africa.

In addition, the distance of the universities was consonant with the available financial and other relevant resources available for this study. Indeed, as Neuman (2003) notes, one of the main disadvantages of face-to-face interviews is their high cost. Ultimately, out of the initial six universities that were requested to be part of this study, the three universities were selected based on their relatively quick and positive responses.

Although the sample only covers three of the 22 public higher education institutions that were audited by the HEQC, the information-rich cases that characterise purposive sampling provided an opportunity for maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002). While small samples with a high degree of heterogeneity may normally be problematic due to the differences among individual cases, maximum variation sampling turns this potential weakness into a strength. The logic of maximum variation sampling is that when a researcher selects a highly diverse sample, the collection and analysis of data may result in detailed and high quality descriptions of each of the cases in the sample (Patton, 2002). These descriptions are important for identifying and documenting unique characteristics of each case as well as similar patterns cutting across all cases. Accordingly, this study maximised variation by selecting three institutions with vastly diverse characteristics so that the findings could be of high quality and also allow for the identification of uniqueness and shared patterns. Maximum variation is common in utilisation-focused evaluation, and the HEQC's institutional audits are intended to be utilised to improve quality in higher education institutions. As indicated earlier in this section, the three institutions selected for this study consisted of a traditional university, a comprehensive university and a university of technology, covered both rural and urban settings, and included both historically advantaged and disadvantaged institutions. It is, however, important to note that a maximum variation sampling strategy does not attempt to generalise findings to all public higher education institutions in South Africa but searches for information that alludes to variation among the three institutions and significant common patterns within that variation (Patton, 2002).

- **A description of the three universities**

The three universities are identified by means of pseudonyms due to issues of confidentiality.

#### *University A*

In this study, the traditional university is referred to as University A. University A is a medium-sized, predominantly undergraduate and residential university. The University straddles a wide geographical area that covers a distance of several hundreds of kilometres. It was established in 2005 after the merger between two institutions as part of the restructuring of the higher education landscape in South Africa. The two universities that merged to form University A mainly cater for black students and are located in townships. They were, thus, categorised as ‘historically disadvantaged institutions’ that had been created to advance the ideology of the Apartheid state (HEQC report<sup>2</sup>). The two universities had varied foci as regards their academic offerings— one is a more general university with a broader focus and the other has a more specific focus. The University is organised into four faculties, namely Health Sciences, Humanities, Management sciences and Law, and Science and Agriculture. University A offers general formative and professional qualifications. The qualifications comprise a mix of undergraduate diplomas and a range of degree programmes from bachelor to doctoral level. In 2009, the University had a total headcount enrolment of approximately 17 000 student with 97% being black African students (HEQC report).

#### *University B*

The comprehensive university that is the focus of this study (also referred to as University B) is a large contact residential university that is situated in a metropolitan area. University B is comprised of a number of campuses which are located both within the city and the surrounding townships. The University was established in 2005 as part of the first democratic government’s restructuring of the higher education landscape, which was aimed at creating an integrated and coordinated higher education system (HEQC report). University B resulted from a merger between a traditional university and a former technikon. The legacy institutions that merged to

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<sup>2</sup> Whilst specific documentation was used for purposes of description, in-text references were removed to protect anonymity. However, the full reference is given in the bibliography’

form University B represented different historical trajectories in the South African higher education system (HEQC report). The University was designated as one of the six comprehensive universities focused on providing vocational, formative and professional education at undergraduate and postgraduate levels as they served different communities, offered different academic programmes, had diverse research foci, capabilities, cultures and identities (HEQC report). Some of the University's pre-merger campuses were historically created to cater for white communities within the urban population while other pre-merger campuses were specifically created to serve the black communities living in the townships around the urban areas. The dawn of the new democratic regime accelerated changes in the student profile of University B, and by the time the merger took place, the new University had a majority of black African enrolments. University B's programme qualification mix includes a wide spectrum of vocational, professional and general formative programmes, as well as undergraduate certificate programmes to doctoral programmes. Most of the students at the University are enrolled at undergraduate level; a large number of these students are enrolled for diplomas and undergraduate degrees (HEQC report). In 2009, the University had a student headcount enrolment of over 47 000; 87% enrolled for qualifications at the undergraduate level while 13% enrolled at the masters and doctoral levels (HEQC report).

### *University C*

The university of technology that is central to this study (referred to as University C) is a medium-sized contact and residential institution. University C's main residential campus is situated in an industrialised area. The institution has satellite campuses in more than one province. Like other South African universities of technology, the institution evolved from being a College for Advanced Technical Education in 1966, to a technikon that awarded diplomas and certificates in various vocational programmes in 1979, to awarding degrees in 1994, and finally to a university of technology in 2004 (HEQC report). University C was not greatly affected by the government-led restructuring of higher education as it was not part of a merger. However, the University had to incorporate two smaller institutions. In 2010, the institution had over 20 000 predominantly African students (Higher Education Management Information System). In fact, enrolments for African students increased from nearly 60% in 1996 to over 91% in 2004 (HEQC report). University C offers approximately 130 programmes that are spread across four faculties:

Applied and Computer Sciences; Engineering and Technology; Human Sciences; and Management Sciences (HEQC report). All the faculties offer programmes that range from diplomas to doctoral studies; however, not all programmes enable full progression to postgraduate studies. University C is predominantly an undergraduate institution with 99% of its enrolments concentrated at this level (HEQC report). Initially, the largest area of enrolment at University C was in the Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) disciplines, but in later years Business, Commerce and Management (BCM) became the area of programmes which attracted the most students.

It is apparent in this sub-section on the description of universities that there was variation in the location of institutions to ensure that both rural and urban universities are covered. The traditional university is rurally-based whilst the university of technology and the comprehensive university are urban-based so that the study covers perspectives from both these disparate locations. This variation of coverage in the sampling of sites according to institutional type, location, and level of advantage ensures the richness of samples central to maximum variation sampling.

- **Sampling of participants**

A total of 58 respondents were selected, comprising 12 senior management members, 12 academics and 34 students spread across the three identified South African public higher education institutions. Table 4.1, on the next page, shows the sampling of participants at each of the three universities. The table indicates that senior management comprised a deputy vice-chancellor, registrar, deputy registrar, executive director, executive deans and directors. The academics who participated in the study consisted of lecturers, senior lecturers, professors and deputy deans. Academics at University A and University C were all from the faculty of science while those at University B were from the faculties of management sciences and humanities. Students' focus groups consisted of both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

There were necessary adjustments made to the original sample of participants. For example, with regard to senior management staff, the original intention was to interview a registrar at each of the three universities. However, due to unforeseen challenges, only the registrar at University B

was interviewed (see section 7.6). At University A, only the deputy registrar was available for the interview, and University C's registrar was unavailable. Another original intention which was not realised was to include at least one professor in the sample of academics at each university. This was achieved at the traditional university (University A) and the comprehensive university (University B) but could not be achieved at the university of technology (University C) probably due to the paucity academics at professorial level. The only professors interviewed at the latter institution were executive deans and the deputy vice-chancellor.

Further, as regards the spread of participants, the initial intention was to interview academics within similar faculties across all the three universities. However, due to responses from academics who were approached to participate in this study and the difficulties encountered in setting up some interview meetings, this idea was not pursued further. The students were from the faculties of science, management sciences and humanities. As Table 4.1 shows, students at University A and University C were from faculty of science, faculty of management sciences, and faculty of humanities whereas those at University B were from the faculty of science and faculty of management sciences. As the sample of participants was not representative of all the faculties at each institution, the participants' views should be read with circumspection to pre-empt potential generalisations.

**Table 4.1: Sampling of participants per university**

Participants	University A	University B	University C
<b>Senior management</b>	Deputy Registrar	Registrar	Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic
	Director of Quality Assurance	Director of Quality Assurance (joined by a Quality Assurance Manager)	Director of Quality Assurance (joined by a Quality Assurance Manager)
	Executive Dean	Executive Director of Staff Development	Executive Dean: Faculty of Humanities
	Director of School	Director of Student Administration	Executive Dean: Faculty of Science
<b>Academics</b>	4 Academic: Faculty of Science and Agriculture	2 academics: Faculty of Management Sciences 2 academics: Faculties of Humanities	4 academics: Faculty of Science
<b>Students</b>	6 Undergraduate 4 Postgraduate From faculty of science, faculty of management sciences, and faculty of humanities	7 Undergraduate 5 Postgraduate From faculty of science, faculty of management sciences	9 Undergraduate 3 Postgraduate From faculty of science, faculty of management sciences, and faculty of humanities

(Source: Author)

#### 4.3.4 Data collection strategies

The participants in this study were from three South African universities – a traditional university, a university of technology and a comprehensive university. The collection of data was carried out between May 2012 and February 2013.

Interviews are one of the most important sources of information in case studies, particularly those that are more fluid guided conversations rather than rigidly structured queries (Yin, 2009). One of the main reasons for choosing interviews for data collection in this study is that they are a powerful way of gaining insight into educational and other intricate social issues as they enable interviewers to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, including a more conscious awareness of the power of social and organisational context (Seidman, 2013). Interviews also afforded the researcher an opportunity to build rapport with respondents, paving way for a relationship of trust between the interviewer and the interviewee in the interview



situation (Basit, 2010). Once there was a relationship of trust between the researcher and participants, the interviewees were motivated and interested in answering the questions with openness and truthfulness (Basit, 2010). Interviews also presented an opportunity to rephrase and clarify the question in cases where the interviewee did not understand it the first time. Another advantage of interviews is that the response rate for interviews is high as the interviewer made sure he visited the participants as per the agreed meeting schedule and engaged in a real-time conversation with them by using face-to-face communication (Basit, 2010).

There are three approaches to qualitative interviewing: the informal conversational interview, the general interview schedule approach, and the standardised open-ended. In this study, the general interview schedule approach was used by listing the questions and issues to be explored during interviews (Patton, 2002). The interviewer arranged questions in a sequence and allowed some probing. Patton (2002) submits that an interview schedule can be developed in more or less detail. In preparation for interviews in this study, interview schedules were developed in more detail with some nuances of the standard open-ended interviews as the interview protocol had to be submitted to the ethics committee of the University of Pretoria prior to conducting the interviews. The interview schedule was prepared to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry were pursued with each person interviewed. Further, the schedule allowed the interviewer the freedom to explore, probe, and ask questions that elucidated and illuminated the subject being explored; and gives the interviewer the space to carefully decide how best to use the limited time available in interviews (Patton, 2002).

Interviews were conducted with respondents from the three selected institutions. Interviews were held with a total of 12 senior management members, 12 academics, and 34 students spread across the three identified South African public higher education institutions. Interviews were conducted to find out about the respondents' views on the possible impact that institutional audits may have had on their institutions. A sound recording device was used to record a verbatim account of the interviews for purposes of transcription and analysis. The interview transcript was validated with the interviewees to ensure data accuracy. The participants' responses were used to establish the possibility of the effect of institutional audits on the three institutions.

Patton (2002) advises that the quality of data gathered during an interview is contingent on the interviewer's skills and experience. This implies that if the interviewer effectively guides and carries out the interview, the quality of information is likely to be of a high standard. Kvale (1996) identifies seven steps which the researcher can use to guide the interview process, and these were found to be important for this study. The steps are discussed as follows:

- *Thematising* – involves clarifying the purpose of interviews and the concepts to be explained. The topics which were covered during interviews with academics, senior management staff and students included the following: mission and vision, institutional culture and student experience, resource allocation, work-integrated learning, assessment, postgraduate education and supervision, support given to black and female academics, and the teaching of large classes (see Table 4.2).
- *Interviewing* – this is the actual act of interviewing participants, and encompasses the process of posing questions, probing and recording the responses from participants. A digital recorder was used to capture the responses accurately and verbatim.
- *Transcribing* – this step involves typing up all interview data recorded and notes taken during interviews with the three groups of key role players at the three universities.
- *Analysing* – during this step the researcher establishes the extent to which the data collected is linked to the purpose of the study. In this study, Atlas.ti software was used to develop families, codes and recoding of the responses from interviews. Data was analysed in accordance with the main research question. A cross-case analysis of data from the three institutions was also conducted.
- *Verifying* – this step involves checking reliability and validity of data. The responses were sent back to the participants and members of the senior leadership of the three universities to allow them to check and verify the accuracy of the data gathered.
- *Reporting* – this is essentially the presentation of findings; telling others what one has learned. The research findings in this study were written up and presented in chapters five and six.

- **Interview schedules**

The main data collection strategy used in this study consisted of interview schedules. Also essential to the data collection process was a list of identified themes. The processes for developing interview schedules and identifying the main themes are explained below.

- **Identification of themes according specific research question**

Before conducting the content analysis, a preliminary list of themes was compiled in accordance with the HEQC's criteria for institutional audits (see Appendix A), issues that emerged from the literature and the conceptual framework. These themes served as lines of inquiry that guided the content analysis of the 22 audit report summaries. Subsequently, the list of themes was amended in light of the analysis of the audit report summaries and consultation with the supervisors for this study.

The revised themes then guided a systematic content analysis of the audit report summaries. These themes were grouped into three categories: (i) the effect of the institutional audits on the quality of aspects of teaching and learning and (ii) the effect of the institutional audits on the quality of aspects of support functions, and (iii) student experience. The following table (Table 4.2) summarises the categorisation of the identified themes according to research questions.

**Table 4.2: Categorisation of themes according to research questions**

<b>Research focus area</b>	<b>Theme</b>
<i>The effect of institutional audits on the quality of aspects of teaching and learning</i>	Postgraduate education and supervision capacity Challenges regarding the assessment of students and security of exams Private work by and professionalism of academics The management of short courses Teaching of large classes Management of work integrated learning
<i>The effect of institutional audits on the quality of aspects of support functions</i>	The crafting and communication of the mission and vision The self-evaluation process Resource allocation Support for black and female academics
<i>The effect of institutional audits on the quality of student experience</i>	Institutional culture (xenophobia and racism)

(Source: Author)

During the analysis of the executive summaries of the audit reports of the three universities, recommendations received by each institution were arranged per theme. This was done to identify the themes that cut across the three institutions and those that were peculiar to certain universities.

Table 4.3 provides a summary of recommendations received by each of the three universities as a result of the institutional audits. These recommendations are arranged in accordance with the themes identified in this study. It is important to note that the theme on self-evaluation was not based on any recommendation – hence it is not included in Table 4.3 - but was the main activity that each audited institution was engaged in while preparing for the audits. The questions asked on the self-evaluation process were intended to find out the effect that this process had on the quality awareness and management at the institutions.

**Table: 4.3: Recommendations received by institutions per theme.**

Recommendation theme	Summary of recommendations		
	University A	University B	University C
Vision and mission	Conduct an institution-wide debate when undertaking the review of the vision and mission statements and put mechanisms in place to ensure that this process is embraced by stakeholders	Conduct an institution-wide debate on the meaning and appropriateness of the vision and mission statements, and engage actively with staff on the practical implications of the statements, how they are translated into strategies, and meaningful performance indicators	Enter into a broad institutional debate about its vision and mission and status as a university and as a university of technology
Post-graduate education	Address supervisory capacity. Improve the academic qualifications of its academic staff so as enhance supervisory capacity for its postgraduate students. Review its process for the approval of research proposals for academics and postgraduate students	Conduct an assessment of its supervisory capacity and develop a strategy to enhance supervisory capacity	Address supervisory capacity
Assessment of students	Implement Assessment Policy across the University. Develop a programme to ensure that all academics refrain from the practice of using past examinations papers repeatedly and develop new papers for each examination	Take immediate action to ensure the security of student records and the examination documentation and implement measures that will curb all forms of academic fraud at the institution	Take steps to evaluate and monitor the application of the new assessment policy, particularly with regard to continuous assessment and the integrity and security of records
Private work by academics	Address the practice of members of staff undertaking private work at the expense of teaching and learning. Create a unitary institutional identity with a strong work ethic and adherence to high professional standards	No recommendation	No recommendation
Management of short courses	No recommendation	Review its policy in offering the range of short courses to ensure that these do not negatively impact on the quality of the mainstream teaching and learning programmes	No recommendation

Recommendation theme	Summary of recommendations		
	University A	University B	University C
Resource allocation	Ensure equitable resourcing of both the main and satellite campuses. Concerns were raised about resourcing of satellite campuses	Take steps to ensure that there is equivalence of provision services across all campuses. Ensure equivalence of provision across all campuses of its information, and communication technology services	Consider equitable provision at the main and satellite campuses of the University
Institutional culture	Investigate issues of sexism and xenophobia Work towards creating a unitary institutional identity with a strong work ethic and adherence to high professional standards	Address the learning environment of its foreign and black students to understand the nature of racism and xenophobia and then develop and implement programmes that will ensure that such students are integrated and fully supported	Reconsider the total student experience at the main and satellite campuses
Support for black and female academics	Put in place interventions to counteract the patriarchal environment in the University, Develop and implement a coherent research capacity development programme to support female researchers	Address the issue of recruitment and retention of black and female academics. Develop an institutional culture which is attractive and supportive of black and female academics	Ensure that the processes and environment are supportive of female academics
Large class teaching	No recommendation	Investigate the most appropriate strategies particularly in large classes to deal with the pedagogic challenge of teaching students with insufficient staff and infrastructure	No recommendation
Work-integrated learning	No recommendation	No recommendation	Put in place necessary mechanisms and resources in place to strengthen the management of WIL and ensure that the placement of students is efficiently accomplished and adequately monitored in order to achieve the relevant teaching and learning objectives of this activity in the different programmes

(Source: Summaries of HEQC Institutional Audit Reports)

Due to data emerging during interviews, two predetermined themes were modified and their focus changed. Firstly, the theme on support given to black and female academics was originally intended to focus on support provided to women in senior management due to their lack of representation and retention in senior structures. However, during the early stages of the data collection, a senior management member at University A painted a bleak picture when asked whether the institution created a conducive environment for women in senior management. His response was as follows:

*“...as a university I don’t think we have any plan or strategy towards that (support for women)...we don’t have a strategy to say this is where we want to go in terms of...eh...advancing women within the institution...we just huff and puff when we appoint, when we fill positions...”(SnrMngA4)*

It was then decided to investigate this aspect further by extending the question to academics and ask about the support that female academics were receiving. This was then consistently asked to both senior management staff and academics at the three universities.

Secondly, as regards the theme on institutional culture, although all three universities received recommendations in this regard, only University A and University B received recommendations that included specific reference to xenophobia. The recommendation given to University C regarding institutional culture did not make particular reference to xenophobia but urged the institution to focus broadly on enhancing well-rounded student experience at the main and satellite campuses. However, during interviews with participants at University C there seemed to be a prevalence of xenophobic attitudes embedded in some responses. As a result, xenophobia was considered a cross-cutting theme across the three universities and was given due attention at each of the three institutions.

- **Interview schedule development**

The interview schedules were developed to ensure that the identified themes were adequately covered. These interview schedules (see Appendices G, H and I) included themes and specific questions under each theme. Although the manner in which the questions were actually asked was adapted according to the level of respondents, the essence of the questions remained the same. As indicated earlier in this section, probes were used to seek more clarity on new,

unfamiliar and pertinent issues that were raised by participants during interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

It was ensured that the interview schedules were developed to elicit responses to answer the research questions for this study. Questions that were posed to senior management focused more on the vision, leadership, and support provided in addressing the recommendations made in the audit reports. Questions for academics focused more on the core areas of teaching and learning. Students were asked questions that were more focused on the institutional culture and their student experience. Although no formal pilot study was conducted, questions were tried out with two academics, two senior management colleagues and a small group of students at two universities. Comments made during these informal interviews and discussions that were held with other higher education colleagues enabled the researcher to improve the suitability and clarity of the questions.

To ensure that there was no undue disturbance in the interview context, interview meeting appointments were set up with respondents in the best possible environment. As indicated earlier in this section, a digital recorder was used to capture a verbatim account of interviewees' responses so ensure that a record of original untainted data was kept and to allow the researcher to transcribe the interviews. As Vygotsky (1987) aptly puts it, each word spoken by a participant reflects his or her consciousness, and thus to substitute participants' actual words with the researcher's paraphrasing or summaries of what they say is tantamount to replacing the participants' consciousness with that of the researcher (Seidman, 2013). Indeed, since the 1960s many qualitative researchers have used audio recordings and transcriptions thereof as data (Delamont, 2012). In fact, reliance on electronic recordings and transcriptions has become so commonplace that fieldnotes tend to be regarded as second-class form of data, if they are not entirely ruled out (Delamont, 2012). Electronic data and transcriptions are preserved and can be reproduced; this means that they are open to repeated analysis and can be accessible to readers of research reports so that analyses can be checked and even replicated by others (Delamont, 2012).



#### 4.3.5 Data collection

The purpose of this section is to discuss how data was collected in this study. The study used content analysis and interviews to collect data from the institutional audit report summaries and participants at the three universities. This section firstly presents a discussion on how content analysis was used to collect data from the institutional audit report summaries. Secondly, a discussion is provided on how one-to-one interviews were used to obtain responses from senior management and academics. Thirdly, the section presents a discussion on how data was collected during focus group interviews with students. Lastly, a discussion on how probes were used to enhance data collection is presented.

- **Content analysis**

It is advisable to begin the data collection process in a case study by conducting a content analysis. To this end, content analysis was employed to collect data from the audit report summaries. “*Content analysis is a technique for gathering and analysing the content of text*” (Neuman, 2003, p. 310). Content analysis was used as it allowed the researcher to systematically examine the contents of the audit report summaries and identify the common themes emerging from the reports (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Indeed, the inductive and iterative nature of content analysis enabled the researcher to look for similarities and differences in the texts of the audit report summaries (Maree, 2007). Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005) identify the following steps in conducting a content analysis: a clear definition of the phenomenon that is being analysed, a choice of sampling methods, and a description of how the unit of analysis will be coded. Accordingly, in this study the research problem and questions were identified prior to examining the contents of the audit report summaries (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

A content analysis was conducted of audit report summaries of 22 public higher education institutions in South Africa. Only one university’s audit report summary could not be examined as the report was invalidated by the HEQC. A preliminary checklist of various topics was developed for analysing these reports. The checklist was primarily based on the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework thus resulted in a number of aspects to look for in analysing the audit report summaries.

The analysis of the 22 audit report summaries allowed for an identification of issues that cut across the South African public higher education landscape. At this stage, a wide range of themes were identified from the 22 audit report summaries. Subsequently, an in-depth analysis of the audit report summaries of the three selected universities was conducted. During this stage of the content analysis process, the themes were narrowed down to those that were more applicable to the three selected universities. Thematic content analysis was thus used to arrange and analyse data from the audit reports into themes.

- **Interviews**

The purpose of interviews is to allow researchers to enter into the interviewee's perspective (Patton, 2002). Indeed, interviews were used to tap into the participants' perspectives and opinions as regards the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience across different types of higher education institutions. Interviews were conducted with senior management members, academics and students at each of the three institutions that form part of this study.

The interviewer in a qualitative interview has a general plan of inquiry but not a specific set of questions that must be worded in a particular way in a particular order (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). This is because a qualitative interview is essentially a conversation in which an interviewer ascertains an overall direction for the conversation and follows up on specific issues raised by the respondent (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

Accordingly, interview schedules were developed (see Appendices G, H and I) based on the themes and were used to guide the conversations during interviews; the schedules were supplemented by probes. The wording of the questions was nuanced in accordance with the interviewee's characteristics, such as level and understanding; for example, some of the questions asked to academics were couched somewhat differently from those posed to more senior management staff. Questions were not always asked to all participants in the same order; the order of questions was arranged in accordance with the issues that emerged from the responses to ensure a flow in the conversation.

During interviews, the interviewer started with a short summary of what the interview is about and followed with a non-threatening open-ended question that got the interviewee talking and helped to put them at ease (Terre Blanche et al, 2006). Questions were asked pertaining to the themes identified in this study as presented in Table 4.3.

- **Focus group interviews**

A focus group interview occurs when an interview is conducted with a small group of people on a specific topic; the groups are usually comprised of 6 to 10 people with similar backgrounds who participate in an interview for one to two hours (Patton, 2002). In this study, focus group interviews were held with 10 to 12 students at each of the three institutions. Focus group interviews can be used successfully to enhance participants' recall or to stimulate embellished descriptions of specific events or experiences shared by group members (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The interviewer ensured that the interview environment in this study was permissive and nonthreatening, and the discussion was comfortable and enjoyable (Patton, 2002). The debate during the focus group interviews was open and accessible to all participants, so that they could freely exchange views and experiences, and also respond to other group members' comments and observations (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000). Although the skills required to conduct the focus group interview are not significantly different from those needed for individual interviews, focus group interviews do present some challenges not found in individual interviews. This is because facilitating and conducting focus group interviews require considerable group process skill which goes beyond simply asking questions (Patton, 2002). The interviewer heeded Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) advice by (a) not allowing a situation where one person or a particular small group of people dominated the entire group, (b) encouraging quieter and more reserved students to participate, (c) obtaining responses from the whole group to ensure the fullest coverage of the topic, and (d) trying to balance the directive interviewer role with the role of moderator by managing the dynamics of the group being interviewed.

The interview schedule (see section 4.3.4) used in this study enhanced the focus group interviews with students as it kept the interviews focused while allowing individual perspectives and experiences to emerge (Patton, 2002). Focus group interviews have several advantages: they are cost-effective as you can gather information from a group of people in one interview session,

participants' interactions enhance data quality, they aid recall as they can be stimulating for participants, their format is flexible, and the extent to which there is a relatively consistent, shared view or great diversity of views can be quickly assessed (Patton, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). However, like all forms of data collection, focus groups also have limitations. These include the following: there are constraints as regards the number of questions that can be asked and the available response time for each respondent, and it is difficult to assure confidentiality in focus group interviews (Patton, 2002). These limitations were taken into cognisance and it was ensured that each participant in focus groups signs a confidentiality agreement.

- **Probes**

In this study, probes were also used to ask for clarity when the interviewee mentioned something that seemed unfamiliar to the interviewer, and the interviewer asked the interviewee to be specific by asking for examples of points that were made (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Probes enabled the interviewer to get answers in more depth without biasing later responses (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Some of the phrases that were used to probe were: Can you give more information on that? Can you provide an example of that; and in what ways? Babbie and Mouton (2001) advise that in order to probe effectively, interviewers should learn to pause deliberately and look expectantly at interviewees to urge them to fill the silence gaps.

- **Emergence of additional themes**

As already mentioned in section 3.14, during data collection new themes emerged. These themes were private work and professionalism of academics and the teaching of large classes which emerged during interviews with participants at University A and University B respectively. Interviews with various participants at University A pointed to concerns about the work ethics and professionalism of academics which tended to coincide with the institutional audit recommendations urging the University to adhere to high professional standards and strong work ethics as well as addressing the issue of members of staff undertaking private work at the expense of teaching and learning. In view of the connection between the institutional audit recommendations and data collected during interviews it was considered necessary to have a specific theme on private work and professionalism of academics. During an interview with the

registrar at University B, she said: *“Uhm, but this campus is totally, totally overenrolled... We don’t have capacity here”* (SnrMngB1). As this was related to an institutional audit recommendation which urged University B to investigate appropriate strategies of teaching large classes, it was deemed prudent to pursue this issue further and identify a theme on how the University was dealing with large classes.

#### **4.3.6 Data analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is the process of transforming data into findings, but no formula exists for that transformation (Patton, 2002). Data collected through qualitative methods is invariably unstructured and unwieldy as a high proportion of it is text based, comprising verbatim transcripts of interviews or discussions, field notes or other written documents (Huberman & Miles, 2002). Indeed, this study is comprised of data from audit report summaries and interviews. This section thus discusses how data from content analysis and interviews was analysed.

- **Data analysis of content analysis**

As indicated earlier in this chapter, content analysis was used to examine data from audit report summaries. Content analysis was used to thematically analyse information in the audit reports summaries. It is a technique used for gathering and analysing the content of text (Neuman, 2000). According to Neuman (2000), content analysis enables researchers to compare content across many texts and analyse it, and indeed in this study the content of various audit reports and improvement plans will be compared and analysed. In addition, content analysis can reveal aspects of the text’s content that are difficult to see (Neuman, 2000).

The text of audit report summaries was searched for recurring words or themes (Patton, 2002). As the essence of content analysis is to identify patterns or themes, the activity of pattern recognition was employed (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). Subsequently, the frequency of each pertinent characteristic found in the audit report summaries was tabulated (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). To ensure that the identified patterns were systematically captured, a content-analytic summary table was compiled (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). A content-analytic summary table provides a matrix display of pertinent data from multiple data sources or cases on

a single platform (Miles et al, 2014). Emerging patterns from the tabulated frequencies aided the process of finalising the themes and the interview questions.

- **Data analysis of interviews**

Although transcribing interviews is onerous and potentially costly, in this study the interviewer transcribed his own recordings as he was exposed to the interview context, had face-to-face contact with participants, and wanted to know his interviews better (Seidman, 2013). Thus, the interviewer felt that he was better positioned to effectively transcribe the interviews.

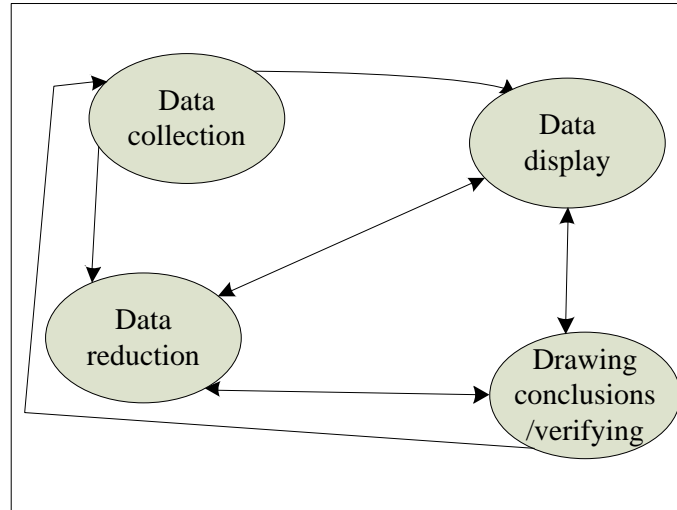
The massive amounts of data collected and transcribed (see Appendix M) created a huge challenge in this study particularly as regards analysing or making sense of it (Patton, 2002). In this study an attempt was made to provide some coherence and structure to this cumbersome dataset by using inductive data analysis as all qualitative data analysis is primarily inductive (Merriam, 2009).

Miles and Huberman (1994) define qualitative data analysis as comprised of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction is a process of selecting, simplifying, focusing, abstracting and transforming data that appear in transcriptions or written-up field notes. This process occurs continuously throughout the course of any qualitatively oriented project. In fact, even before the actual collection of data, anticipatory data reduction occurs as the researcher decides which conceptual framework, which research questions, which cases, and which data collection strategies to choose (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Further episodes of data reduction occur as the process of data collection proceeds when the researcher writes summaries, codes, teases out themes, makes clusters, makes partitions, and writes memos. Similarly, in this study Atlas.ti (see Appendix N) was used to code selected texts, categorise data by creating code families and write memos. In qualitative data analysis a code is a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative or essence-capturing attribute for portion of language-based or even visual data (Saldana, 2008). Saldana (2008) advises that when engaging in the activity of coding, the researcher needs to wear his or her analytic lens; however, the way the researcher perceives and interprets the data depends on the type of filter that covers that lens. In this study, data was further categorised by arranging

codes in a systematic order (Saldana, 2008). Miles and Huberman (1994) further point out that the data reduction process is not separate from analysis and continues after fieldwork until the completion of a final report.

The second flow of activity that constitutes data analysis is data display. Data displays generally refer to an organised, compressed assembly of information that enables the researcher to draw conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the course of their work, Miles and Huberman (1994) have become convinced that better data displays lead to valid qualitative analysis. Displays such as matrices, graphs, charts, and networks are designed to assemble organised information into an immediately accessible compact form so as to enable the analyst to draw justified conclusions. In this study, Atlas.ti was used to create networks of code families to display data from transcriptions. Appendix N shows how networks were used to display key interview data for each of the code families. As displays are an integral part of analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994), these network displays enabled the researcher to make inferences about the data and enhanced the analysis process. Miles and Huberman (1994) further add that designing displays also has clear data reduction implications.

The third activity that forms an integral part of the data analysis process is conclusion drawing and verification. Concomitantly, in this study, data was verified by constantly going back to the transcriptions to re-check the verbatim responses from participants. Conclusions drawn were also verified as the analysis proceeded. The three activities of data analysis— data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/ verification – are interwoven, before, during, and after data collection in parallel form, to constitute the general domain of data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As shown in figure 4.1, the three activities of data analysis and the activity of data collection itself form an interactive cyclical process.



(Source: Miles & Huberman, 1994)

**Figure 4.1: Components of data analysis: Interactive Model**

Qualitative data analysis is thus a continuous iterative enterprise; activities of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and/or verification come into the picture successively as analysis episodes follow each other.

According to Patton (2002), the two main sources in data analysis are questions generated during the conceptual and design stages of the research, and analytic insights and interpretations that surfaced during data collection. The main purpose of analysing data in this study was to obtain information that is usable and useful; this was done by describing and analysing the data and identifying connections between similarities and differences in issues. After conducting the interviews, data was transcribed and organised. This was followed by a systematic analysis of the transcripts by clustering similar themes together and attempting to interpret and draw inferences from them. In line with Patton's (2002) point that no formula exists for translating qualitative data into meaningful findings, in this study the invariable subjectivity of interpreting and presenting qualitative information was guarded against as the data is normally presented in the form of words.

In heeding Yin's (2009) advice, the case study data was analysed by starting with the questions in the case study protocol rather than with the data. The process started with a small question first, followed by the identification of the evidence that addresses the question. Thereafter, a



tentative conclusion was drawn based on the weight of the evidence. The analysis then continued to a larger question and the procedure was repeated. The process kept going until the main research questions were addressed.

Data from the digital recorder was played back and transcribed. Transcription is the representation of selected aspects of behaviour of individuals engaged in a conversation or interview (Kowal & O'Connell, 2004). The analysis of the transcribed data was done using thematic analysis as the focus of analysis is on significant content and themes (Rule & John, 2011).

The process of qualitative data analysis effectively began with reading the interview transcript. As the researcher read through the transcripts, he was engaged in coding, a process during which the researcher jots down notes and comments that strike him as interesting, potentially relevant, or important to this study (Merriam, 2009). The more specific form of coding used was open coding as the researcher was as expansive as possible and open to anything possible in identifying any segment of data that might be useful (Merriam, 2009).

Data was categorised into themes that capture some recurring pattern that cuts across the collected data. Atlas.ti was used as it allows one to enter verbatim interview transcripts (Merriam, 2009). Atlas.ti is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software which helps researchers code and categorise large amounts of narrative texts (Yin, 2009). In this study, the software helped with the building of networks of codes and the production of reports in a set of text (Bernard, 2000). Atlas.ti also provided an opportunity to have an interface in the data analysis process. This involved simultaneously coding and recoding the responses from interviews and creating different 'family trees' (Kvale, 1996). During the process of coding and recoding, data was sifted.

## **4.4 Methodological norms**

In order to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research, Guba and Lincoln in Koch (1994) recommend the criteria of credibility and transferability.

### **4.4.1 Credibility**

Researchers enhance credibility when they describe and interpret their experiences. In order to enhance the credibility of this study, all data that was gathered using both content analysis and interviews was safely stored. Thus, audit report summaries, notes, tape recordings, data analysed using Atlas.ti and other documents will be made available whenever they are required to prove the credibility of the study. To ensure the credibility of transcribed data, interview transcripts underwent a validation process by respondents. Data analysed using Atlas.ti has been saved and stored in a disk.

### **4.4.2 Transferability**

Guba and Lincoln (in Koch, 1994) assert that transferability depends upon the degree of similarity between the contexts. Many researchers prefer to use the term “fittingness” (Koch, 1994). According to Koch (1994), a study meets the criterion of fittingness when its findings can “fit” into a context outside the study situation and when its audience views its findings as meaningful and applicable in terms of their own experiences. Although the study was only conducted with academics, senior management and students at three public higher education institutions, the findings in this study could possibly have the likelihood of transferability as regards the effect of institutional audits on other higher education institutions. It is also intended for this study to suggest strategies to improve the manner in which institutional audits are conducted and followed up to maximise the benefits of this exercise.

Qualitative research uses generalisation to a limited extent since the intent of this research method is not to generalise findings to individuals, sites, or places other than those under study (Creswell, 2014). Yin (2009) makes a distinction between two types of generalisation: statistical and analytical generalisation. Statistical generalisation typically applies to survey research whereas analytical generalisation applies to case studies. As mentioned earlier in this chapter,

one of the criticisms of case studies is that they provide little basis for scientific generalisation (Yin, 2009). In response, Yin (2009) submits that, like experiments, case studies are generalisable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. In essence, case studies, like experiments, do not represent a “sample”, and a researcher’s goal in conducting a case study will be to expand and generalise theories (analytic generalisation) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalisation) (Yin, 2009).

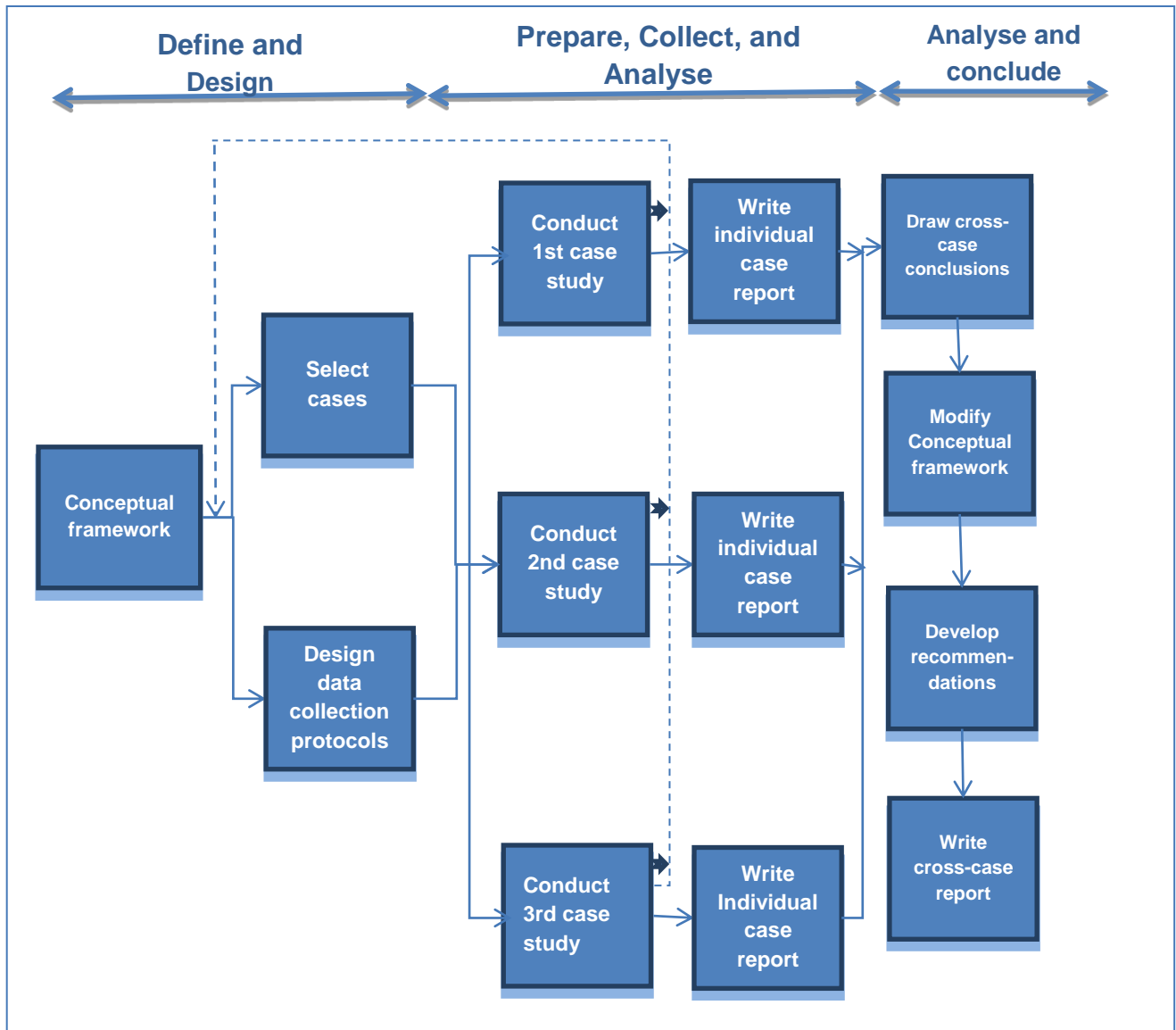
The three universities in this study have fundamental differences as each is a different institutional type (a traditional university, a comprehensive university and a university of technology) with a different purpose and mandate. Although the purpose of this study is not essentially to replicate the findings, the responses from these three fundamentally disparate institutional types which are at different levels of quality maturity will provide a comparative view of the effect of institutional audits across different types of higher education institutions.

Yin (2009) advises that the replication logic must be distinguished from the sampling logic. The sampling logic is commonly used in surveys and requires an operational enumeration of the entire universe or pool of potential respondents and then a statistical procedure for selecting a specific subset of respondents to be surveyed. The data resulting from the sample that is actually surveyed is assumed to reflect the entire universe or pool, with inferential statistics used to establish the confidence intervals for which this representation is presumed accurate. According to Yin (2009), any application of the sampling logic to case studies would be misplaced because case studies are not the best method for assessing the prevalence of phenomena, and would have to cover both the phenomenon of interest and its context, yielding a large number of potentially relevant variables. It is important to note that there is a link between replication logic and analytical generalisability, as well as between sampling logic and statistical generalisability.

The logic underlying multiple-case designs is similar in that each case must be carefully selected so that it either predicts similar results (literal replication), or predicts contrasting results but for anticipatable reasons (theoretical replication) (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) asserts that an important step in all the replication procedures is to develop a rich conceptual framework which should stipulate the conditions under which a particular phenomenon is likely to be found (literal replication) and the conditions under which it is unlikely to be found (theoretical replication).

The resultant conceptual framework then becomes the vehicle for generalising to new cases, making it similar to the role played in cross-experiment designs.

The replication approach to multiple-case studies is illustrated in Figure 4.2 (on the next page) which was adapted from Yin (2009). The figure shows that the first step in designing the study consists of theory development, and also that case selection and the definition of specific measures are important steps in the design and data collection process. Each individual case study comprises a ‘whole’ study (Yin, 2009) in which convergent evidence is sought regarding the facts and conclusions for the case; the conclusions of each case are then considered to be the information requiring replication by other individual cases. Both the results of the individual and multiple cases can and should be the focus of a summary report. For each individual case the report should specify how and why a particular proposition was demonstrated or not demonstrated. The report should indicate the extent of the replication logic across cases and why certain cases were predicted to have certain results whereas other cases, if any, were predicted to have contrasting results. The dashed line feedback loop in the figure represents a situation where important discovery occurs during the conduct of one of the individual case studies.



(Adapted from Yin, 2009)

**Figure 4.2: The replication approach to multiple-case studies**

#### 4.5 Research ethics

It is crucial for all researchers to take cognisance of the ethical codes and regulations governing their practice as failure to adhere to these considerations is perceived as undermining the scientific process and may result in dire legal and financial penalties and liabilities for

individuals and institutions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Interviews, in particular, have a strong ethical dimension as they concern interpersonal interactions and produce information about the human condition (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). To ensure that the research was ethically sound, permission was first sought and obtained to conduct research at University A, University B and University C (see Appendices J, K and L). Then the informed consent of all individual interviewees was obtained by providing them with sufficient information about the study (see Appendices D, E and F). The information provided to them also enabled them to determine possible risks or discomfort and to choose whether or not to participate in the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Participants' responses were further treated with strict confidentiality and the consequences of the research were made clear to them. Further, permission was sought to use a sound recording device from each interviewee (see Appendices D, E and F). Great caution was taken to ensure that the anonymity of respondents was protected. In addition, the interviewer conducted this research with all respondents as a PhD student of the University of Pretoria (UP) and not as an employee of the CHE. In all the correspondences and interactions, the researcher identified himself as a PhD student at the University of Pretoria. Ethical clearance for this research was also obtained from the University of Pretoria (see appendix B).

There were also confidentiality considerations in the referencing of the institutional audit reports of the three institutions. In order to protect the identity of the three universities, the in-text referencing of the institutional audit report summaries has been omitted. The reports were referenced 'HEQC report'. The full references are, however, provided in the bibliography section.

#### **4.6 The role of the researcher**

The researcher can perform various roles in qualitative research. The qualitative researcher performs roles that encompass a scientist, naturalist, field-worker, journalist, social critic, artist, film maker, quilt maker and essayist (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As a result, the researcher may be viewed as a 'bricoleur'. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe a bricoleur as a "Jack of all

trades, a kind of professional do-it-yourself". A qualitative researcher as bricoleur uses the aesthetic and material tools of his or her craft, deploying a wide range of methods, strategies and empirical materials available. Accordingly, in this study, the researcher performed various roles during the data collection process and during the write-up of the findings. A wide range of empirical data was used and various methods and strategies were deployed in attempting to piece them into a meaningful set of findings.

Patton (2002) points out that in qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument, as the credibility of qualitative methods is largely contingent on the skill, competence, and rigour of the investigator, as well as things going on in the investigator's life that could serve as a distraction. The researcher ensured that he was ready to conduct the interviews competently and with rigour by reading widely on how to conduct research interviews successfully, and by holding discussions with his study supervisors, other PhD students, PhD graduates and senior colleagues at his workplace.

The qualitative researcher's role is also metaphorically described by Kvale (in Babbie & Mouton, 2001) as a miner. The metaphor is based on the assumption that participants possess specific information and that the researcher's job is to dig it out. Relevant information was dug out, as it were, from participants at University A, University B and University C by navigating cautiously during the interview process. The interviewer in this study heeded Babbie and Mouton's (2001) advice by ensuring that the way he asked questions did not subtly bias the responses that he got. Great care was taken to guard against putting the questions in a particular context that would potentially omit altogether the most relevant and useful answers.

In all, the above pointers were taken into consideration when carrying out this research. The research was centred on the investigation of the opinions and perceptions of various higher education stakeholders on the performance of their respective institutions in various areas such as resource allocation, communication of vision and mission, support for women and black academics and assessment. Feedback from the participants was then compared with the information from audit reports to decipher the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on the three South African public higher education institutions.

## 4.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented the research methodology for this study. As indicated in the chapter, the aim of this study is to investigate the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience across different types of higher education institutions. The study focuses specifically on three selected South African universities which represent each of the three public higher education institutional types in South Africa: a traditional university, a university of technology, and a comprehensive university.

The chapter argued the research design chosen and how this research design has assisted in answering the research questions. Population and sampling were also described and argued. The chapter further described the process of developing interview schedules and identifying the main themes. The processes of data collection and analysis were also presented. Finally, methodological norms and research ethics were discussed.

The next two chapters, Chapters 5 and 6, present the study's findings. These are followed by a presentation of the summary of findings, main conclusions, reflections on the methodology and conceptual framework in Chapter 7.



## CHAPTER 5

# THE EFFECT OF INSTITUTIONAL AUDITS ON THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter, together with Chapter 6, presents the study's findings. The two chapters address the specific research questions (see section 3.16). Chapter 5 addresses the following sub-question:

- What discernible effect have the HEQC institutional audits had on the quality of aspects of teaching and learning policies, practices and behaviours?

The sub-question is addressed by focusing on the following themes: student assessment and security of exams (5.2), postgraduate education (5.3), private work by and professionalism of academics (5.4), the management of short courses (5.5), the management of work-integrated learning (5.6), and teaching large classes (5.7). As mentioned in chapter 2, the themes on teaching and learning, excluding postgraduate education, focus on undergraduate education. The findings for the three universities are disaggregated and discussed separately. At the end of the discussion of findings for each theme, a conclusion is presented.

As indicated in Chapter 4, the identified themes were based on the analysis of the executive summaries of the audit reports of the three universities, the HEQC's institutional audit criteria, literature review, and data emerging from interviews.

Wherever possible, the discussion will consist of the juxtaposition of recommendations given to the university and the responses from participants to ascertain the effect of institutional audits in each of the themes. It is important to note that not all the themes apply to all three universities as they were based on the recommendations peculiar to institutional types or specific circumstances at each institution.

The amount of time that lapsed between the HEQC's institutional audit visit and the interviews conducted for this study is different for University A, University B and University C. The institutional audit visits for the three universities were conducted between 2006 and 2010 whereas interviews conducted with senior management, academics and students for this study took place between 2012 and 2013. The first of the three universities to be audited by the HEQC was University C in 2006, followed by University B in 2009 and then University A in 2010. Thus, six years had lapsed between the HEQC audit visit and interviews for this study at University C, three years at University B and two years at University A.

## **5.2 Challenges regarding the assessment of students and security of exams**

Eighteen of the 22 universities that were audited received recommendations regarding assessment and the security of tests and exams, including the three universities under study. This could be an indication that assessment is a pervasive challenge across the higher education system in South Africa. The recommendations made in the audit reports of the eighteen universities comprised drafting, reviewing and implementing assessment policy; the appointment of external moderators; the manner in which moderators' reports are used to improve the quality of programmes; assessment emerging from internal and external programme reports; examination security; inaccuracies in published examination results; alignment of assessment practices with the new teaching methodologies; the introduction of external moderation for all exit level courses; implementation of language policy in the area of assessment; security of student records and the examination documentation; timeous provision of assessment feedback to students.

The three universities central to this study received recommendations that primarily focused on consistent implementation of assessment policy across the university, the practice of using past examination questions in test and examinations papers, the integrity and security of student records, and the provision of timely feedback on assessments. Thus, this study focused on these themes.

## University A

It emerged during interviews that the assessment policies at University A do not seem to be well communicated. Some of the academics were not even aware of the University's assessment policies. One academic from the University said that she doesn't "*even know if there is a university-wide assessment policy*" (AcadA1). She further pointed out that she was aware that: "*there is a faculty...policy on assessment but I've not seen it*" (AcadA1).

Consistent application of assessment policy across faculties at University A is another challenge with which the University is faced. This was confirmed by various stakeholders at the University. An executive dean of faculty at the University articulated the inconsistencies in the application of the assessment policy at University A as follows:

*"...adherence...across the faculties is not the same...I can tell you with certainty that adherence across the faculty is not coherent..."* (SnrMngA1)

Challenges as regards the consistent application of assessment policies appeared to have been prevalent even within faculties. An executive dean of faculty from the University indicated that one of the Schools in his faculty did not adhere to the agreed upon faculty assessment procedure:

*"As a faculty we have a policy which explains how we want to do things, how we want to submit our question papers. We are saying every question paper must be accompanied by a memorandum. So in Agriculture there are still those challenges of adherence to the agreed upon dates..."* (SnrMngA1).

The practice of repeating examination questions does not seem to have abated at University A, even after the HEQC made a recommendation in the institutional audit report advising the University to desist from the practice. During interviews with academics and students it emerged that some lecturers repeat examination questions from the previous years; in some cases whole papers are repeated, as expressed in the following statement by a student from University A:

*"...Business Management you can always cram the multiple choice answers that number 1 is A, number 2 is B."* (StudentA6)

Students at the University also reported that the lecturers have cut and pasted questions from previous papers. In fact, some cases were to such an extent that students could notice different font sizes on the same question papers, which suggested to them that the lecturers could have literally cut sections from previous question papers and pasted them on the new one before making copies for students. A student from University A puts it as follows:

*“The other time he (the lecturer) didn’t even type the question paper and you could see that it was a clear cut and paste as the paper had different fonts” (StudentA3)*

In some cases students claimed that they were given question papers from the previous years that had circled answers, as articulated in the following utterance from a student from University A:

*“And some of the recycled question papers even have circled answers. So we already have answers on the question paper” (StudentA9)*

Even more alarming is the claim by students at University A that some question papers that had been reported leaked, continued to be written as if nothing had happened. A student from the University said:

*“And some of the question papers do leak sometimes, and they continue writing the same question paper.” (StudentA6)*

It was clear from the interviews with students that students were not impressed with this practice of lecturers repeating questions as some of them indicated that they expected an effort from the lecturer to at least change the manner in which they asked a question, even if the essence of the question remained the same. The following statement from a student shows that students expect more from their lecturers in the way question papers are set:

*“Even if you are asking the same questions, at least do the effort of changing how you question.” (StudentA8)*

However, it was encouraging to note that University A acknowledges the challenges it faces regarding assessment and is making efforts to address these. One example of such efforts is showed by an executive dean of faculty at the University who indicated that he has put a school

“under administration” for failing to adhere to assessment policies and for the poor quality of their question papers. His views are articulated as follows:

*“adherence across the faculty is not coherent, but there is an effort to try and enforce it...at the leadership level...The challenge....is in the school of Agriculture...They are under administration as I speak. Ja, if you misbehave in my faculty, I’ll eat you alive... We put you under administration and so on.” (SnrMngA1)*

The Dean further pointed out that he checks all the examination question papers in his faculty to ensure that the quality and assessment standards are upheld:

*“I go through every paper to check how many marks and so on...and if I find anything wrong...the Director must tell me: ‘why did you pass it on?’...so I sit here for those days and then the lecturers get confronted.” (SnrMngA1)*

In addition, the Dean has put in place measures to tighten the security of examination question papers and curb leakages of the papers by ensuring that he is the only point of contact between the faculty and the University’s examinations centre as regards the submission of examination papers. He summarises these examination security measures as follows:

*“...the security (of examination papers) at the level of the faculty is tight...you have to kill me to get the keys. They, they are kept in the safe and from there...I go there...and submit to the exam centre and the receipt is issued out to me... So, if it leaks...it must be in my office or exam centre...Those are the people responsible. So...I’m satisfied with the level of security that I have put (in place)...at faculty level.” (SnrMngA1)*

It is further encouraging to note that “all question papers are now being reviewed and posted on the website for student consumption” (AcadA4), as stated by one academic at University A. The posting of these papers online, as the academic puts it, ensures that “if there are any repetitions they will be evident...” (AcadA4).

## *University B*

It was evident during interviews with both academic staff and members of senior management that the University's assessment policy was inconsistently applied. An academic at University B indicated that some departments at the University only gave multiple choice questions during assessments due to the large numbers of students they had. He stated that this was particularly prevalent within service departments as they often dealt with high student numbers from the various departments to which they were providing a common subject.

The view about the inconsistent implementation of assessments was corroborated by Vice-Deans at the University. One Vice-Dean ascribed the problem to high staff turnover and new academic staff members applying assessment practices from their previous institutions. The Vice-Dean states her views as follows:

*“One has to understand that at the level of practice in Departments, things are changing all the time. You get new academics from institutions with different cultures, and if certain assessment practices work well internationally or in Africa, those practices may not work well here. It takes a while before the word spreads that some practices may not work as well are being used. It is difficult to make sure that everything that must be in place is in place. In some departments, about 80% of the academic staff changes over the course of three to four years...” (AcadB1)*

Another Vice-Dean at the University found that continuous assessment serves different purposes in different departments. He felt that the University needs to ensure consistency in the use of continuous assessment across the University. He indicated that:

*“Some departments have continuous assessment contributing to the year mark, whereas others see it as a process to get students to work consistently and continuously. This may require a fresh look to ensure consistent use throughout the institution.” (AcadB2)*

It may be necessary for the University to provide training and clear guidelines on the implementation of continuous assessment to all academics to ensure better understanding and consistent application.

It was further evident during interviews with academics and members of senior management that University B was not using the external examiners' reports optimally. A vice dean of faculty from University B indicated that he does not receive all the external examiners' reports even though university protocol requires that he does. He has the view that these reports should also be discussed by the examination committee. He says:

*“I think this is an area where we can improve... They (external examiners' reports) are all supposed to come to me up to honours level, but I don't receive all the reports that I should. If there are concerns, I would address those concerns with the HoD (Head of Department). To get the bigger picture, an examination committee should be called upon to discuss reports periodically, which should help to tighten up governance procedures.” (AcadB2)*

Like University A, University B also had challenges regarding the repetitions of examination questions by lecturers. During interviews with students the following was said pertaining to the repetitions of examination questions:

*“...my experience is that...there are other people that are repeating the subject and they would come with the previous question papers to class. When the test comes it's exactly the same...it changes in other places; you find that one part is different from what they did last year...about 40, 50% (is cut and pasted).” (StudentB7)*

A further problem that was mentioned by students at University B was about seating arrangements during examinations which were providing opportunities for students to cheat, as encapsulated in the following statement by a student from the University:

*“Another problem is that we sit too close together in tests because you find that we sit the same way we sit in class and there's a lot of copying. Yes, you find that we're sitting at the back and asking each other for answers.” (StudentB8)*

However, despite these challenges, there seemed to be general concurrence among various academics at University B that the security of examinations is water tight. Academics who were interviewed felt that the measures that were put in place to safeguard the security of

examinations were effective. They also indicated that they have not heard any reports of exam leakages at the University. They articulate their views as follows:

*“We have...very tight (exam security measures); ...well we haven’t...seen nor heard of any leakages in terms of assessment. I think in the last 10 years or so that I’ve been here, I’ve never heard...of any (examination paper leakages.” (AcadB3)*

*“...even printing, I don’t submit the...summative assessment to the printers, I take it to the person responsible for assessment. So that person...when they take it ...for printing, he is accompanied or she is accompanied by security officers. And if it’s time for printing, nobody comes around that place. It’s so strict. I normally go to printing department and i know if it’s exam you’ll see security it’s very very tight. Even the transportation of those documents is very tight. And...when you go and collect scripts at the exam when students are writing, it’s so tight.” (AcadB4)*

Further, the University ensures that newly employed academics are aware of the examination procedures by communicating these to them shortly after their arrival at the University. These procedures are then reinforced by sending email communication to the academics just before the examination question papers are set:

*“If you are a new lecturer you get exam procedures...even if...we wrote exam in June, so the very same exam procedures that were e-mailed to you they are going to e-mail you again for final one for December or October.” (AcadB4)*

An academic staff member at University B suggested that the University should have “a mentoring system to induct new lecturers in the proper processes and practices.” She further suggested that a forum should be established where students and newly appointed academic staff members “get together to discuss problems at the grassroots level” (AcadB1).

The academic further indicated that an investigation of the assessment practices at the University had been conducted to help with the identification of problem areas, and that they were awaiting a report on assessment practices to understand the crucial issues so that they could “make sure that practices are brought in line with the policy” (AcadB1).



Another academic at the University pointed out that the University has put in place systems to ensure consistency of practices such as invigilation and the provision of feedback to students. He has the impression that, although there are areas of concern, generally the situation is improving:

*“...systems have been put in place to ensure healthy and clear policy implementation plans, starting from invigilation to aspects like assessment and getting feedback after assessment. There are isolated instances that make your hair rise, but those are generally minor issues. I don’t know of any gross irregularities, and I think the system is improving as a rule.” (AcadB2)*

University B appears to have tightened security measures regarding the security of exams. It was clear from interviews with academics that the University has clear procedures for submitting examination papers that could help to reduce the likelihood examination paper leakages. However, the University may need to look into the apparent repetition of examination questions by lecturers as this could compromise the quality of assessments. In addition, the seating arrangements and invigilation may need to be closely monitored to prevent any possibilities of cheating by students.

### *University C*

As with University A and University B, there seems to be a general lack of adherence to University C’s assessment policy by all faculties; at best, assessment policy appears to be complied with by some departments within faculties at faculty level. It became clear in interviews at University C that there is a pervasive lack of compliance with the University’s assessment policy by faculties. Feedback from interviews with deans of faculties revealed that some departments use continuous assessment while others do not. A dean of the faculty of science at University C conceded that assessment at the University was problematic and he had to stop using continuous assessment as he found it to have a negative effect on students’ learning. The dean’s views are articulated in the following statement:

*“Assessment is a problem in many cases. Students in some cases do continuous assessment, and people were excited about how it is done. I started looking at it and what helped me in my faculty is the Biomed Technology. I wanted to know why students*

*were not doing well in the Board Exams. I was told that students failed these exams, and that our University was in trouble. I found that the continuous assessment was the problem, because students will study a chunk, and write a test which they would pass, but they would never revisit that work. It was not integrated. That to me highlighted the importance of assessment. We revisited the process of continuous evaluation, and I required people to prove to me how it worked. I stopped it and proposed that we should go back to the usual way of assessment. I said that this must be debated properly so that our assessment should carry on with what we are doing. It is not easy to change this practice, because students are used to writing tests and doing well, but they cannot cope in the exams.” (SnrMngC1)*

Another dean of faculty at University C corroborates the view about inconsistencies in assessment practices by stating that the role of continuous assessment and its application are perceived differently by various departments at the University. He views are summarised as follows:

*“Some departments have continuous assessment contributing to the year mark, whereas others see it as a process to get students to work consistently and continuously. This may require a fresh look to ensure consistent use throughout the institution.”*  
(SnrMngC2)

At University C, like at University A and University B, the practice of repeating previous examination questions in examination question papers was prevalent. According to an academic staff member at the University, even a professional council for engineering qualifications identified the repetitions of questions in exam question papers as one of the concerns. The academic staff member’s views are expressed as follows:

*“...I heard that in other departments...ECSA (Engineering Council of South Africa)...came to do audits, and they found exactly like that in engineering, because the question papers were repeated...they gave them the same paper, I mean over and over, so...it’s a problem. But they (ECSA) picked it up.”* (AcadC3)

As regards the security of exams, leakages of examination papers appear to be prevalent at University C. An academic staff member from University C highlights the problem as follows:

*“...about the security I am not that happy because you find that sometimes there are some leaks for tests. Let’s say you want to give the test, we normally give a test on Saturdays so that they...they...they write a common paper. So, in most cases you find that there are leakage of papers of which we don’t know whether it’s where they’ve printed their printing or it’s among the lecturers or whatever.”(AcadC4)*

Another academic from the University pointed out that even after one of the exam papers was reported to have been leaked, the lecturers continued marking the paper and the results were considered valid. In some cases the number of people responsible for handling examination papers in the central examinations office seems to compromise the security of exams, as one academic from University C puts it:

*“...you take the paper to the exam office...for the exam then there’ll be leaks there as well...I don’t know who’s responsible for there, I think the lady that is responsible, there are a lot of people that...also have access to that (office). And also in the printing for the test during the semester, if you take it to the printing office, because there are a lot of people submitting papers, they can’t do yours immediately when you are there. So which means you have to leave it there and also the security there is not good. So, the leaks are also being observed in that place...” (AcadC1)*

Academics at University C also complained that due to exam leakages emanating from lax examination security, they end up having to unnecessarily set an extra paper for each examination session to replace the leaked original examination paper. One academic said that the previous year they had to *“set another paper because (they) were told that there was a leak. (They) had to re-set the paper. It happened twice.” (AcadC2)*

Another academic from the University added that they were even required to set an extra examination paper for each examination session in anticipation of a probable paper leakage, despite there being no reported leakage of their paper. She decried the situation as follows:

*“I do hear (of examination paper leakages) and I have set a third paper because of that; so...even if it’s not your paper that is a leak you suspect that every paper leaks so...all of us we have to redo and rewrite another assessment paper, and so it means there is more work for us because of people that are being negligent.” (AcadC1)*

The University management appears to be fully aware of the problems pertaining to the security of exams, and has apparently assured members of the University community that these security breaches would be dealt with, as in the following statement from an academic at the University:

*“...there were problems...some exams were even cancelled...last year first or second semester. But...I think there were assurances in the beginning of this year that these things (exam paper leakages)...cannot happen anymore. So, there were problems where exams leaked and that that I think everybody knows about...”(AcadC3)*

However, despite assurances by the University management that the security of examination papers would be addressed, some academics have the impression that the University does not seem to be making efforts to ameliorate the situation, as captured in the following statement by an academic at University C:

*“No, I haven’t seen anything being implemented (to improve the security of exam papers) there. I haven’t heard anything being talked about that they’re gonna implement.” (AcadC1)*

In certain cases, there seemed to be a lack of appeals processes for students regarding assessment. A senior management member from University C indicated that he was aware of students’ complaints about a lack of appeals processes:

*“Students also highlighted the lack of an appeals process to raise concerns with the assessment process. Sometimes they are also assessed by contract workers who are not as well informed about assessment practices.”(SnrMngC3)*

The senior manager’s statement was, to some extent, corroborated by students who mentioned that the capturing of marks was problematic as they would be told that they did not write exams when they knew they did. The students further complained that when they took the matter further, they would just be given a mark which they didn’t think was a correct reflection of their performance in the examinations. The students said the following:

*“On the issue of marks I also had a problem. I was told I didn’t write the exam for Communication and I know I wrote it and I passed it. And when I went to exams they gave me stories and said there are so many of you with the same problem. And the next day I went and I said what did I get and they said 59. But got a high year mark and I think I did well in the exam, I still can’t believe it. Maybe that 59 is the exam mark, they didn’t even include the year mark. (StudentC10)”*

*“And if you have a remark, you have to pay for it (i.e. pay for the exam script to be re-marked) but we are not even sure if they do it (mark the script), you just get the mark that you got (i.e. the initial mark received for the exam). (StudentC4)*

*“If they realise they made a mistake they just give you a mark. You don’t know whether the mark is the correct, eh, the mark you deserve, eh, I mean the real mark that you got. I don’t think it’s exactly what you got but it’s just to keep you quite.”(StudentC6)*

### ***Cross-university summary***

It is evident that the three universities are faced with various challenges pertaining to assessment of students. The major challenge that pervades the three institutions is the inconsistent application of the university-wide assessment policy. Feedback from participants suggests that this was due to ineffective communication of the assessment policy; some of the academics were not even aware of their university’s assessment policy. In fact, consistent implementation of assessment policy appears to be happening within some faculties, schools and departments rather than across the university as academics appear to be more aware of their faculties’ assessment policies than the overarching institutional one.

Another challenge that pervades the three universities was the practice of repeating examination questions. The problem was so serious that in some cases the cutting and pasting of questions from previous examination papers was glaring and whole papers were repeated. The repetition of examination questions could affect students’ learning process. Indeed, Struyven, Dochy and Janssens (2005) contend that students’ perception of assessment tends to influence their approach to learning; these approaches can either be positive or negative. Assessments that are perceived

by students to be inappropriate tend to encourage surface learning approaches (Struyven et al, 2005). Accordingly, the repetition of previous question papers by academics at University A, University B and University C could affect the learning process negatively by encouraging superficial learning approaches. In fact, it is easier to induce surface learning approaches than to promote the deep learning approaches (Struyven et al, 2005). It is thus easier for academics to set easier and more predictable questions in students' assessments than those that appeal to students' higher order and deep learning approaches. Academics at University A, University B and University C appear to engage in assessment practices that largely promote surface learning as some students can perform well in their exams by primarily finding answers to previous question papers instead of working hard to have a better and deeper understanding of the subject content.

Academics have a key role to play in students' learning approach; however, findings in a study by Struyven et al (2005) suggest that academics are not successful in providing adequate guidance to students about optimum approaches to learning.

Interviews with academics also revealed that University A and University C had serious challenges regarding the leakage of examination papers. It was further indicated that some question papers that had been reported leaked, continued to be written or marked regardless. Although, it is encouraging to note that some universities in this study acknowledged the challenges they faced regarding assessment and were making efforts to address these, it is still a source for great concern that these assessment practices were allowed to happen and degenerate to this extent. More so because assessment defines the higher education curriculum in students' eyes, exerts a profound influence on their learning, and has long been perceived as the driving factor for improving teaching and learning (Beaumont, O'Doherty & Shannon (2011).

As Fletcher, Meyer, Anderson, Johnston and Rees (2012, p. 131) aptly put it:

*“Assessment is high stakes for everyone involved, hence requiring that both teachers and learners have better understandings and expectations about its purposes and processes.”*

### 5.3 Postgraduate education

Of the 22 public higher education institutions that were subjected to institutional audits, 21 received recommendations pertaining to supervision or postgraduate education. The only institution at which the panel had no concerns regarding postgraduate education was Mangosuthu University of Technology, which is the only university whose primary focus was on undergraduate education. This clearly shows that challenges pertaining to supervision and postgraduate education are pervasive across the public higher education sector in South Africa. The recommendations made to the three universities central to this study in the area of postgraduate education covered the following issues: supervisors acting as examiners of their own students, high workload for supervisors, lack of supervision capacity, delays in the proposal approval process, inadequately qualified supervisors, using the same external examiners for too long without variation. The prevalence of some of these challenges are corroborated by Singh (2011) who found that universities are grappling with a lack of critical mass in terms of suitably qualified and experienced supervisors, and an increase in workloads of supervisors.

#### *University A*

Feedback from students at University A indicated that inadequately qualified lecturers are allowed to supervise students. It was clear during the interview with students at the University that they don't want to be supervised by under-qualified lecturers. The following sums up how students feel about inadequately qualified supervisors:

*"In our department last year we had a lecturer who was supervising students but was not even enrolled for a Masters. He said he was enrolling for Masters but I don't even think he enrolled. But you need someone who has a good background in research to supervise students" (StudentA8)*

In some faculties at University A there were sufficiently qualified lecturers but the constraining factor was the lack of variety in the fields of study within a faculty because lecturers were not qualified in diverse fields of study. For instance, lecturers in one department which had the highest proportion of lecturers with doctoral degrees indicated that most of their colleagues in the faculty specialised in a similar field of study. One lecturer from the department said:

*“...our expertise are not too diverse. There are a number of staff members that...are sitting in the same field. So, while that is good to form a strong research group...the disadvantage is that... the teachers also are in one research field. Most of the teachers are also in one research field. So that is the limitation but mostly, uh, we have, uh, fairly highly qualified staff members mostly with PhDs in my department. (AcadA1)*

The lack of supervision capacity appears to have resulted in high workloads for those academics who are involved in the supervision of postgraduate students. It was evident during interviews with academics at University A that the teaching loads of supervisors are not reduced to create space for supervision time. Some academics felt that the high workloads for supervisors impacted on the length of time students took to complete their studies as well as the quality of supervision. For example, one academic at the University said that there have been *“delays in terms of study completion due to high numbers students per staff member and in some cases the quality is compromised.”* (AcadA4)

This problem of high workloads for supervisors seems to have been compounded by the lack of policy on workloads for supervisors. The lack of clarity on workloads for supervisors appears to have given some academics the impression that the determination of the workload for supervisors is contingent on whether or not they are favoured by their line managers. One academic from the University felt that the issue of supervision workloads has *“a lot of politics”* and that whether or not you get a fair workload *“depends on who you are”* (AcadA1).

Interviews with students from University A pointed to delays in the proposal approval process. Students even suggested that the delays could be a result of supervisors’ incompetence, lack of commitment from lecturers or even that their supervisors could be sabotaging their efforts, as embedded in the following responses from students:

*“If you submit a proposal and don’t make follow ups, even the supervisor won’t look at it. You should even give a deadline that by next week I’m coming to collect it. If you are not saying that, it will stay in his office for three months.”* (StudentA1)



*“...You wonder whether they (students) are being sabotaged or they are just not good students. You wonder if the supervisors are not good or someone is just not interested in the students.” (StudentA2)*

The lack of supervision capacity has resulted in some departments not offering masters and doctoral qualifications. At University A, the Schools of Optometry and Pharmacy were reported by staff and students to be offering no postgraduate degrees because lecturers were inadequately qualified to supervise. The lack of postgraduate offerings does not augur well for the next generation of scholars as it could create further problems in the area of postgraduate education.

Another concern with regard to postgraduate education is the issue of supervisors acting as examiners for their own students. It became evident during interviews with senior management members and academics at University A that supervisors were also playing the role of examiner for their own postgraduate students. However, it was also encouraging to note that the university was intending to discontinue the practice, as encapsulated in the following statement from an academic at University A:

*“We still have that (the practice of supervisors examining own students) here, but I’m told this year onwards it’s no longer going to happen. I evaluated a number of my students’ dissertation and thesis...” (AcadA3)*

This was corroborated by a senior member of management who conceded that the institutional audit conducted by the HEQC helped the University to reconsider the role of supervisors in the assessment of their postgraduate students. The following statement by a senior manager at University A also shows that the University found the practice to be problematic and was planning to address it:

*“I think the audit identified that there were instances where the roles of the supervisor and examiner became conflated, and we are trying to address this as an institution through the improvement plan. Looking at it in an honest manner, there were serious loopholes.” (SnrMngA3)*

## *University B*

Members of senior management conceded that University B was faced with challenges regarding postgraduate supervision capacity. One senior manager attributed the lack of supervision capacity to the merger between a traditional University and a former technikon:

*“We merged a technikon and a university, which meant that there were more staff unable to supervise, meaning that those who can are overloaded.” (SnrMngB2)*

The view about the University’s lack of supervision capacity was corroborated by academic staff members. An academic staff member at the University said that University B has *“a shortage of supervisory capacity in many disciplines”* (AcadB1).

The institutional audit of University B also highlighted the lack of grievance procedures for postgraduate students at the University. As pointed out by one senior management member at University B, students don’t feel sufficiently protected by the feedback procedures and as a result there is hardly any feedback from students regarding supervision as they are afraid of the perceived effects of such feedback. The senior management member pointed out that the University is making plans to improve the situation to enable students to raise any problems regarding supervision without fear of reprisals:

*“...there is a drive to have postgraduate support workshops. The difficulty is to get feedback from students, because they feel very vulnerable when they complain. We are vigorously working to improve the situation.” (SnrMngB2)*

To further capacitate the area of postgraduate supervision, universities also place their lecturers in the masters and doctoral qualification programmes. At University B, there are also some supervision forums that have taken place to allow for some interactions between experienced and novice supervisors, as attested to by a senior management member at the University as follows:

*“We have a staff qualifications programme to try and get all staff to have at least a Master’s degree, and we recently instituted a Doctoral support programme...(we) have*

*run some supervision forums, and there is a drive to have postgraduate support workshops. (SnrMngB2)*

There are even efforts to attract rated researchers to help to build supervisory capacity within the university by training upcoming supervisors. The following statement from a member of senior management from University B bears testimony to this:

*“I know that there were efforts to attract rated researchers, no matter what the rating. Researchers were head hunted and remunerated extremely well, which seemed to have worked – some of them are still around, and they have trained people to supervise others and increased our research output.” (SnrMngB3)*

It is evident that University B has made considerable progress in addressing the recommendations made about supervision capacity.

#### *University C*

Like University A and University B, University C was confronted with challenges pertaining to supervision capacity. This was confirmed by an executive Dean of Faculty at the University who indicated that supervision capacity is *“a problem everywhere” and that the University had “a big problem with supervising”*. (SnrMngC3)

There seemed to have been a prevalence of gender disparities in supervisory capacity at University C. An academic from the University mentioned that her department did not have any female supervisors. Her sentiment is aptly captured in the statement following statement:

*“I think in my department we have...mostly males that are supervising and they can supervise M students and PhD students, but...females we don’t have unfortunately.”*  
(AcadC1)

Despite the challenges encountered by University C as regards supervisory capacity, it was evident from respondents at the University that mechanisms were being put in place to address the issue. In an attempt to address the lack of supervision capacity University C has collaborated with other universities to share supervision capacity by employing academics from other

universities as consultant supervisors, as mentioned in the following statement by a dean at University C:

*“... we identify (supervisors) at certain universities; for example at North West (University)...where I identify a...consulting professor...I consult with her for a period of three years and she must have at least five...masters students...in certain programmes we have (students) at D (doctoral) level but (in) certain (programmes) on masters level... she’s (the consulting professor) coming every second week on (a) Friday. I pay the petrol...and I give her a certain allowance for a month...they (consultant supervisors) will assist me...with my supervision, because I do not have (sufficient adequately qualified) staff here...” (SnrMngC3)*

In addition, the consultant supervisors also played a role in improving supervisory capacity by serving as mentors for emerging researchers. Further, the lecturers at University C collaborate with those from other universities to write papers. It was indicated during interviews that the partnership is not only with local universities but also with international universities that are regarded to be performing well in a particular field identified by the University. An executive dean of faculty from University C corroborates these by pointing out that:

*“...my lecturers here writing with someone at another university an article...they collaborate...we have a partnership with Kingston University in London and with Kingston; they are in the field of art. They are very good in the art field, graphic design and photography. So they assist me there with supervision also. And I send...my lecturers for a week.” (SnrMngC3)*

### ***Cross-university summary***

Feedback from senior managers, academics and students reveals that University A, University B and University C are faced with various challenges regarding postgraduate education. These challenges include supervision capacity, lack of grievance procedures for postgraduate students, delays in the proposal approval process and supervisors performing the role of examiners of their own students. It became clear during interviews with senior managers, academics and students that, of all the aforementioned challenges regarding postgraduate education, supervisory capacity

poses the greatest challenge at the three universities. Indeed, this finding is corroborated by the PhD study conducted by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) report (2010) which found that the percentage of permanent academic staff with PhDs at South African universities ranged from five percent to 61 percent per university. The study further points out that in 2007 the top nine South African public higher education institutions were responsible for producing 83% of the PhD graduates in the South African public higher education sector (ASSAf, 2010). It is worth noting that the percentage of permanent academic staff with doctoral qualifications at the three universities central to this study (University A, University B and University C) ranges between 12 and 18 percent. The three universities also lie within the bottom eight universities as regards permanent academic staff with doctoral qualifications according to the ASSAf report. It is thus not surprising that University A, University B, and University C are faced with challenges regarding postgraduate supervision capacity. What is surprising, however, is the variable commitment and urgency with which this issue is addressed at the three universities. As mentioned earlier, at one of the three universities (University A) the problem was so dire that, some schools did not offer any postgraduate qualifications beyond the honours degree level due to lack of sufficiently qualified academics to supervise masters and doctoral students. During interviews at University A, some students even indicated that inadequately qualified lecturers were allowed to supervise students. It should be noted, however, that although the students who participated in the focus group at University A were from different faculties, the academics were from the faculty of science and agriculture. To this end, the participants' views should be read with circumspection to pre-empt potential generalisations.

Academics at the three universities indicated that the lack of postgraduate supervisors has resulted in high workloads for those academics who were qualified to supervise. The problem was further compounded by the apparent lack of policy on workloads for supervisors. Despite the challenges encountered by the three universities as regards postgraduate education, it was evident from the respondents that mechanisms were being put in place to address the issues raised. In an attempt to address the lack of supervision capacity some universities have collaborated with other universities to share supervision capacity and agreed with the other universities to allow their experienced supervisors to mentor their emerging researchers, placed their lecturers in the masters and doctoral qualification programmes of their partner universities,

and established supervision forums that have taken place to allow for some interactions between experienced and novice supervisors.

#### 5.4 Private work by and professionalism of academics

Of the three universities central to this study, University A is the only one that received a recommendation that raised serious concerns about the practice of undertaking private work by academics at the expense of teaching and learning quality. In addition, the HEQC institutional audit report points to instances where academics did not arrive for lectures or were not available during student consultation hours.

It was evident during interviews that private work by academics at University A continues to be a huge problem that tends to interfere with their academic work. Various academics and senior management members are aware of the problem and acknowledge that they are aware of its negative impact on the core academic activities. It became clear during interviews with various respondents that the faculties of law and health sciences at University A had several academics involved in private work which affected their performance at the University. An executive dean of faculty from the University felt that it is “*a thorn in the flesh... of management because...you have people who spend more time outside the institution than within*” (SnrMngA1). He further stated that the problem has been prevalent for the previous years and that it has been a “*very serious challenge*” (SnrMngA1). An academic from University A added that:

*“...it (private work) happens in the faculty of law and also the health sciences like the optometrists. They mostly have practices outside the University. So it affects contact time with the students.” (AcadA1)*

Another academic felt that private work makes the academics to be absent from the University for some time and also compromises the quality of the output as it affects the concentration of their “*academic energy*” (AcadA4). He further lamented that the academics’ absenteeism due to private work deprives students of the much needed presence of academic staff and also reduces consultation time with students and availability for supervision. His views are as follows:

*“Yes, there are some colleagues who run private businesses which requires them to be absent for some time and even urgent matters that need to be attended to in their private businesses taking them away from the academic work-place...we have observed colleagues leaving campus earlier than expected although most of them would take leave or half-day leave to attend to these matters. It does compromise quality of academic output in the sense that the concentration of academic energy is spent somewhere else and the presence of academic staff is most sought after by students, affecting consultation hours and research supervision availability.” (AcadA4)*

An executive dean of faculty at University A even referred to the lecturers’ unavailability for students and lack of commitment as *“academic crime”* (SnrMngA1). He felt strongly that lecturers who are guilty of lack of professionalism and are giving students poor quality of service should be charged and taken through a disciplinary hearing. The dean clearly stated that since students were paying for the lecturer’s attention, if lecturers were not available for consultations then they were committing a crime against the students.

In addition, students from University A complained that the University does not seem to be willing to employ the best qualified academics and that it does not treat some of its existing staff well. Students further claimed that some of their lecturers were not adequately qualified to lecture and that impacted negatively on students’ performance. They pointed out that they were lectured by honours students who did not prepare them adequately; students claimed that classes that were taught by honours students performed worse relative to those taught by better qualified lecturers. The students’ views are encapsulated as follows:

*“I think the University is not willing to pay because those lecturers want a lot of money because of their qualifications and their experience. During the first semester we had a lecturer from Switzerland but he left because he was not paid for six months.” (StudentA6)*

*“And in my course we had two groups; one group was lectured by a professional lecturer and the other one was lectured by an honours student. The one that was lectured by an honours student we all failed because he didn’t cover the scope and he didn’t do anything in that scope. So we all failed.”(StudentA10)*

The problem is compounded by the University's ostensible lack of regulation of private work. It emerged during interviews with members of senior management that there was no policy on private work at the University. This lack of policy could have led to the situation spiraling out of control. A deputy registrar from University A indicated that

*“Regulation of the private work outside the University...in terms of getting the approval...is very critical because now I don't think there's any regulations. A person, if you are...you are a lawyer...you're...you are lecturing here you can be an advocate and open a private eh practice there. Now, the experience and the complaints and the vibes that one gets is that in such instances, in such professions people tend to spend more time there than at the university. Now, it compromises their work at the university.” (SnrMngA4)*

Despite academics' private work being a huge challenge at University A, there seem to be mechanisms that have been put in place to ensure that this malady is addressed. During interviews academic staff members at the University had the impression that the university is making efforts to correct the situation. The academics expressed their views as follows:

*“...but now at least they've realised that (problems pertaining to private work by academics), they are working on it and there is something coming, there are committees now who are looking at the new regulations.” (AcadA3)*

*“...the University management has since initiated debate around the establishment of a working policy around this matter and this will guide academics in their daily activities regarding management of private work versus performance of duties in the academic environment.”(AcadA4)*

It also became evident in interviews with members of senior management that the University was in the process of drafting policies on private work by academics. In fact the University seems to be drafting separate policies for contract and private work. The policy on private work was being debated by staff unions and the University management as one member of senior management indicated in the following statement:



*“...the University has tried to come up with...policy to regulate that (private work). Ja, but besides doing that there is policy which tried to regulate what is called contract work. If you want to do that, right, you get permission but the University is going to get so much from that. Ja, to try and regulate. So, so, you know, the fact that the University decided to come up with the policy around that is because it was a problem. That tells you that it was a problem. And how do you regulate it? How do you bar people from doing that when you don't have a policy?...private work...is being debated by the unions and management, private work. Well I don't know, I am part of the negotiating team, I don't know which way it will go.”(SnrMngA1)*

It seems the policies are also meant to serve as deterrents to ensure that the situation does not get out of hand, by charging academics a percentage of their income made from private work. A member of senior management indicated that more often they realise that the academic was involved in private work when they want to claim the money for their work that has been paid to the University. It is then that the University usually becomes aware of the academic's involvement in private work, and proceeds to take the percentage of the amount due to the University and give the rest to the academic involved.

### ***Theme summary***

It was evident during interviews at University A that private work by academics at the University is a serious problem. Various academics and senior management members acknowledged the problem and its negative impact on the core academic activities. It became clear during interviews with various respondents that the problem was more prevalent in some faculties than in others. Some academics and senior managers pointed out that private work resulted in some of those academics involved in private work being absent from the University during working hours and also compromised the quality of their output. The problem is exacerbated by the University's apparent lack of regulation of private work; some senior managers said that there was no policy on private work at the University.

Despite academics' private work being a huge challenge at University A, the University appears to be making efforts to correct the situation by, inter alia, drafting policies on contract and private work, and putting in place strict measures to bring this practice under control.

### **5.5 The management of short courses.**

Half of all the South African universities that were audited (11 of 22) by the HEQC received recommendations pertaining to short courses. The main issues covered in these recommendations were the quality of short courses, their impact on the mainstream teaching and learning programmes, certification, management and oversight, the impact of short courses on the academic workload in relation to the core functions, and the development of the central register for short courses. In this sub-section, focus is on University B as it handles the largest number of short courses among the three universities, partly due to its size – it is the largest of the three universities central to this study in terms of student numbers, and among the largest higher education institutions in South Africa.

During interviews with academic staff and senior managers it was evident that short courses are a contested terrain between faculties and the University management. A senior manager at the University pointed out that while the University management wanted to develop a framework for the offering of short courses at the University, faculties resisted it as they did not want interference from central management as regards short courses. It seems academics view short courses as a source of extra income necessary to augment their salaries and view the intentions of the University's central management with suspicion. Faculties seem to have the impression that central regulation of short courses would compromise their supplementary income. The following response by a senior manager at the University captures these sentiments

*“Let me give you some background. This is such a sensitive issue. It is a cash cow, as someone quite rightly said. The preparations for the audit as well as the audit identified problems. I was asked to develop a framework which, one year later, is still not finalised because the faculties don't want to be regulated and view the framework as interference. Faculty members claim that because (the University) does not pay*

*competitive salaries staff should be allowed to supplement their salaries (quite generously) by offering these non-subsidised programmes. I've been told that some faculties will have to close down if the non-subsidised programmes were closed out."*  
(SnrMngB3)

An academic from the University corroborated the senior manager's views by indicating that she doesn't "*think there needs to be a central monitoring or oversight function, since Departments cannot be told what and how to offer*" (AcadB1). She did, however, concede that "*a policy and guidelines would be useful to govern review processes*". (AcadB1)

Indeed, senior management wanted to tighten the management of short courses by developing a short course policy and putting in place and communicating guidelines for the approval process of short courses. The University management further planned to address issues such as academics' workload, quality assurance, resource and financial management, and to create a central short course database for all short courses offered by the University. A senior manager at the University articulates these views as follows:

*"...all we really want is a database, and some approval processes that would involve Senate's approval of programmes. We want aspects like workload, resource and financial management of the programmes as well as quality assurance aspects to be regulated. The framework has not yet been approved yet, despite having been sent to the faculties twice already. Faculties will claim that their autonomy is being affected. I do think that the Deans are more aware of the issues, and we have been asked by some Deans to come and make presentations to their people. We also had an interesting experience where we were asked to review a unit responsible for non-subsidised programmes, and we conducted a full self-evaluative peer-based review, which was valuable for the faculty and staff members."* (SnrMngB3))

Even some academics concurred that the short course approval processes needed to be tightened. An academic staff member at the University felt that that short courses "*should address very real needs, and that the programmes should...be approved at the Faculty level and not only be left up to the Departments to approve*" (AcadB1).

### *Theme summary*

It was evident that the management of short courses at University B remains a challenge. Academic staff and senior management had different views about the management of short courses. Senior management wanted to develop a framework for the offering of short courses at the University to ensure consistency of practice and better management. However, faculties resisted the central regulation of short courses as academics did not want interference from central management regarding these courses. This was mainly because academics viewed short courses as a source of extra income that augments their salaries and thought senior management wanted to centralise the management of these courses in order to usurp this opportunity from faculties.

Notwithstanding these disparate views between senior management and academics regarding the management of short courses at University B, it seems senior management is determined to forge ahead with measures effectively manage short courses by developing a short course policy and providing guidelines for the approval of short courses.

## **5.6 Management of work integrated learning**

Work-integrated learning (WIL) refers to:

‘An educational approach that aligns academic and workplace practices for the mutual benefit of students and workplaces’ (CHE, 2011, p. 78).

The primary purpose of WIL is to enhance student learning, and in doing so several innovative curricular, assessment and pedagogical forms have been developed in a quest to address concerns raised about employability, graduateness and civic responsibility (CHE, 2011). Of the six universities of technology in the South African higher education system, five received recommendations pertaining to the management of work-integrated learning (WIL). This is hardly surprising considering that the international higher education benchmark for student to staff ratios regarding students on work placements is 88:1, while it is 234:1 in South African

universities of technology. These ratios, particularly the latter, suggest that the quality of WIL monitoring is usually not adequate (CHE, 2011).

The only university of technology that did not receive a recommendation about work-integrated learning, Mangosuthu University of Technology, actually had a commendation on the implementation and monitoring of work-integrated learning. As has been mentioned earlier in this chapter, Mangosuthu University of Technology focuses on undergraduate education, which could be allowing the University to give greater focus on work-integrated learning – an integral and important component of undergraduate studies at a university of technology. Another possible reason that makes it possible for Mangosuthu University of Technology to perform well in the management of work-integrated learning could be that it is the smallest university of technology in South Africa in terms of student numbers, which could be enabling it to manage the implementation and monitoring of work-integrated learning.

The recommendations made in the institutional audit reports of the five universities of technology mainly covered issues such as the placement and monitoring of students and developing and strengthening partnerships with industry.

Of the three universities central to this study, University C is the only one that received a recommendation about the management of work-integrated learning (WIL) from the HEQC institutional audit, primarily because it is the only university of technology in this study. As a university of technology, University C requires virtually all its students to complete the WIL component. The institutional audit raised concerns about University C's placement and monitoring of students in the WIL programme as well as resourcing and strengthening the management of WIL.

It emerged during interviews with students, academics and senior management members at University C that the management of work-integrated learning (WIL) was a challenge. One of the greatest challenges was the monitoring of students involved in work-integrated learning by academics. Respondents from University C pointed out that some of the students in the programme are not receiving training that is relevant to their studies. They expressed the view that if the lecturers conducted more visits and communicated more with the companies where the

students are placed, the problem of irrelevant training could be alleviated. An academic staff member from University C articulated her concerns as follows:

*“But what also our students are saying is that they will take them for, eh, for example if he is doing Analytical Chemistry, they will take them and then when they get there, they are not doing anything of Analytical Chemistry. They are making them tea girls and tea boys...”(AcadC1)*

The issue of irrelevant training was corroborated during interviews with students. One student pointed out that in some companies students are assigned duties that have no relevance to their field of study and that they are given tasks such as *“cleaning instead of doing like engineering stuff”* (StudentC6).

It was also clear from the feedback received that University C was struggling to place all students that require WIL training in industry. A member of senior management at the University implied that the government’s expectation that universities place all students who require WIL training is unrealistic. He added that it is even more difficult to find placements for international students. He expressed his views as follows:

*“Placement is not easy, and even though the government tried to assist, it is difficult. For the government to insist that (all) our students should undergo WIL is pushing it, because there are not that many companies geared to do this. Some of the students are lucky, but it is not always possible to help all of them. It is also a problem for international students to be placed.”(SnrMngC2)*

It also emerged that some of the students take years to graduate after completing all their coursework because they struggle to find WIL placements. An academic from University C submitted that the University needed to put in place mechanisms to avert the recurrence of this unfortunate situation as follows:

*“...you can find that the student is finished with that he’s supposed to study. He’s left with the in-service, and it takes years for that particular student to graduate because he*

*didn't do the in-service...the student doesn't have to wait years for graduation.”(AcadC1)*

There was also a view that the universities are not doing enough to ensure that students in the WIL programme are placed. As an academic at University C observes in the following statement, the University needs to be more committed to the placement of students by forging partnerships with various organisations where students can potentially receive relevant training for their WIL component:

*“No, they're not doing enough...because students...have to find their own... in-service. So, I think...if the University can get more involved in that part, then they can control that. If they have companies that they have...collaboration with and they can take students there then it, it can work...”(AcadC1)*

Notwithstanding these challenges pertaining to work-integrated learning, there have been efforts made to assist students to get placements and also monitor their training.

As a way to deal with this challenge regarding the monitoring of students in the work-integrated learning programme, a senior management member at University C mentioned that resources have been committed to WIL to enable effective monitoring of students who have been placed in industry. He indicated, for example, that two cars have been bought to specifically address the issue of monitoring students in the WIL programmes. The senior manager noted that when students in the WIL programme are monitored, the chances of them getting irrelevant training are reduced. He suggested that the University should appoint WIL champions from each programme. His views are expressed as follows:

*“...we have high calibre people to champion this thing (WIL), so I think the monitoring is done in the best possible way. We are using a certain amount of the WIL fees paid by students to plough back and pay for things like petrol. It is necessary to have a champion in each faculty to look at issues relating to WIL. We...should have staff members in each programme to focus on WIL, and in my faculty we have two vehicles dedicated to WIL visits. I'm saying that I was part of monitoring WIL. I hired somebody to look at WIL in relation to Chemistry, which was why we bought a second car...we*

*are doing more than we could be doing to ensure that students don't do irrelevant work as part of their WIL programmes.” (SnrMngC3)*

There were also indications that some schools have formed partnerships with various employers to facilitate the placements of students. Another senior management member at the University indicated that her faculty had established partnerships with various hotels to ensure that their hospitality students get placements and relevant training.

This view was corroborated by a deputy vice-chancellor at the University who stated that the University works in collaboration with an extended network of organisations. He further submitted that the University was planning to improve the WIL component further and also strengthen the level of academics' involvement in work-integrated learning. He indicated that:

*“...we have...an extended network of...organisations supporting and we are...committed to continue and strengthen that process. We are currently revisiting our structure to enhance the process even further...we are planning to elevate even the leadership in that, so that we strengthen the level of academic interaction between the work-integrated function in the institution and the academic faculties.” (SnrMngC1)*

The deputy vice-chancellor further alluded to the University's plans to consider alternatives such as developing students' practical experience by using simulations. He stated that instead of letting students wait for WIL placements to receive practical training, they provide opportunities for students to receive relevant exposure and continuous training at the University where possible.

*“We are currently in a process to look at alternative options to, to assist students with, with, with developing their practical experience through simulations and so on. For example, we have with our law students...a practice of work-integrated learning continuously. So on a weekly basis people come here and in the normal classes they have the opportunity to engage with practical issues. And...I think we do a fine job” (SnrMngC1).*



There are many definitions of a simulation, but broadly a simulation is a representation of reality; it is a model of events, items or processes that do or could exist (Feldman, 1995). Simulations can be used at different stages to support a WIL (Feldman, 1995). The use of simulations in WIL projects is supported by Welch, Vo-Tran, Pittayachawan and Reynolds (2012) who find them to enhance student learning. Welch et al (2012) add that the blending of authentic experiences and scaffolded learning by simulations gives students experience of diverse situations. Simulation is one of the four main approaches identified by Patrick, Peach, Pocknee, Webb, Fletcher and Pretto (2008) to be included in a WIL program; the others being project work, placement and virtual WIL.

It was further encouraging to note that at least some schools at University C limit the numbers of students they enrol to those they can place in WIL programmes. Even more positive is that the University encourages its academics to go outside the country to monitor international students engaged in work-integrated learning in countries bordering South Africa. A senior manager at the University stated that the academics in her faculty went as far as Botswana to monitor hospitality students placed in hotels in that country.

### *Theme summary*

It appears that University C, like many other universities of technology in South Africa, is confronted with various challenges regarding the management of work-integrated learning. These challenges include the monitoring of students involved in work-integrated learning, and the placement of students that require WIL training in industry. Notwithstanding these challenges, it appears that the University has made efforts to address the situation. It emerged during interviews with senior managers that resources such as cars bought specifically for WIL purposes, so as to enable effective monitoring of students who have been placed in industry. It was further pointed out that in some faculties WIL champions have been appointed for each programme. The University has also considered alternatives such as developing students' practical experience by way of simulations instead of placement opportunities in industry.

## 5.7 Teaching of large classes

As a comprehensive university in a large metropolitan area, University B is one of the largest universities in South Africa in terms of student numbers. To this end, it was virtually inevitable that the University would be confronted with large classes. In fact University B is the only one of the three universities central to this study that received a recommendation from the HEQC's institutional audit about large classes. Owing to the lack of a research-based benchmark for defining large classes, in this study large classes refer to classes that have resource constraints and where room size constraints result in the class being divided and taught separately in the form of repeat lectures where the class is repeated several times, either by the same lecturer or by several different lecturers (Jawitz as cited in Hornsby, Osman & De Matos-Ala, 2013). The institutional audit report of University B further raised concerns about University B's overloaded academic staff and fewer contact periods for students. As a comprehensive university in a large metropolitan area, University B is one of the largest universities in South Africa in terms of student numbers.

During interviews with staff and students at University B it was pointed out that large classes pose a myriad of challenges for the University. In some cases there were service subjects such as the Introduction to Business Management course which registers between 3500 and 4000 students each year (Jawitz as cited in Hornsby, Osman and De Matos-Ala, 2013). Service subjects are those subjects that are often compulsory for students across various qualifications and even faculties; an example is Mathematics which is taken by students enrolled for Engineering, Commerce and Science qualifications. Due to the large numbers of students registered for service subjects, these classes had to be split up into smaller groups, which created time-tabling challenges. The splitting up of classes created teaching and learning challenges as is it difficult to standardise the quality of provision in a subject that comprises different groups taught by different lecturers. It was, however, indicated that the University is making efforts to address the issue of teaching large classes. A senior manager responsible for quality assurance at the University pointed out that the University has used technology to enhance the teaching of large classes. It was indicated that the registrar has put in place measures to address the time-tabling issues. The senior manager in quality assurance made it clear that large classes will remain a feature of the University and that the University will continue exploring various ways

to effectively manage them. She outlined the problem and the measures taken by the University as follows:

*“We do have some large classes, for which we have built some super-large lecture rooms that can accommodate up to 1 000 students. These large classes can be found in Psychology and Management, where groups of up to 4 000 have to be split up into smaller groups. This has resulted in havoc in terms of the time table, however. From a teaching and learning perspective it is also not easy to spread the lecturing staff between the groups and standardising the quality of provision. Of course we tried to extend and develop the technology-assisted learning component of the majority of our programmes. There was a big effort to develop these components. The registrar is also trying very hard to standardise the time table and ensure that students have access to the computer labs. Despite our best efforts, there are always some problems, but I think the issues around large classes may have been addressed and managed. Large classes are no longer an exception to the rule. We may not have an effective way to deal with them yet, but we are trying.” (SnrMngB3)*

In addition, the University was said to be putting in place measures to ensure that existing lecture rooms at satellite campuses are equipped with appropriate technology to aid teaching and learning. A senior manager at the University indicated that refurbishments of other campuses of the University were underway and that the University was planning further renovations.

*“We have also just started to refurbish the (name withheld) campus - Engineering and Health Sciences are housed there - which will bring about changed perceptions. The next campus in line for refurbishment is the (name withheld) campus” (SnrMngB4).*

Academics appeared to be positive about the infrastructure refurbishments that have already been done at the University. As pointed out by an academic at one of the University’s satellite campuses, the lecture rooms have been enlarged to cater for the large classes and there is adequate availability of teaching technology:

*“... all the resources that you need as an academic staff are there, eh, there’s a microphone, there’s... working projectors and...speakers. So...when it comes to large*

*numbers, no, in fact the infrastructure is catering for that. They made sure that they enlarge or they increase the capacity of...lecture halls. So...that's sufficiently catered for.” (AcadB3)*

Academics further indicated that they are receiving adequate support to cope better with large class teaching. An academic at the University submitted that the lecturers are allocated tutors to assist them with large classes:

*“...academically we have been...getting...all of support...with each and every lecture or every lecturer now gets to be allocated...a tutor...All our tutors are either doing an honours or a masters. So, unlike before when one...had to do like everything...things are slowly... I (only) need to have about three to four contact sessions with my students. And I know that my tutor will be there as well to, to help me and if...I have exercises that...need to be done...they are always there...to see that...process through.” (AcadB4)*

It was further pointed out that the University had put together a large working group to investigate the issue of large classes and “to look at international literature on the subject” (SnrMngB2). It also emerged during interviews with senior management that smaller large classes of around 150 students “present a bigger problem because the technology may not be as advanced in those contexts (as opposed to much larger classes which more advanced teaching technology).” (SnrMngB2).

The issue of technology for smaller large classes was echoed by students who highlighted the needs for technological devices such as microphones to enhance the quality of teaching and learning as expressed in the following statement by one of the students at University B:

*“...our classes are not as big but the noise levels, all that, they're still there. So using a microphone might allow students to hear clearly” (StudentB8).*

The students further pointed out that some lecturers posted study material online and that created a challenge for students who could not afford to access the internet and print out the material.

The sentiment is captured in the following utterance by one student during a focus group interview with students at University B:

*“... for me the main problem is that all of us come from different backgrounds and when it comes to things like reading material and stuff, they’ll post it on the internet, on Edulink. And it’s like some people can’t afford to print those things out. You have to print out for every module, you’ll have to print out tutorials, exercises, notes.”*  
(StudentB12)

It also emerged that the University was making efforts to collaborate with other universities as regards the teaching of large classes as a senior manager responsible for staff development noted:

*“We have attempted to work with UP on large classes, but nothing much came from that initiative. We also obtained funding to run a project with UCT to focus on the selective implementation of tutorials, and I think that project has come to an end, but the outcomes are not certain.”* (SnrMngB2)

It was further pointed out during interviews that University B was considering offering workshops for lecturers to help them manage large classes more effectively. An academic staff member indicated that the University was exploring options such as technology-assisted learning which would require all students to have tablet computers.

### ***Theme summary***

It appears that large classes continue to pose challenges at universities. During interviews with staff and students, it was acknowledged that University B was faced with high student numbers. It was, however, also pointed out that the University was making good progress as regards the teaching of large classes. It emerged that the University has refurbished and built extra lecture rooms at the main and satellite campuses, used technology to enhance the teaching of large classes, put in place measures to ensure that existing lecture rooms at satellite campuses are equipped with appropriate technology to aid teaching and learning and even allocated tutors to assist academics with the teaching of large classes.

In addition to these measures the University had put together a working group to investigate the teaching of large classes. The University was also engaged in collaborations with other universities to share good practice regarding the teaching of large classes and even considered giving workshops to lecturers to help them manage large classes more effectively. On the whole, University B appears to have made good strides in addressing the challenges posed by large classes.

## 5.8 Conclusion

This chapter presents findings about the following themes: student assessment, private work by academics, postgraduate education, management of short courses, management of work-integrated learning, and the teaching of large classes.

All the three universities are faced with challenges pertaining to postgraduate supervision. However, it raises concern to note that University A, which appears to be confronted with the most serious problems regarding supervision, does not seem to be making enough efforts to remedy the situation. In fact, University C, a university of technology which is less research intensive than University A, appears to be putting in place more innovative and concrete measures to address the issue. This apparent inertia is antithetical to TQM's focus on customer satisfaction and continuous quality improvement (Harvey & Eisner, 2011). In this case, focus on customer satisfaction implies that the universities make efforts to improve their supervision capacity to ensure that there are enough supervisors to supervise postgraduate students and that the supervision is of good quality. The findings, however, hardly suggest any notable efforts to satisfy students or improve quality. In fact, during focus group interviews with students at University A, some students pointed out that they were not satisfied with the quality of postgraduate supervision and that there did not seem to be efforts from the University address the situation.

The three universities encountered the following challenges regarding the assessment of students: inconsistent application of the university-wide assessment policy, and practice of repeating examination questions. Two of the three universities also faced challenges regarding

the leakage of examination papers. The lack of uniformity in the application of assessment practices negates the consistent application of practices advocated by the systems approach's holistic viewpoint and interconnectedness between various sub-systems (Miller-Williams & Kritsonis, 2010).

It emerged that University C is confronted with various challenges regarding the management of work-integrated learning. However, the University has made efforts to address the situation by buying cars dedicated to the WIL component, appointed WIL champions for each programme in some faculties, and has even considered using simulations to develop students' practical experience.

It further emerged that although large classes continue to pose challenges at University B, the University appeared to be making good strides; the University has refurbished and built extra lecture rooms at the main and satellite campuses, used technology to enhance the teaching of large classes, put in place measures to ensure that existing lecture rooms at satellite campuses are equipped with appropriate technology to aid teaching and learning and even allocated tutors to assist academics with the teaching of large classes.

There were other problems that were specific to certain universities, such as the lack of control of private work by academics at University A and the under-management of short courses at University B. The challenges experienced by the three universities could be assuaged by adherence to principles of TQM and the systems theory. There is a dire need for the culture of continuous quality improvement and student-centredness to be developed. In addition, the notion of interconnectedness between various sections of a university to improve efficiencies needs to be appreciated particularly by those in leadership positions in higher education. It was, however, encouraging to note that the universities acknowledged most of the challenges they faced and were making efforts to address them.

The next chapter, Chapter 6, presents the findings with particular focus on the effect of institutional audits on the quality of support functions and student experience.

## CHAPTER 6

# THE EFFECT OF INSTITUTIONAL AUDITS ON THE QUALITY OF SUPPORT FUNCTIONS AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE

### 6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 focused on the universities' core area of teaching and learning. This chapter continues the discussion of findings that started in Chapter 5 by focusing on the following research sub-questions:

- How have the HEQC institutional audits influenced the quality of aspects of support functions?
- What are the effects of institutional audits on the quality of student experience?

The chapter discusses the participants' views on the self-evaluation activity that preceded institutional audit site visits. This chapter further discusses the findings with specific focus on the following themes: vision and mission (6.2), the self-evaluation process (Section 6.3), resource allocation (Section 6.4), support for black and female staff members (Section 6.5), and institutional culture and student experience (Section 6.6). It is important to note that although the effect of institutional audits on the quality of student experience is discussed separately in section 6.6 by mainly covering two specific aspects of institutional culture (i.e. xenophobia and racism), this sub-question is further covered in all the themes, including those discussed in Chapter 5, as these themes inevitably have a bearing on the quality of student experience. As with the previous chapter, the discussion of each theme is done per university. Further, the recommendations made to the universities are juxtaposed with the responses of senior management, academics and students from University A, University B, and University C. Information from the institutional audit reports and interviews enabled the researcher to have a sense of the progress made by the universities since the audit was conducted.



## 6.2 The crafting and communication of the mission and vision

All the three universities received recommendations pertaining to their visions and missions in their audits reports. The recommendations urged the universities to conduct university-wide debates when reviewing the meaning and appropriateness of their visions and missions, and to communicate these effectively. Accordingly, the interviews which were conducted with management staff, academics, and students, investigated the extent to which members of the university community were involved in the discussions on the mission and vision as well as how effectively these were communicated to various stakeholders at the universities.

### *University A*

Members of senior management at University A generally felt that the University consulted with various stakeholders in the process of crafting the institution's vision and mission. The following statement by a senior manager at the University testifies to the sentiment:

*“What is happening at this point in time is that management eh and with management I include I think all levels up to the position of the Directors but there were also some other people, I think there were also HODs, that's right. ...we had a two day...workshop...off campus, where...a very good facilitator took us through the whole process of coming up with a good strategic plan and then also with...a whole redefinition of the of the vision and mission of the University. So, that is in place...the draft of...the workshop...was sort of compiled by the facilitator and sent through for comment. And that was distributed...as widely as possible.” (SnrMngA2)*

Despite the ostensible involvement of various stakeholders in the crafting of the University's strategic direction, the senior managers were in agreement that the University's vision and mission were not effectively communicated beyond the senior management level. A senior manager at the University was unequivocal about the lack of downward communication of the vision and mission by the university's senior leadership. It appears that the University's Vice-Chancellor was aware of this communication gap and has made efforts to address it at various meetings with his senior leadership team:

*“...when the process of crafting the vision and mission of the new university was done, its cascading, the furthest down it would go...would depend on whatever level of management. So, there are people in management...who were involved in the crafting of the vision and mission, who in my view didn't do their job, right. Because now, you see it is the management which carries the vision, right, but somehow the people down there have to know that this is the mission that we have worked on. So...the consultation really was there but the people were supposed to take it right to the lowest guy in the institution didn't do their job... people sit with information and they don't communicate it, and that has been expressed in various forums by the VC, because he gives the executive management the information and then people come and sit with the information.” (SnrMngA1)*

Another senior manager at the University corroborated the sentiment about lack of communication of the University's strategic direction and further indicated that some of the members of senior management were not properly apprised of the University's vision and mission. The senior manager articulated his views as follows:

*“...most people (at the University) don't know...the vision and mission...They don't know that...in my interaction with one of my bosses...some of the senior people when they were asked by the HEQC to articulate that same vision and mission, they couldn't. Now, if it couldn't up there you see it sends the message to say maybe not enough job was done when the whole thing was started... even the awareness campaign thereof...I'm almost three years down the line but...I haven't seen any initiative or sort of conscientising the University community to say guys by the way remember in anything that you do, bear at the back of your mind that this is our mission, this is our vision.” (SnrMngA4)*

The general statement among academic staff was that the vision and mission was not inclusive of all stakeholders and not well communicated. There was also a view that senior management decided unilaterally on the University's vision and mission and that academics were not consulted in the process, as articulated by one academic staff member as follows:

*“Ok, the main mission and vision of the University, right, I think it was only decided by top management, right. So, it’s not like we...are consulted or...I think it was something which was done by senior managers...” (AcadA3)*

Some academic staff members felt that the University’s vision and mission was not well explained to the University community, and thus many stakeholders did not understand what it entailed. An academic staff member at the University pointed out that she found the University’s vision and mission to be cumbersome and that it meant little to her:

*“...I also do not know it by heart. It’s a very long statement, I just know that it involves teaching and community engagement. It focuses on, especially that we are set in a rural, eh, area, that we are supposed to support, you know, these villages around us. So that is the aspect of the mission and vision that really talks to me, that comes out for me, but the rest to me are...just too abstract, they are too out there. But I don’t understand what they mean, you know, it’s words mused together, nice words mused together but they do not mean much to me.” (AcadA1)*

Another academic indicated that the University’s vision is not well known across the University. He felt that most of the members of the University community could not clearly articulate the vision as they did not understand it. He expresses his views as follows:

*“The vision I’m not quite sure that it’s quite known, right. Because somebody would just say, no they are talking about eh getting solutions for, you see, Africa and staff like that. But the way it’s structured...I don’t think most of the people will be in a position to tell about it and explain it, because it is not only about saying that this is the mission. You just have to have an insight information about it and, and be in a position to tell external people that this is what is meant. I don’t think people can do that. Most of the people can’t do that.” (AcadA3)*

Conversely, one academic said that he felt that the crafting of the vision and mission was inclusive of various stakeholders and well communicated to members of the University community. He further indicated that he had a clear understanding of the University’s vision and

mission and that members of the University community “*structure (their) daily business around these concepts*” (AcadA4). The academic staff member articulated his views as follows:

*“...we discussed it from department to school to faculty levels until it reached senate for approval and adoption by the entire University structures... These mission and vision views appear in all formal communications, websites, book-forms, and articles that are circulated on campus. So, to my knowledge, even the students cannot avoid being aware of these objectives...to my best knowledge, all structures on campus work around these objectives... I’m involved in teaching and research and always structure my research focus to respond to these objectives...”* (AcadA4)

It is evident in the above quotation that the academic staff member had the impression that students at University A were aware of the University’s vision and mission. However, during interviews with students at the University, it became clear that they were not aware of the vision and mission of the University:

*“What it (mission) means to me? Eh, not yet (anything). (StudentA1). “I think there were papers lying around to check what will the merger be, especially the issue of, but the visions and mission...I don’t think so.” (StudentA2). “...I don’t know. I don’t know but i think i saw something somewhere saying ‘Finding solutions for Africa’. (StudentA3). “...as a new first year student I don’t even know what our mission and vision is. I don’t know.” (StudentA5).*

There were, however, indications that efforts were being made to address these concerns. Some members of senior management pointed out that measures were being taken to improve and monitor the effectiveness of communication in faculties. A senior manager at the University has even taken it upon himself to monitor the downward communication of information “*because people sit with information*” (SnrMngA1). His views are articulated as follows:

*“When I communicate something to my subordinates and I ask them to communicate further, I say when you communicate to those people please copy me. So, you send it...but copy it back to me. So...I am one of the recipients. No, because now people sit with information. Ja, that’s our challenge as an institution.”* (SnrMngA1)

This appeared to be corroborated by some academics who felt that communication of the University's mission and vision was improving. Academics pointed out that the University was making efforts to increase the visibility of the vision and mission and urging members of the University community to align their activities to the institution's vision and mission. Academics expressed their views as follows

*“In most things they (University management) try to say it (vision and mission) or to make it visible. And even now when we do documents for the department or the school, they now stress that they should be aligned with the vision and the mission; so that way it sort of forces you to know it and then be able to align everything to that mission and vision.” (AcadA3)*

#### *University B*

The views of senior management about the extent to which the vision and mission were consulted and communicated at University B were fairly disparate. Some members of the University's senior management felt that the vision and mission were widely consulted and well communicated to various members of the University community as expressed by senior managers as follows:

*“I think that the new mission and vision were clearly communicated, by means of the intranet and other vehicles. We are currently revisiting our mission and vision statements, in terms of which there has been communication. A draft vision and mission statement had been communicated to staff, and their involvement is invited in finalising these documents. I am personally aware of these documents because the Registrar communicates these documents to all staff, which involves my portfolio.” (SnrMngB4)*

*“We developed the new strategic thrusts last year and the year before. There was a concerted effort to involve all staff. There was certainly more involvement by middle management, and drafts were sent out to all staff for discussion. How well they took up the opportunity is debatable. I don't know how well the communication worked – we are inundated with communication on a daily basis. I would discuss the new vision and*

*mission with staff, I certainly tried to communicate, but if it was effective I don't know.”*  
(SnrMngB2)

Some responses from senior management members pointed out that the vision and mission were not effectively communicated, members of the University community were not widely consulted, and that the merger made effective communication difficult. One member of senior management even suggested that the University's Vice-Chancellor decided on the institution's vision and mission without consulting members of the University community, resulting in it not being well accepted by members of the University community. The senior managers expressed their views as follows:

*“Our perception, following consultation, was that the first document was drafted by management and not adequately consulted. The second draft was considerably better consulted, and there was greater buy-in...once he (Vice-Chancellor) was appointed he changed the vision and mission unilaterally, which did not make sense and was not well communicated. It was therefore not well accepted.”* (SnrMngB3). *“I also think that the three-way merger made it difficult to ensure integration, because communication was not in place.”* (SnrMngB3-2)

Like some senior management members at University A, there were sentiments among senior managers at University B that the information about the vision and mission was not well consulted or communicated by senior management to various stakeholders at the lower levels of the University. There was, however, an encouraging view that the situation is improving. The following responses from members of senior management at the University express these sentiments:

*“There were communication gaps between the Deans and top-management (the Executive Leadership Group) and the faculties. Communication between the committee structures where decisions are taken and the people doing the work in service and support divisions could also improve. I think taking the message back from the decision-making structures to the rest of the institution sometimes gets lost. The Deans may be*

*much too busy to give proper attention to all these issues, even though the situation has improved greatly.” (SnrMngB3-2)*

*“...it was not well consulted at ground level. There was no ownership for it...and then shortly after that we had the HEQC...audit. And there were quite a lot of...questions...on the vision and mission, and obviously the results were clear that it was not that well consulted.” (SnrMngB1)*

As with senior management, the views among academics regarding the University’s vision and mission were varied. The academics’ responses were split between those who felt that the vision and mission were widely consulted and communicated and those who thought otherwise. Some of the academics indicated that the process was inclusive of all stakeholders and well communicated. They had the impression that opportunities for engagement on the vision and mission were given to everyone and that it was left to those who were interested to take up the opportunity. The following responses from two of the four academics interviewed testify to these positive statements about the process of crafting and communicating the vision and mission at University B:

*“It was a laborious process that involved all stakeholders....whether all of them used the opportunity to participate is questionable, because there was some resistance from some people who were not interested in participating. However, the opportunity was there if people wanted to use it...it was not a top-down process, even though some people may...have said that this was not the case...(this University) is a huge institution with a lot of stakeholders, a real mix of cultures and backgrounds, but in general I am quite satisfied that the process was well communicated. I did not have any problems with the process...as far as I am concerned, and the people that I work with, we were involved.” (AcadB1)*

*“The documents were widely consulted and there was broad participation from all staff members...there was wide participation and enough opportunity for anybody to make input on the process.” (AcadB2)*

On the converse, the other half of the academics who were interviewed pointed to a lack of consultation with University stakeholders about the mission and vision, unilateral decisions by senior management, and some even suggested that there was a lack of interest from the University community about its mission and vision. In fact some of the academics' responses echoed the views of senior managers. For example two academics at the University had the view that the vision and mission mainly was the preserve of those at the higher levels of the institution, and that some of the staff members didn't know the University's vision and mission. They expressed their views as follows:

*"No, I don't think it was...communicated...to all the stakeholders, especially the students. It's not inclusive of all the stakeholders. Mostly it's catering for the top level managers and the middle managers..." (AcadB3)*

*"I do know about the vision and mission of this institution...I wasn't involved...It was a project of senior management together with the, the two companies that were tasked to rebrand the newly formed institution...to be quite honest with you, I know that there are people or there are staff members within this institution who don't know of the vision and the mission of this institution. I have come across, you know, a couple of individuals, academic staff members who do not know the mission and the vision of, of the institution" (AcadB4).*

Students who were interviewed at University B indicated that they did not know about the mission and vision and felt it was not communicated to them. They even mentioned that it was unimportant to them as the University does not communicate sufficient information about the vision and mission. The students' views are captured below:

*"Actually it's really not that important to us (StudentB1). It is not effectively done. 'cos if it was a thing that's everywhere like we would obviously know, know what it is. We see it on some brown unattractive thing on the wall and it's like it's not appealing to us to actually get up and read those things. They don't like they don't put it across in a way that will make it attractive to us like it's not attractive at all (StudentB2). Like I don't think when they advertise (this University) they even stipulate what the mission and vision is. You have to now go and do your own research to actually find what the*



*mission is and what the vision is and if you're really interested, not that we are not interested but then there are other things we are interested in, when you are looking then only you'll come and say okay the vision is this but what is, what does the vision entail, what does the mission entail? But otherwise they don't say, even in open days they don't say what the mission or the vision is (StudentB3). We don't really care (StudentB2). We don't (StudentB4). About the mission and vision. We don't care about our vision and mission. So we just know that we wanted (this University) because we know that (this University) is the best for what we wanna achieve. So what their vision and mission is doesn't really matter to us as long as our goals and their goals meet and StudentB2). They make it seem unnecessary, so we don't see the necessity to find out about it, I mean, you know (StudentB3). ...but about mission and vision they don't mention it or make it like for us to be aware of it StudentB5)"*

#### *University C*

At University C, all senior management members who were interviewed were of the view that the mission and vision were well communicated and inclusive of all stakeholders, as articulated in the following statement by one member of senior management:

*"I think with the new vision and mission, all stakeholders were drawn into the process so participation levels rose...It was a very participative process. I think the non-academic staff have also been drawn into the process. I think that the process cascaded into the academic plan." (SnrMngC4)*

Conversely, academics at the University felt that the vision and mission were not inclusive of various stakeholders and not well communicated; one academic even admitted that she was not aware of the University's vision and mission. Some of the academics pointed out that they only became aware of the University's mission and vision when they saw it on the internet as expressed in the following responses by two academics:

*"I think...I concentrated more about it last week when I was attending...a contact session class at UFS (University of Free State). That's when...I saw it (online)...but I was just a browsing." (AcadC2)*

*“Actually...I saw it on the University webpage. That was the first time I saw the mission and vision...I am just trying to say that I didn’t know before I saw it...no one talked about it.” (AcadC3)*

One academic staff member, however, felt that the vision and mission were well communicated to the University community and were *“in black and white that everybody can see”*. (AcadC4).

Students at University C did not know about its mission and vision and felt it was not well communicated. One student indicated that she was aware of faculties’ strategic directions but not the institutional one as they were not informed about it.

It became clear from interviews at University C that senior management members’ views regarding the engagement of the University’s stakeholders about the mission and vision were disparate from those held by academics and students. It appears that the mission and vision may be fairly well communicated among senior management staff but not as well with the rest of the University community. This feedback seems to suggest that the University has not engaged in an institution-wide debate as advised in the recommendation contained in the institutional audit report of the university.

### ***Cross-university summary***

Responses from the interviews at the three Universities regarding the vision and mission show that, in the main, senior managers felt that the process of crafting the universities’ strategic directions was widely inclusive of and well communicated to all stakeholders. Academics, on the other hand, were generally dissatisfied with the process of crafting and communicating the vision and mission. Some academics thought their senior management had unilaterally decided on the university’s vision and mission while others only became aware of their university’s vision and mission via the internet. The general view among students who were interviewed was that they did not know about the mission and vision and felt it was not communicated to them. They also indicated that they found their university’s vision and mission unimportant. The senior management members’ positive view about the crafting and communication of the mission and vision could have been partly due to their closeness to the process of discussing the university’s overall strategic direction in general and their vision and mission in particular. The largely

contrasting perceptions about the universities' visions and missions between senior management on one hand and staff and students on the other suggest somewhat of a disjuncture between the former's processes and the latter's expectation and communication needs. It is possible that senior management may have taken it for granted that the vision and mission would be cascaded to the academics and students without having devised clear strategies for these.

Although at some universities members of senior management pointed to measures being taken to improve and monitor the effectiveness of communication of the vision and mission, these efforts appear to be piece-meal and insufficient. The apparent lack of interest about the mission and vision by some academics, and a feeling by some of the students that the mission and vision are unimportant raise concern. It thus seems that efforts from the universities to involve various stakeholders' inputs in the crafting on the mission and vision have been scant and the communication thereof has been generally ineffective.

### **6.3 The self-evaluation process**

In line with international practice, the HEQC employs an institutional audit methodology that consists of institutional self-evaluation, followed by an external validation by a panel of peers and experts (CHE, 2007a). In the self-evaluation exercise institutions are required to develop an audit portfolio that comprises a self-evaluation report and supporting evidence (CHE, 2007a).

This theme focuses on the opinions of senior management staff about the HEQC's institutional audit process. The views of senior management are the most appropriate since senior management were often in direct contact with senior staff at the HEQC in preparation for the institutional audits. Thus, senior management staff members had oversight on the institutional audits process at their respective universities and were often in the forefront of putting together the self-evaluation reports of their universities. Feedback from management staff at all three universities suggests that they found the self-evaluation exercise and the institutional audits worthwhile. Senior management staff responded positively to the question about the usefulness of the institutional audits process.

### *University A*

The importance of institutional audits was highlighted by a senior manager in the quality assurance office at University A who indicated that the audits gave institutions an opportunity to reflect on their strategies and plans:

*“...the audit allows time to take a pause and look at all those systems, policies and procedures, rules and regulations that are used to govern the institution.” (SnrMngA3)*

It was further pointed out that the recommendations made in the audits helped members of the University community to become aware of their challenges and achievements, thereby allowing them to identify the improvements that needed to be made. The senior manager added that the self-evaluation activity raised the importance of backing up claims with evidence as it ensures that *“people understand that they cannot make claims that cannot be substantiated.”* (SnrMngA3). The importance of substantiating claims with evidence is supported by Shah et al (2011) whose discussion with 40 participants in the Australian Universities Quality Assurance (AUQA) revealed that self-evaluation activities, inter alia, promoted an evidence-based culture in decision-making.

### *University B*

It emerged that the audits facilitated the merger processes which some of the universities were at the time undergoing. The institutional audit's effect on the merger process was reported as *“assisting the newly merged University to revisit processes to ensure that (the process is) coming together well”* (SnrMngB2). Another senior manager at the University added that conducting the self-evaluation was *“on the whole ...a useful exercise, which went a long way to unify the institution in some areas...helped the institution to identify areas that needed attention...”* (SnrMngB3). The unifying role that institutional audits played at University B was aptly expressed by a senior manager at the University who pointed out that the audit contributed towards a unified culture as *“the HEQC was viewed as a common enemy around which the forces could unite”* (SnrMngB32). By exposing the areas that require attention, self-evaluations seem to have allowed the University to have an *“increased focus on quality”* (SnrMngB3).

Although the institutional audits were largely regarded to have had positive effects, they were not without sceptics and critics, particularly during the early stages. A senior manager at University B found *“audit was time consuming and very expensive”* (SnrMngB3). The manager, however, indicated that after the audit people embraced it as they became more aware of its quality focus.

This view was corroborated by another manager at the University who submitted that she found members of the University community to view the audits with negativity at the beginning as they thought it would be too much extra work. She had to make efforts to create more awareness and better understanding of the audits among staff and students before she could get buy in and *“made so many friends”* (SnrMngB32). It further emerged that during the self-evaluation stage there were disagreements regarding the self-evaluation report of University B by various members of the University community as attested to by a manager of quality assurance at the University:

*“It was also difficult to get people to agree on the SER (the Self-evaluation Report) document – they would hate one paragraph and therefore want to scrap the whole document. On the whole it was a useful exercise”* (SnrMngB32)

The registrar at University B also thought the audit was *“a very...labour intensive but very focused exercise”* and also felt it was *“very necessary”* (SnrMngB1).

### *University C*

The positive role played by institutional audits was further confirmed by a senior manager in the quality assurance office at University C who pointed out that the institutional audit created more awareness about quality issues among students and staff at the University. The senior manager further mentioned that the audit helped to institutionalise quality at University C because it has since broadened its quality focus from only looking at academic quality to including quality in support services as well. He expressed his views as follows:

*“Prior to the audit, quality assurance was a peripheral activity...From then to now, our staff and students have become more aware of quality issues...It (quality assurance) has*

*really now been institutionalised, and we have moved beyond silo management that focused only on academic quality. We are now also looking at quality in support services...*”

Further, it was indicated that the institutional audit helped the University to plan, implement, and review its quality assurance as a continuous process. To some extent, the institutional audit was reported to have prepared the University for reviews by professional bodies. It was further pointed out that the audit has enabled the University to put in place the necessary structures to manage quality within the University, which resulted in the training of quality champions in the faculties and support service at the University.

In addition, the institutional audit allowed the University to benchmark with other institutions. A senior manager at University C pointed out that the benchmarking that resulted from the audit led to the University revising its short courses and staff collaborating with their counterparts at other institutions in a quest to improve quality. The manager further indicated that another positive spinoff of the audit was the regular policy reviews which did not happen before the institutional audit.

### ***Cross-university summary***

Senior managers at each of the three universities agreed that the self-evaluation exercise and institutional audits added value to their institutions. Some of the positive effects of self-evaluations and institutional audits were that they enabled institutions to reflect on their policies and procedures, prepared the universities for reviews by professional bodies, enabled the universities to put in place the necessary structures to manage quality, resulted in the training of quality champions in the faculties and support service, recommendations made in the audits helped members of the university communities to become aware of their challenges and achievements thereby allowing them to identify the improvements that needed to be made, and raised the importance of backing up claims with evidence. It was even pointed out that self-evaluations and institutional audits, to some extent, facilitated the merger processes which some of the universities were at the time undergoing. However, it also emerged that initially some members of the universities’ communities were skeptical about the audits as they found them

time consuming and onerous. However, most of this negativity appeared to have later assuaged when they started realising the value of the time investment and hard work.

## 6.4 Resource allocation

Thirteen of the 22 South African universities received recommendations about resource allocation in the HEQC institutional audit reports. University A, University B and University C all had recommendations about resource allocation. The recommendations given to the 13 universities were mainly about the resourcing of the library, quality assurance function, information and communication technology services, and the equitable resourcing of main and satellite campuses. The main recommendations given to the three universities in this study pertained to the equitable resource allocation between the main and satellite campuses and the resourcing of libraries. The following is the presentation of findings from interviews with senior managers, academics and students at each of the three institutions about resource allocation in general and the resourcing of libraries in particular.

### *University A*

As regards the issue of resource allocation across the main and satellite campuses, members of senior management felt that the University's resource allocation model across campuses was justified and that any suggestions of inequitable resourcing were unfounded and a matter of perception. A member of senior management based at the main campus of the University suggested that concerns from satellite campuses about inequitable resource allocation may be a result of misunderstanding what the process entailed. He indicated that there may *"be different perceptions about advantage and disadvantage...people may not understand what informed the decisions."* (SnrMngA3). The apparent misperception of resource allocation by satellite campuses is corroborated by another senior manager who added that because the University's satellite campuses are often smaller than main campuses, resources are allocated based on their size. Thus the perceptions of inequitable resourcing are inevitable due to differences in the sizes of university campuses.

Senior managers pointed out that the quality of the library service has greatly improved. They added that the library has come *“up with new innovations in order to develop that support section”* (SnrMngA2) and has even conducted *“training sessions for supervisors as well as postgraduate students (on) how to use...the available eh technology in the library”* (SnrMngA2). The inter-library loans service provided by the main campus was also regarded as excellent by senior managers as they felt that the library provided quick and efficient service in this regard. There was also a general feeling that the newly appointed executive director of the library was making great strides in improving the quality of the library service. One senior manager, however, felt that staff and students at the University were not taking full advantage of the service and resources provided by the library.

The general sentiment among academics was that the service provided by the library was good and continued to improve. Academics at the main campus indicated that the library always consulted them regarding the books they would need from the library and always tried their utmost to cater for their needs. The following responses by academics at the University confirm the positive view of the library service:

*“...there’s a lot of improvement in our library. Even the material in it, now and then we as academics...are requested to give them the recent books we want to be in there. So, it makes life easier that we know that we did give them the names of the books and...they go and order what you request. Not them just going and buying out of their own will...”*  
(AcadA3)

*“Each department has been assigned a specific librarian who responds to our specific needs and hence, I am happy with the service provided.”* (AcadA4)

Academics also corroborated senior managers’ view that the inter-library loans service was providing quick and efficient service. Although some students felt that the library provided good service to the University community, others indicated that the library space was too small and that it was inadequately resourced:

*“It just gets packed in there, you can’t even breath. Some of us can even faint.”*  
(StudentA8). *“It can’t accommodate all of us; some of us can’t study during the day”*



*(StudentA9). “On my side I think it’s very difficult to access journals. I hardly find any journals. Many of the journals don’t open. But overall I think the University is doing good.” (StudentA8). “...you hardly get what you want from the library.” (StudentA2). “The books which I found there...are old. They are very...much old to such an extent that when I just page through the book I can see that they are older than myself...And the library is too small.” (StudentA5)*

### *University B*

There was a unanimous view among senior management members at University B that the University’s campuses were not equitably resourced. This was attributed largely to the merger between a former traditional university and a former technikon that predated the institutional audit two years earlier. According to one senior manager at the University *“there (were) huge complaints and perceptions of inequality across the institutions about inequality as far as resources (were) concerned.”* (SnrMngB4).

Senior management members also acknowledged that they have received complaints about unsatisfactory library resourcing at satellite campuses. Accordingly, one senior manager said:

*“When we go on campus visits, we regularly get complaints on (one of the satellite) campus(es) that the books are outdated.”* (SnrMngB2)

It is, however, encouraging to note that all the members of senior management who were interviewed indicated that the University has put in place plans to address this disparity in resource allocation. It became evident that the University was making considerable financial investments in the satellite campuses in a quest to improve infrastructure and other aspects of resourcing, as expressed in the following view by a senior manager at the University:

*“We had infrastructure projects. And the first project was on our (one satellite) campus...there wasn’t a student centre. So getting a student centre up and running there, I recall that was about 30 million rand and showing them that we care. And then the (other satellite) Campus was more than 500 million rand.”* (SnrMngB1)

The University was so determined to improve the resourcing of all its campuses that it ensured that the item of equitable resourcing became a constant feature in senior management meetings and also made campus resourcing part of the key performance indicators for some members of senior management:

*“...in our meetings it is a stated intention to ensure equitable distribution across campuses. I’m happy to show you my performance contract, which specifies that equivalence across all four campuses form part of my KPAs. The same campus equivalence also forms part of the Registrar’s KPAs.” (SnrMngB4)*

The University has also decided that some faculties would be based at satellite campuses with their senior management located there. As a senior manager at the University puts it, the University had made a decision to *“relocate all health sciences from (the main) campus, to the (satellite) Campus.”* (SnrMngB1). The Faculty of Education has also been relocated to another satellite campus and *“the Dean is located on (that) campus fulltime.”* (SnrMngB1)

As regards general resource allocation across the University’s campuses, academics confirmed senior management’s view that there was inequitable resource allocation. Some of the academics based at satellite campuses indicated that their libraries and recreational facilities were not adequately resourced while the main campus enjoyed better resources. It was, however, reassuring to note that academics were hopeful that the situation about inequitable resourcing was gradually improving as expressed in the following response:

*“...there is a lot of improvement. We’re not yet there but the management is doing...a lot to ensure that there is equity in terms of what...staff members and...students require...in all the campuses of the University. We are not yet there but we’ve seen a lot of improvement.” (AcadB4)*

*“I think we’re still moving towards the ideal situation, even though good progress had been made.” (AcadB1)*

Academics further pointed out that the newly appointed library director brought about positive changes to the library which have enhanced the quality of the library service.

Students, particularly those at satellite campuses, indicated that most of the facilities were located at the main campus and that libraries at satellite campuses were too small and internet access is limited. Some students even corroborated senior management and academics' view that the infrastructure at satellite campuses was inadequate and that made them feel less important than students at the main campus. The students expressed their views as follows:

*“...about the library I don't think we are getting all the resources that we need. The library is too small and we are many. So in terms of finding books, sometimes you want books only to find that you've got to go to (the main campus). So I think here at (this campus) we don't have enough material in the library and we don't have many computers.” (StudentB4). “...in fact the only big enough library is the one in (the main campus). All the other ones are very limited. Most of the things that we need for our course are mainly that side at (the main campus).” (StudentB10). “...most of the time our resources actually are in (the main campus). But I've also noticed that (the main campus) is the best like throughout all the campuses...” (StudentB8). “They make us feel like we are not important. I'm sure even the (main campus) students feel more important” (StudentB7). “The library is too cramped, it's not big enough for students...the venues where we study...are small.” (StudentB13). “...apparently there was a gym here and it's closed, and it's apparently very small. But the gym at APK is big and it's good.” (StudentB4). “(one satellite campus) looks like a prison...Everything just looks old, it looks like they don't even invest anything in there. You feel like you are in prison when you are there. Whatever you want, you always have to go to (the main campus). (StudentB6)*

### *University C*

During interviews with senior management members it emerged that lack of equitable infrastructure and other resources across the University's different campuses remained an on-going problem. A senior management member pointed out that lecturers at satellite campuses were often appointed on a part-time basis and were therefore hardly available for consultation with students. A deputy vice-chancellor at the University attributed the lack of equitable resourcing across campuses to lack of subsidy for satellite campuses from government:

*“The difficulty we have is that we do not have an official satellite campus system that is being subsidised by the department. What we have is...decentralised delivery sites, which means it does not attract special subsidy from government. So we need to use subsidy generated by central funding and the resources to fund the activities of those campuses...decentralised facilities normally is not a profitable exercise...it does not necessarily support itself to the extent that it is profitable. And for that reason without government subsidy we must accept that they are running in the negative and...really requires cross-subsidisation. So, for that reason we... must accept that there’s always...the sensitivity around equal resourcing and equal opportunity and quality and levels of services to staff and students” (SnrMngC1)*

Another senior manager seemed highly concerned about the viability of the satellite campuses and cautioned as follows:

*“Really, satellite campuses or sites of delivery it’s a big problem ...I really...think...the department must, before you open a satellite campus, really do a market analysis, really have a look at it, because it’s in most cases not viable. So, satellite campuses, no. I’m not in favour of...no, it’s not working; really, I’ve seen so many... mistakes that we have done.” (SnrMngC3)*

The senior management members were of the view that the library at the main campus was providing satisfactory service and had adequate resources for staff and students, and that satellite campus libraries needed attention. One executive dean at the University decried the lack resources at satellite campus libraries as follows:

*“...go and have a look at the libraries of our satellite campuses. It’s only really the few prescribed books, you know textbooks, that’s all there for the students. And then you offer it until BTech levels.” (SnrMngC3)*

In responding to the HEQC’s recommendation about the space constraints in the library, senior management members indicated that plans were in place to expand the library at the main campus. One senior manager even mentioned that the University has appointed a new library director who has made good strides regarding library materials and service.

*“I think that we have turned the library around. We have a new person appointed to the library, who has managed to turn the library around in terms of its holdings and technological advances. The procedures and processes for students and staff are advanced.” (SnrMngC4)*

Academics at University C corroborated senior management’s view that the library at the main campus of the University provided satisfactory service. One academic at the University’s main campus, however, accentuated HEQC’s observation about library space by indicating that the library is too small for the number of students at the University as follows:

*“...you’ll see today the library will be packed because it’s cold, student cannot stay outside, they will all want to be studying in the library. It will be so packed, there wouldn’t even be space for other students...so the library is small but the students are many. And, there’s no like in other universities they say this is the science library...law library...or law floor. It’s not here...maybe they could do that but still 24 000 is quite a lot.” (AcadC3)*

Students, on the other hand, were not satisfied with the service provided by the library as they felt that its space was too small and that it was not adequately resourced to cater for the number of students at the University. The students’ views about the library are expressed as follows:

*“...you find that there are less computers than there are more students, less space than there are more students.” (StudentC4)*

*“...the problem is the space, I also complained about it last semester. This University has been big for a very long time; why are they not building more libraries? And the operating hours and the space is very much limited.” (StudentC3)*

*“The University must look at the number of students they have admitted here and make sure they are accommodated. You look at the library, it’s not big enough for the students that are studying here.” (StudentC10)*

Some students even had the impression that the University was not making efforts to address the situation about space constraints. Students even suggested that one of the reasons for the library to be overcrowded was that there were no study areas at student residences. Some students

pointed out that although the library had been renovated and looked more impressive, the space has not been increased. The students' views were as follows:

*“The library, they are not even trying...There were two campuses. They took those campuses, they put them together but they did not build anything. Now it's like during exams, during tests that place is like fully packed, fully packed.” (StudentC9)*

*“I think the University is doing nothing about space. If they don't have money to pay more staff they can just add more space like more rooms for the exam.” (StudentC7)*

*“Well it looks new but they have not expanded it. We see they are building more lecture halls, they are taking in more students but the study space is still small, which is a problem. You know why it's packed? It's because they don't have study areas at res. If they had study areas at res, the library would not be so packed.” (StudentC10)*

### ***Cross-university summary***

There was general concurrence among senior management members at the three universities that the satellite campuses, including their libraries, are not as adequately resourced as the main campuses. However, while senior managers at University B and University C acknowledged that inequitable resource allocation is an unfortunate fact that needs to be corrected, their contemporaries at University A attribute concerns about inequitable resourcing at satellite campuses to misconception and misunderstanding. The view held by senior managers at University A that dismiss complaints about inequitable resourcing as a product of misconception raises concern as it may imply that the University is reluctant to address this concern about satellite campuses. It is also worrisome that a senior management member at University C expresses pessimism about satellite campuses as this gloomy sentiment could signify inertia regarding conditions at satellite campuses of the University.

Academics were generally satisfied with the service provided by the libraries at the main campuses, while students at the main campus raised concerns about library space and resources such as computers, including limited internet access. Students at satellite campuses indicated that they felt marginalised as they had the impression that the University management gave more attention to those at the main campus.

It is, however, encouraging to note that the three universities seem to have made notable progress in the resourcing of their libraries, although more still needs to be done particularly about libraries at satellite campuses and equitable resourcing of infrastructure and human resources between main and satellite campuses. Each of the universities had appointed new incumbents to head their libraries and feedback from stakeholders suggested that these new appointees were bringing about positive changes to the university libraries.

## **6.5 Support given to black and female staff**

Twelve of the 22 universities that were audited by the Higher Education Quality Committee had recommendations pertaining to the support for black and female staff members. The recommendations covered recruitment, retention, nurturing and development, and the creation of a conducive environment for black and female academics to flourish. In addition, the audit reports of some universities raised concerns about sexism. University A, University B and University C received recommendations that focused on the provision of support for black and women staff member, the elimination of a patriarchal culture and an equitable representation of female academics.

### *University A*

Members of senior management generally indicated that the University provided adequate support to female academics. One senior manager added that the University also prioritised the appointment of women into academic positions to ensure gender parity in academia. However, one senior manager submitted that the University did not have a strategy that provides a framework for appointing and supporting female academics. He added that appointments of and support for female academics are carried out haphazardly:

*“...as a university I don’t think we have any plan or strategy towards that, no. I don’t know...I would say we don’t have a plan... we don’t have a strategy to say this is where we want to go in terms of...advancing women within the institution.” (SnrMngA4)*

Academics who were interviewed pointed out that the University had support structures for female academics. Most of the academics mentioned an association for women researchers which provides research support to its members and has the backing of the University's Vice-Chancellor. One academic expressed her views as follows:

*“...about maybe five or so years ago they established this...organisation for women... it's an organisation that...has been started by women academics, those that are mostly studying and it's just to help each other for networking within the University and to help each other move on, especially those who study further and it's strongly supported by our VC. So he supports them financially and...that are...are still studying especially towards a master's or PhD...are usually given time off without even having to fill in leave form. So yes, there is a move in the right direction, that aspect is positive and the University, the management is supporting it.” (AcadA1)*

Another academic added that he had “observed a noticeable presence of women in many senior management positions” and felt that “the presence of women is recognised and functional” (AcadA4).

### *University B*

Members of senior management mainly pointed out that although in the past there was lack of support for black and women academics the situation has since improved and the University has put in place mechanisms to support the particular groups of academics. Senior managers indicated that the University has put together strategies to support and retain black and female academics and that reports on the retention of black academics serve at various senior management meetings. It was also pointed out that the University has appointed women in a number of senior management positions at the University. Senior managers' views are articulated as follows:

*“...women academics get mentioned much less frequently. Following the HEQC visit, I think they are mentioned more frequently...” (SnrMngB2)*



*“We have quite a few strategies in place. First of all there is a retention policy that we apply. We monitor retention of black academics. That serves at our, report serves at our...senate executive committee meetings. It serves at our MEC (Management Executive Committee) meetings as well...” (SnrMngB1)*

*“Getting women in senior positions was achieved relatively quickly. We have five women Deans, and we have two women at DVC position. I think at the top level it happened fairly quickly...” (SnrMngB3)*

It was evident from the senior managers’ responses that the University was struggling to retain black academics as they were poached by other universities or were lured by better offers from industry. Notwithstanding these retention challenges, University B appears to have made progress as regards the appointment of, retention of and support for black and female academics. In fact, the University has ensured that the retention of *“black academics in particular is...an indicator on (their senior management’s) score card.”* (SnrMngB1)

The general sentiment by academics at University B was that the support for black and female academics was not satisfactory. As mentioned earlier in this chapter some academics pointed out that the University seems to prefer appointing foreign black academics to South African black academics, and thus they felt that the latter group was being marginalised. It was further indicated that support for women and black staff in leadership positions was lacking, as embedded in the following statement by an academic staff member at the University:

*“In my faculty we have a number of women as HoDs (Heads of Departments), and a couple of years ago both Vice Deans in my faculty were women, but the support for women in leadership positions is non-existent. One has to make it on your own, which is tough. You have to act like a man, and compete and be strong – there is no real mentorship for women in leadership roles.... I think if I have to broaden the scope and look at blacks in leadership, I think there are even bigger gaps in terms of mentorship and leadership guidance.” (AcadB1)*

It was even indicated that although the University had clear intentions to provide support to black and female academics, there was *“strategic manoeuvring which may hold back*

*transformation.*” (AcadB1). This could suggest that the University’s ostensible commitment to transformation pertaining to black and female staff may not be as sincere as it appears.

### *University C*

The HEQC institutional audit report noted that overall the percentage of male academic staff (57%) at University C was proportionally higher than that of female academic staff (42%). The audit report further breaks down the distribution of academic staff by gender and rank as follows:

**Table 6.1: Academic staff at University C according gender and position**

	Female	Male
Senior Management	35.8%	64.2%
Director	25.9%	74.1%
Associate Director	33.3%	66.7%
Senior Lecturer	35.6%	64.4%
Lecturer	46.5%	53.5%
Other Instructional/Research professionals	43.9%	56.1%
<b>Overall</b>	42.8%	57.2%

*(Source: HEQC report)*

As illustrated on Table 6.1 above, men are more dominant at senior levels of management and at higher academic positions. The audit report does, however, indicate that University C strives to ensure that new staff appointments contribute to meeting the University’s gender targets, but that there is difficulty in attracting staff in the designated groups in some of the key areas. According to the report University C has made slow progress in the transformation of the gender profile of its academic staff. Owing to the underrepresentation of female academic staff at University C the interviews at the University focused on the representation of and support provided to female academic staff.

During interviews with members of senior management, it was pointed out that the University was providing focused support to female staff. A Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University

indicated that the University was providing opportunities for women to advance to higher position at the institution and had a PhD programme to assist women to improve their qualifications.

A female senior manager at the University added that the representation of women at senior structures of the University had increased and even women in senior leadership positions were enjoying constant support, particularly since the University's new Vice-Chancellor, who was appointed six months after the audit visit, was a woman. Her views are expressed as follows:

*"...yes there's definitely support...To come specific to women, I think there's...a big change because our VC is a woman. Previously it was really only men...but (now) they have women in engineering. So they have a specific support group there. There is a lot of support...in the field of research we have...a group that is called women in the research; they are writing, they get together once in a month...even...on the senior level, so there (is) a lot of support. You will see that if they form a committee...they try to bring... equity. And when I say equity I also mean equity in a sense not only of black and white but also in a sense of male and female and also bring in that in all the committees so that it's not only a structural thing of men." (SnrMngC3)*

Academics unanimously agreed that there was an under-representation of women at the University, particularly in science and engineering fields. One academic even felt that once female academics are employed by the University *"then there is nothing...that's the end of the road (for them)"* (AcadC3). There was also a suggestion from female academics that the environment at the University is conducive for men to progress but less so for women. The academics' views were articulated as follows:

*"...the problem like, eh, in other courses we don't have enough women which...looks like...most of the women are not in those type of courses. For example...in our department, Mathematics, where we've got around, I think is four out of 12 women. And, the posts are advertised but...the women are not... participating in the application whatsoever..." (AcadC4)*

*“I think they are trying by all means, but with the other departments I only see the...males dominating than the females. Maybe it’s because there are no females with those qualifications...” (AcadC2)*

*“...right now in our department basically ...most women that are here, we are trying to do our PhDs, we all have masters and we’re working towards the PhDs. Mostly it’s men...so far I think men are thriving in our department” (AcadC1)*

### ***Cross-university summary***

Responses from senior management at the three Universities were mainly positive regarding the support given to black and female academics. Senior managers generally had the impression that the universities were providing adequate support to the two groups that were historically marginalised. They also indicated that the institutions were putting in place measures to improve support given to these groups of academics. Conversely, academics generally pointed to a lack of support of black and female academics. At University B South African black academics indicated that they felt marginalised as the University seemed to have preference for foreign black academics. At University C, academics had the view that support for female academics was inadequate and that there was a low proportion of female academic staff, particularly in the science and engineering fields.

The recommendation about a patriarchal culture at University A does not seem to have been given attention. During the interviews for this research, the University’s executive management team of 13 members consisted of only one female member and all deans of faculties were male. Obers (2014) cautions that the under-representations of women in positions of authority tends to determine the nature of support and mentoring that is given to them. As regards support for female academics at University A, responses from academics seem to suggest that the responsibility for supporting female academics was assigned to an association for women researchers, which was aimed to provide support to female staff and students engaged in postgraduate research. The association was subsequently formally launched in 2012, suggesting that the University made an effort to address the recommendation pertaining to the provision of support for female researchers.

The disparity in views between senior management and academics regarding support given to black and female academics suggests that more still needs to be done to support black and female academics to ensure that these demographic groups feel as valued as the other historically advantaged demographic groups such as male and white academics.

## **6.6 The effect of institutional audits on student experience**

The findings on the effect of institutional audits on the quality of student experience mainly focus on two specific aspects of institutional culture: xenophobia and racism. It is acknowledged, however, that aspects of teaching and learning and support functions play a central role in determining the nature of student experience at an institution.

- **Institutional culture**

Institutional culture refers to a set of beliefs, behaviours, ways of doing things, leadership and management styles, and institutional ethos which are peculiar to one institution (Barnes, Baijnath & Sattar, 2010). Ten of the 22 universities that were audited received recommendations about institutional culture and xenophobia. According to The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1978), xenophobia refers to an ‘unreasonable fear and dislike of foreigners or strangers’. Everatt (2010) contends that xenophobic sentiments have been prevalent even before the 1994 democratic elections in South Africa and that xenophobic violence was barely reported by the media during the mid- to the late 90’s but was a constant aspect of the South African landscape that was buried beneath the preoccupation with the ‘rainbow nation’. Shindondola (2002) adds that xenophobia has its roots in the institutionalised inequality engendered by the apartheid system in South Africa, which resulted in frustrations and bitterness about unmet high expectations of many black nationals for the new South Africa being taken out on foreigners.

In May 2008 xenophobic violence erupted suddenly in South Africa and spread rapidly from Alexandra to other sites across the country (Everatt, 2010). Xenophobic attitudes and violence appear to have been focused on black African migrants, primarily Mozambicans and Zimbabweans, and over time have been extended other specific groups such as Somalis and

Pakistanis (Everatt, 2010). One of the main reasons behind these xenophobic attitudes is that these groups are often perceived by many South Africans to have taken their (South Africans') houses, women and jobs (Everatt, 2010).

Recommendations about institutional culture in the 10 universities covered issues such as the improvement of students' academic, social, cultural and residential experience; the presence of a tavern on campus and the effects this has on reported violence and crime, and its impact on student life; political interference, violence and intimidation on campus; language policy and its impact on academic results as well as the concrete experience of students inside and outside the classroom; the health and well-being of students; disaffection within the ranks of its international students; political intolerance, sexual abuse of female students, cheating and destruction of property; and the culture of staff and student strikes. Recommendations pertaining to xenophobia focused on international staff and students, particularly those from other African countries.

#### *University A*

In addition to a recommendation about xenophobia, University A also received a recommendation which urged it to develop measures to address the patriarchal environment in the institution. A patriarchal environment comprises structures, values and 'practices that reflect the experiences, values and interests of men as a group and protect their privileges while simultaneously denying, dismissing and/or devaluing the experiences, values, and interests of women as a group' (Wood, 2004). Wood (2004) further contends that patriarchy is not just about individuals and their beliefs, behaviours and status, but a social system reflecting the views and interests of men as a group.

Despite management's awareness of tensions between different local and international students and of the prevalence of ethnic-nationalism, there have not been any satisfactory and adequate interventions. The HEQC audit report encouraged the University's senior management to foster an environment in which acceptance and appreciation of diversity are regarded as essential values of the university community.

Academics at University A felt that there was no prevalence of xenophobia at the University as expressed below:

*“We have had colleagues and students from countries outside South Africa, and have been working with them without a single incidence of xenophobia.” (AcadA4)*

Like academics, students indicated that there were no incidents of xenophobia at University A. Students also corroborated senior management’s admission about the prevalence of ethnic-nationalism at the University. The students’ responses are summarised as follows:

*“...well, in here we have got tribalist, you find...the Venda people will be there, the Pedis will group themselves there...And then you find the Swatis themselves in groups. So, in other words these people, they cannot relate.” (StudentA7)*

*“...this (ethnicity) has been happening for quite some time with...sport especially... we had a soccer league here at the University. You have...for guys from southern side, the Tswana speaking, you will have Uno (a football club) from Giyani, you will have Sundowns from somewhere in Venda...they were along tribal lines. And you will have so many Pedi teams but from certain areas, Sekhukhune guys...then you will have guys from around Turfloop, then guys from around Seshego.” (StudentA2)*

Although students mentioned that there was no prevalence of xenophobia, their responses suggested that they had the impression that international students received preferential treatment and had domineering tendencies:

*“Yes on the academic side you may find that, especially with the internationals, that’s the experience I had. They want to take over, and you find that maybe for example we are in a class they want to do everything; they don’t allow you to do, all they need is to do...” (StudentA7)*

*“...last year, we had an international lecturer, he gave us an exam scope, it was seventeen chapters. Then he gave the international ones seven chapters to study. Then on Sunday when I was coming back from the academic side I met this young boy and he told me than no, just study seven chapters...then he (the student) gave me the seven chapters, then I studied that, and that course I had a distinction. (StudentA10)”*

Xenophobic behaviour is antithetical to the very concept of 'a university' and undermines the creation of an appropriate environment for successful teaching and learning to take place.

### *University B*

Members of senior management at University B acknowledged the HEQC's concerns about xenophobia and racism and indicated that the University was making efforts to address the situation. It was pointed out that the University's senior leadership had visited various campuses of the University to address staff and students about issues such as xenophobia, racism and homophobia. It further emerged that senior management was "*running programmes in the residences specifically to deal with xenophobia and gender-based violence*" (SnrMngB2). A member of senior management indicated that the University has a dedicated focus on internationalisation, which includes focused attention on international students:

*"...first of all we decided that internationalisation must be a dedicated strategy. So, we compiled a strategy, an internationalisation strategy...So we initiated a division for internationalisation and we appointed an executive director and empowered the division. So there is a dedicated focus on international students."* (SnrMngB1)

In addition to the hitherto mentioned interventions, the University was in the process of introducing the "*citizenship module which must form part of every undergraduate curriculum*" (SnrMngB2).

Although some academics indicated that xenophobia was not prevalent at University B, others submitted that although xenophobic signs may not be obvious at the University, xenophobia was actually prevalent among members of the University community. There were indications that some South African black academics harboured negative attitudes towards foreign African academics as they felt that the University preferred to appoint foreign black academics over black South African academics. Academic staff members pointed out that the ostensible preference for non-South African black academics was partly due to foreign black academics' willingness to accept lower remuneration packages. They further suggested that South African blacks' dissatisfaction with the situation may be gradually building up into a volatile situation



due to these preferential appointments, and then the xenophobic attitudes will ‘boil’ into violent reactions. The academics’ views are expressed as follows:

*“...what we’ve observed over the past few years is that this institution has been recruiting...black people...but people from across Africa. They seem to be preferring people from...outside of South Africa to black South Africans...And it has been a big issue, more” (AcadB3)*

*“In the long run...it’s (xenophobic violence) going to happen. South Africans they don’t boil in the short run, they boil in the long run...South Africans are not showing that there is xenophobia, but it’s there.” (AcadB4)*

Although students at University B said that there was no prevalence of xenophobia at the institution, some of their responses seemed to suggest that that racism could be an issue. The following encapsulates students’ responses:

*“I haven’t seen such (incidents of xenophobia and racism) because, uh, in my experience (this University)...has a warm and friendly environment to live for all. (StudentB8)*

*“...racism is played light. But because some of us are directly affected, that’s when we see it (racism) is happening. People...try too hard to cover it but we still see it. (StudentB3)*

*Ja...I feel like she is on point. All these things are here. But it’s because if it does not affect you directly you never even know. (StudentB6)*

### *University C*

Senior management members at University C indicated that there was no prevalence of xenophobia at the University. In fact, the University’s leadership appears to be proactive about matters regarding institutional culture and has embarked on activities to create awareness about and denounce any kind of discrimination or disrespect, as expressed below by a senior management member at the University:

*“We do not have xenophobic tensions...We find that people respect each other. I don’t say that there may not be other levels of tensions that we don’t know but I am talking about things that surface to the extent that you can experience it...in our case leadership is very sensitive that they express themselves because the campus belongs to all of us...we recently had a march...in town, where we expressed ourselves against xenophobia, where our VC, DVCs, everyone participated and we visibly came out and said this University (does) not subscribe to...any sort of discrimination or disrespect; we...respect people from wherever...” (SnrMngC1)*

Academics corroborated senior management’s view that xenophobia was not prevalent at the University. However, one academic indicated that she observed a lack of racial integration and racism tendencies at the University. Another academic felt that foreign students were receiving preferential treatment from senior managers and often bypassed University protocol for communication and grievance processes. The academics’ views are expressed as follows:

*“Xenophobia I will say I haven’t seen it, I haven’t experienced it happening since I’ve been here. But the...division, the racism part I think it still exists... There’s still that division between white people and black people. Even if you can see in a meeting you can see that white people they will group themselves, black people they will group themselves.” (AcadC1)*

*I think at (this University) they are favouring the people from outside...Even with the lecturers, they will tell you that I’m going to a boss. They will say, no since you didn’t do this I’ll go to the Dean. That’s what the students will tell you. You can see that they get so much support from the...from the management...they need to learn about the processes that you have to follow if you’re having a problem.” (AcadC2)*

Students echoed senior management and academics’ view that there are no xenophobic tensions at the University. However, during interviews with students there seemed to be a prevalence of ethnic-nationalism at the University. Students from one of the country’s provinces complained that they were accused of practising witchcraft simply because they originated from the province. The students’ views were expressed as follows:

*“...us the ones who are South Africans and the international students, the relationship between us and them so far since I have been here...I haven’t seen any...serious challenges in a way ‘cos we get along quite well.” (StudentC6)*

*“...what I find as a challenge is that, I don’t know how to categorise it but then usually a lot of students who come from Limpopo are always associated with witchcraft. Anything that happens it’s the guys from Limpopo...and I find that very offensive ‘cos some of us don’t even know how to practise this (witchcraft).” (StudentC5)*

### ***Cross-university summary***

Responses from senior management at University A and University B signify that that they were aware of xenophobic tensions, as well as ethnic-nationalism and racism tendencies at the former and latter respectively. Academics at University B indicated that the University seemed to prefer foreign black academics to South African black academics while those at University C felt that foreign students were receiving preferential treatment from management. There appear to be feelings of discriminatory attitudes and treatment based on demographics such as race, ethnicity and nationality among students at the three Universities. These feelings tend to engender the apparent prevalence of racism, ethnic-nationalism and xenophobia at these Universities. Although University B and University C have made efforts to address these interpersonal maladies, University A did not seem to have made plans to address any such issues despite management’s acknowledgement of the prevalence of xenophobia and ethnic-nationalism at the University.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the findings of interviews that were conducted with staff and students at University A, University B and University C by focusing on the following themes: vision and mission, the self-evaluation exercise and institutional audits, resource allocation, institutional culture, and support for black and female staff members.

It is evident that senior managers and academics largely have different views about the challenges faced by their universities. For example, as we have seen, senior managers mainly indicated that the process of crafting the universities' visions and missions was widely inclusive of and well communicated to all stakeholders, while academic staff generally did not find the process inclusive and well communicated. The disjuncture in the communication of the vision and mission between senior managers and academics suggest that the institutions do not sufficiently adhere to TQM's principle of involving the entire workforce (Besterfield, 2004). Furthermore, the disjuncture suggests a fragmented approach to institutional sub-units instead of a systems approach's holistic view which advocates the interrelationships between various faculties, departments and units of a university (Miller-Williams & Kritsonis, 2010).

Further, senior managers at the three universities concurred that the self-evaluation exercise and institutional audits added value to their institutions and helped them to improve on quality in various areas. Although there was initial scepticism about institutional audits among some staff members, the process was eventually embraced by most staff members.

There was general agreement among staff and students at the three Universities that the satellite campuses are not as adequately resourced as the main campuses, although the three Universities responded differently to the disparity. While University B seemed to be committed to addressing inequitable resourcing across its campuses by putting in place various measures, University A attributed the complaints about inequitable resourcing to misconception by staff and students at satellite campuses, and University C did not seem committed to addressing the issue and there were even pessimistic comments about the continued existence of satellite campuses. Contrary to TQM's basic principles, staff at University A and University C did not seem committed to meeting and exceeding the expectations of students at satellite campuses (Sallis, 1993). While University A seemed defensive regarding concerns raised about attention given to the University's satellite campuses, University C appears to have given up on satellite campuses. This is aptly summarised in the following comment by an executive dean at University C as follows:

*“...go and have a look at the libraries of our satellite campuses. It's only really the few prescribed books...Really, satellite...(are) a big problem...it's in most cases not viable.*

*So, satellite campuses, no. I'm not in favour of...no, it's not working; really, I've seen so many... mistakes that we have done.” (SnrMngC3)*

Responses from staff and students at the three Universities pointed to a prevalence of xenophobic tensions, as well as ethnic-nationalism and racism tendencies within the university communities. Although there were indications that University B and University C were making efforts to address these issues, there were no indications from respondents at University A about plans to address the issues as indicated in the audit report. There did not seem to be a serious commitment to addressing aspects of the institutional culture such as xenophobia and racism. Indeed, TQM's principle about commitment to continuous improvement did not seem to apply to University A and University C as regards the prevalence of xenophobia and racism.

Although senior management members at the three Universities were generally positive about the support given to black and female academics, responses from academics were less so. The differences in views between senior management and academics signified a need for more support to be provided to black and female academics. It is important for black and female academics to be treated in a way that makes them feel that they are a valued part of a team to ensure that the entire team functions more effectively. As Suchan and Dulek (1998), put it, each part of a system affects the behaviour of the whole and, because the subsystems are interrelated, the effect that each subsystem has on the whole depends on at least one other subsystem.

The three Universities seem to be showing different levels of commitment to addressing the issues that they are faced with, and some issues seem to be given more attention than others.

The next chapter presents a summary of this study and its overall findings, draws conclusions and makes recommendations.

## CHAPTER 7

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the conclusions reached in this study which sought to investigate the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience across different types of higher education institutions. The chapter presents a summary of this research project and its key findings, draws conclusions and makes recommendations. It starts by presenting the summary of the study in Section 7.2. In Section 7.3 the summary of the main findings is presented according to the research questions. Section 7.4 presents a reflection on the conceptual framework, and a reflection on the methodology is presented Section 7.5. In Section 7.6, major challenges encountered during interviews are discussed. Section 7.7 presents and argues the issue of generalising from the case studies. The main conclusions of the study are presented and discussed in Section 7.8 and the recommendations are made in Section 7.9.

#### 7.2 Summary of the study

As has been mentioned in Chapter 1 (1.2) the Higher Education Quality Committee's (HEQC) institutional audits, which were conducted between 2004 and 2011, covered all 23 public higher education institutions and some private providers. After receiving an institutional audit report, institutions were required to develop and implement a quality improvement plan which responds to the recommendations made in the audit report (CHE, 2004a). Three years after the audit visit, institutions were expected to submit a progress report which shows the progress made by institutions in implementing the approved improvement plan. However, the process of monitoring the implementation plan primarily appears to be superficial as it is largely paper-based and, focuses on engagements with the institutions' executive leadership and not those at the lower levels. In addition, since the institutional audits were concluded in 2011, there have

hardly been any studies that sought to establish the effect of institutional audits on quality in South African Universities. This study therefore attempts to bridge this gap as it investigates the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience across different types of higher education institutions in a more substantive manner by conducting interviews with members of senior management, academics and students (see 1.2).

The primary purpose of the HEQC's institutional audits is to facilitate systematic and continuous improvement and development of quality in higher education and enhance the capacity of higher education institutions to plan, act and report on quality-related objectives and achievements (CHE, 2004a). It is thus imperative that, after embarking on such a resource-intensive and time consuming activity as institutional audits, robust measures are taken to ascertain the extent to which these audits have made a difference. However, as mentioned the HEQC's monitoring mechanisms appear to be superficial.

To this end, the primary aim of this study is to investigate the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience across different types of higher education institutions. The following main research question guided the study:

- What effect have the HEQC's institutional audits had on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning; support functions; and student experience across different types of higher education institutions?

As explained in Chapter 3 (section 3.16), this main research question has been broken down into the following specific research questions:

- What discernible effect have the HEQC institutional audits had on the quality of aspects of teaching and learning policies, practices and behaviours?
- How have the HEQC institutional audits affected the quality of aspects of support functions?
- What are the effects of institutional audits on the quality of student experience?

The literature review that was conducted identified and discussed the concepts that led to the conceptual framework (see section 3.15). The conceptual framework was underpinned by the Total Quality Management (TQM) and systems theories (see section 3.13). The framework also presented the major role players at the three selected universities: senior management, academic staff and students. The three groups of role players were asked questions pertaining to the themes that were categorised into the areas of teaching and learning and support functions, and student experience. These themes were identified during the analysis of summaries of institutional audit reports, literature review and during interviews at the three universities. The views of these role players were sought to establish the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience across different types of higher education institutions. The literature review showed that, although overall the effects of institutional audits on universities were positive, there were also negative effects that were reported (see sections 3.9, 3.10 and 3.11).

In order to answer the research questions, the experiences of the three key role players at universities – senior management members, academics and students – were sought. Feedback from these higher education stakeholders would provide pointers as to the effect of institutional audits on teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience across different types of higher education institutions.

A case study design was used to investigate the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on University A, University B and University C. An in-depth investigation was chosen to ensure that the participants' detailed views, non-verbal cues and relevant contextual factors are captured. The in-depth focus that characterises case studies attempted to address the relatively superficial follow-up mechanisms employed by the HEQC as regards the implementation of the quality improvement plans by institutions to address recommendations in the institutional audit reports. One university was selected from each of these institutional types: a traditional university (University A), a comprehensive university (University B) and a university of technology (University C) (see section 4.3.3). Three universities also comprised a mix of both historically advantaged or white universities and historically disadvantaged or black universities as well as universities based in rural and urban areas.



A total of 58 respondents were selected, comprising 12 senior management members, 12 academics and 34 students spread across the three identified South African public higher education institutions (see section 4.3.3). One-on-one interviews were conducted with senior managers and academics while focus group interviews were conducted with students at the three universities. A total of 27 interviews were conducted with 58 participants at the three institutions. A digital recorder was used to capture a verbatim account of interviewees' responses and these were subsequently transcribed. Table 4.2 under section 4.3.5 in Chapter 4 summarises the categorisation of the identified themes for this study.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, a content analysis of the audit report summaries of the three universities was conducted in order to identify major themes and formulate pertinent interview questions. The study did not set out to follow up on all aspects of each recommendation in the audit reports but considered the overall focus of the recommendation for comparability across the institutions. The themes identified based on the recommendations in the audit reports were also used to group the codes developed during the data analysis on Atlas.ti (see section 4.3.7).

Data from the digital recorder were played back and transcribed. The analysis of the transcribed data was done using thematic analysis as the focus of analysis is on significant content and themes (Rule & John, 2011).

### **7.3 Summary of the main findings**

In this section, a summary of the main research findings is presented. This section is structured according to the sub-headings that are directly linked to the specific research questions and is based on the findings as reported in Chapters 5 and 6.

#### **7.3.1 The effects of the HEQC institutional audits on the quality of teaching and learning policies, practices and behaviours**

In this sub-section a summary of the main research findings is structured in accordance with the themes that fall under the secondary research question focusing on the core areas of teaching and

learning. The discussion thus focuses on assessment of students, postgraduate education, private work by academics, management of short courses, management of work-integrated learning and the teaching of large classes.

- **Challenges regarding assessment of students by academics**

It was evident that the three universities are faced with various challenges pertaining to assessment of students. These challenges consist of the inconsistent application of the university-wide assessment policy, repetition of examination questions, and leakage of examination question papers (see 5.2). The repetition and leakage of exam papers appeared to be more serious and out of control in some universities than in others. For example, in some cases, whole papers were repeated, and some question papers continued to be written or marked even after they were reported to have been leaked. Struyven, Dochy and Janssens (2005) contend that the manner in which students are assessed tends to influence their approach to learning; these approaches can either be positive or negative. The practice of repeating examination questions in at the universities in this study are likely to promote surface learning approaches (Struyven et al, 2005).

- **Challenges regarding postgraduate education**

Feedback from senior managers, academics and students reveals that University A, University B and University C are faced with various challenges regarding postgraduate education, although these were variable across the universities. These challenges include supervision capacity, lack of grievance procedures for postgraduate students, delays in the proposal approval process and supervisors performing the role of examiners of their own students. Interviews revealed that supervisory capacity posed the greatest challenge at the three universities. Indeed, this finding is corroborated by the PhD study conducted by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) report (2010) which found that the percentage of permanent academic staff with PhDs at South African universities ranged from five percent to 61 percent per university. Despite these challenges, it was evident from that, at least in some universities, mechanisms were being put in place to address the issues raised (see 5.3).

- **Private work by academics**

It emerged during interviews at University A that private work by academics at the University is a great concern. Various academics and senior management members acknowledged the problem and its negative impact on the core academic activities. In fact respondents pointed out that the problem was more prevalent in some faculties than in others. The problem is exacerbated by the University's apparent lack of regulation of private work. It is encouraging to note that the University appears to have made efforts to correct the situation by putting in place policies to regulate private work by its employees. Notwithstanding these efforts, however, no substantive change seems to have taken place in this regard (see section 5.4).

- **The management of short courses**

The findings further suggest that the management of short courses at University B remains a challenge. Although Senior management wanted to develop a framework for the offering of short courses at the University to ensure consistency of practice and better management, faculties resisted the central regulation of short courses as academics viewed short courses as a source of extra income that augmented their salaries and seemed to suspect that management's motives were to usurp this extra income opportunity from faculties. It became clear, however, that senior management was determined to put in place measures to centrally manage short courses (see section 5.5).

- **The challenges in the management work-integrated learning**

It appears that University C, like many other universities of technology in South Africa, is confronted with various challenges regarding the management of work-integrated learning (WIL). These challenges include the monitoring of students involved in work-integrated learning, and the placement of students that require WIL training in industry. Notwithstanding these challenges, it appears that the University has made efforts to address the situation. Senior managers pointed out that resources such as cars were bought specifically for WIL purposes, so as to enable effective monitoring of students who have been placed in industry, and that in some faculties WIL champions have been appointed for each programme (see section 5.6).

- **The management of large classes**

It appears that large classes continue to pose challenges at universities. During interviews with staff and students, it was acknowledged that University B was faced with high student numbers. In fact, in some cases there were subjects which registered between 3500 and 4000 students each year (Jawitz as cited in Hornsby, Osman & De Matos-Ala, 2013). During interviews it emerged that the University was making good progress as regards the teaching of large classes. For example the University was using technology to enhance the teaching of large classes, was in the process of equipping existing lecture rooms at satellite campuses with appropriate technology to aid teaching and learning and even allocated tutors to assist academics with the teaching of large classes (see section 5.7).

### **7.3.2 The effect of the HEQC institutional audits on the quality of support functions**

In this sub-section a summary of the main research findings is structured in accordance with the themes that fall under the secondary research question focusing on support functions. The discussion thus focuses on the vision and mission, self-evaluation activity, resource allocation across university campuses, and support given to black and female academics.

- **The mission and vision**

Responses from the interviews at the three Universities regarding the vision and mission show that, in the main, senior managers felt that the process of crafting the universities' strategic directions was widely inclusive of and well communicated to all stakeholders. Academics, on the other hand, were generally dissatisfied with the process of crafting and communicating the vision and mission. Some academics thought their senior management had unilaterally decided on the university's vision and mission while others only became aware of their university's vision and mission fortuitously (e.g. via the internet). The general view among students who were interviewed was that they did not know about the mission and vision and felt it was not communicated to them. It is important for students, together with academics and other members of the university community, to be aware of the university's strategic direction which is normally

captured in its vision statement and mission. The vision and mission often guide research students' activities such as research focus areas and even what they can expect from the university. Although it appears that there have been efforts from the universities to involve various stakeholders' inputs in the crafting on the mission and vision, these have been largely scant and ineffectual (see section 6.2).

- **The value added by the self-evaluation activity**

Senior managers at each of the three universities agreed that the self-evaluation exercise and institutional audits added value to their institutions. It was even pointed out that self-evaluations and institutional audits, to some extent, facilitated the merger processes which some of the universities were at the time undergoing (see section 6.3).

- **Resource allocation for the main and satellite campuses**

There was general concurrence among senior management members at the three universities that the satellite campuses were not as adequately resourced as the main campuses. However, while senior managers at one university (University B) appears to have made great strides in addressing equitable resourcing across campuses, the two other universities (University A and University C) had hardly made efforts to address this issue and, even more concerning, did not seem keen to give it focused attention (see section 6.4).

- **Support given to black and female academics**

Responses from senior management at the three universities were mainly positive regarding the support given to black and female academics. Conversely, academics generally pointed to a lack of support for black and female academics. Some South African black academics even indicated that they felt marginalised as the University seemed to prefer employing foreign black academics to South Africans. The recommendation about a patriarchal culture at one university (University A) does not seem to have been given attention. The disparity in views between senior management and academics regarding support given to black and female academics suggests that more still needs to be done to support black and female academics (see section 6.5).

### **7.3.3 The effects of institutional audits on the quality of student experience**

This section discusses student experience by focusing on two aspects of institutional culture: xenophobia and racism. Responses from senior management at University A and University B signify that they were aware of xenophobic tensions, as well as ethnic-nationalism and racism tendencies at the former and latter respectively. Academics at University C felt that foreign students were receiving preferential treatment from management. There appeared to be feelings of discriminatory attitudes and treatment based on demographics such as race, ethnicity and nationality among students at the three Universities. These feelings tended to engender the apparent prevalence of racism, ethnic-nationalism and xenophobia at these Universities. Although University B and University C have made efforts to address these interpersonal maladies, University A did not seem to have made plans to address any such issues despite management's acknowledgement of the prevalence of xenophobia and ethnic-nationalism at the University (see section 6.6).

### **7.4 Reflection on the conceptual framework**

As indicated in Chapter 3, the conceptual framework for this study is underpinned by the Total Quality Management (TQM) and systems approaches. The overall goal of TQM is to create an organisation committed to continuous improvement (Smit & Cronje, 2002). Indeed, this is in line with one of the objectives of the HEQC's institutional audits: 'to encourage and support higher education providers to maintain a culture of continuous improvement...' (CHE, 2004a). Feedback from interviews at the three universities suggests that the audits have compelled the institutions towards addressing the recommendations made in the audit reports, which contributes to the improvement of quality.

However, TQM's overall goal of commitment to continuous improvement does not seem to be adequately subscribed to across the three universities. This inference is based on the urgency and depth with which the universities address the recommendations in the audit reports. The principle is applied variably at the three universities. For example, University B seems to be the most committed to improve the areas flagged in its institutional audit report. In particular, responses

by various stakeholders suggest that the University has made great strides in the areas of resource allocation across its various campuses and postgraduate supervision capacity. It was also pointed out during interviews that resource allocation across campuses forms part of the key performance areas of some members of the senior management team including the Registrar and Director of Student Administration. On the converse, University A and University C seem to show less commitment to ensuring equitability of resourcing across campuses. Senior management members at University A attribute complaints about inequitable resourcing as a misperception, whereas those at University C seem to blame the inequitable resourcing across campuses on a lack of *"official satellite campus system that is being subsidised by the department (of higher Education and Training) (SnrMngC1)"*. As indicated in Chapter 6, University C's lack of progress in improving resource allocation at its satellite campuses is aptly summed up by an executive faculty dean at the University who said that *"satellite campuses (are)...a big problem (and are)...not working" SnrMngC3* (see 6.4). Although the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 3 shows that the principles of TQM should provide the conceptual basis for higher education leaders and role players, the findings in this study suggested that TQM principles were scantily applied.

The effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on aspects of teaching and learning and support areas appears to have been mainly positive. Although, the universities have variably addressed the recommendations in the audit reports, there is a general sense that the audits have compelled universities to engage in more substantive conversations about quality and put in place mechanisms to address the recommendations in the audit reports. However, the effect of the audits on the quality of student experience appears to be limited and more needs to be done to ensure that the quality of student experience is improved. The conceptual framework will accordingly be extended to include the overall positive effects of institutional audits on the teaching and learning and support areas. In addition, the conceptual framework will reflect the marginal effect of institutional audits on the quality of student experience. Indeed, TQM in higher education focuses on students as customers including the service provided to students, and the contribution of all staff members to the effectiveness of an institution (Ali & Shastri, 2010). It is evident that the service provided to students at some universities and in certain areas leaves a lot to be desired, and is not consonant with TQM's concept of treating students as valued

customers. The examples that have been given such as inadequately qualified academics being allowed to supervise postgraduate students at University A, lack of monitoring and placement of students in WIL programmes at University C, inequitable resource allocation across campuses at both University A and University C, and institutional cultures fraught with racism and xenophobia at the three universities bear testimony to this. The factors lead to a compromised student experience which is antithetical to TQM's notion of treating students as customers. To ensure that all staff members contribute to the effectiveness of the institution they need to, inter alia, be apprised of the strategic direction of the institution and support mechanism that need to be put in place to ensure that they have the necessary capacity. From the interviews with academics, it appears that many of them were not sufficiently informed of their university's vision and some did not even know it. It also emerged that even some members of the senior leadership team could not articulate their university's vision. It thus stands to reason that if university staff members are not well informed about its strategic direction, it is unlikely that the institution will achieve its strategic objectives because the implementation of the strategy, as it were, lies in the hands of the staff involved in the core business of an organisation. It is also essential to put in place support systems for staff members to ensure that they are sufficiently capacitated and empowered to discharge their roles, and create a conducive environment for them to perform their duties optimally.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the systems theory foregrounds a holistic approach which focuses on the way subsystems interrelate and how systems work over time and within the context of larger systems (Miller-Williams & Kritsonis, 2010). Indeed, the systems theory and the TQM theory should not be seen as mutually exclusive because one of the fundamental tenets of the latter is that organisations must be viewed as systems and the work people do within the system must be regarded as ongoing processes; in fact, total quality management gives more attention to the system than anything else (Pineda, 2013). The apparent lack of communication regarding the university's vision to various stakeholders and inequitable resource allocation across all campuses of an institution could be indicative of a disjuncture between various parts of the universities' systems. In view of these and other discrepancies that were pointed out during interviews, it seems senior management members at the three universities don't continuously view the institutions as a whole but view certain aspects as separate constituent parts. Above all,



since the three universities central to this study are part of the South African public higher education system, the efficacy of their institutional systems will have a bearing on the overall effectiveness of the broader South African public higher education system. The conceptual framework might have to be adapted to reflect the systems that do not function effectively in terms of effectively communicating the mission and vision, assessment policies and other important aspects of an institution.

### **7.5 Reflection on the research methodology**

As mentioned in 4.3.1, a case study design was chosen for this investigation. Case studies are the most apposite research design to answer the research question as they involve a systematic and in-depth investigation of a particular phenomenon and the use of multiple sources of evidence with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion (Yin, 2009; Rule & John, 2011). The choice of the case study design to investigate the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on University A, University B and University C enabled an in-depth investigation to be conducted of the three institutions (Yin, 2009; Rule & John, 2011).

The substantive investigation helped to fill the void left by the largely superficial monitoring mechanisms used by the HEQC. Interviews with academic staff and students have enriched the study with invaluable inputs from those involved in the coal-face of the university's core activities. These perspectives from academics and students are not possible with the HEQC's approach of engaging with the universities' executive leadership on the progress report as these interactions would mostly focus on generic and high level feedback. By covering the three institutional types in the South African higher education sector (a traditional university, a comprehensive university and a university of technology) which also consisted of a mix of both historically advantaged or white universities and historically disadvantaged or black universities located in rural and urban areas, the research covered diverse institutional contexts in the South African higher education landscape. Indeed, findings suggest that contextual factors may have influenced an institution's response to institutional audit processes. As Yin (2009) notes, case studies may take too much time to conduct and result in colossal and cumbersome documents.

One reason for the onerous nature of case studies is that data gathered is largely qualitative (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Accordingly, data collection in this study was arduous and time-consuming. The amount of work involved and time spent in this study were all worthwhile as the produced rich data that made it possible to conduct an in-depth investigation on the effects of institutional audits at the three institutions (Yin, 2009). The researcher conducted 27 interviews with a total of 58 respondents all by himself. Other interviewers could have assisted the interviewer in collecting data, thereby interviewing a larger number of participants in different areas within a shorter period of time. The researcher, however, chose to conduct all the interviews so that he could observe the participants' verbal and non-verbal messages as well as contextual factors. Indeed, in some cases, interviewees sought to enhance the researcher's understanding of their responses by sharing sensitive confidential information which they requested the researcher not to include as part of the interview record. For ethical reasons, the researcher has decided to respect these wishes.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the themes identified in this study were based on the HEQC's criteria for institutional audits, content analysis of audit reports, literature review and data emerging from interviews (see section 3.14).

A mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence could have been used in this study by distributing questionnaires to a larger number of respondents in addition to interviews conducted, adding to the richness of the evidence (Yin, 2009). However, in hindsight, it was found that during interviews respondents often needed clarity on some questions. Some of the questions needed to be accompanied with some background information to ensure better clarity. These opportunities for clarifying questions would have been missed had survey questionnaires been distributed to participants. Moreover, it was the primary purpose of this research to conduct a more focused and in-depth investigation to determine the extent to which the universities have responded to the interventions of the HEQC institutional audits.

Although the study only covers three of the 23 public higher education institutions in South Africa (approximately 13%), its findings and conclusions could provide useful insights and pointers regarding the influence that the institutional audits have had on the universities. In addition, increasing the sample was not feasible given the time and resource constraints in this

study. Even though the sample size was small, there was variation of coverage in the sampling of sites according to institutional type, location, and level of advantage to ensure the richness of samples which is central to maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002). The logic of maximum variation sampling is that when a researcher selects a highly diverse sample, the collection and analysis of data will produce detailed and high quality descriptions of each of the cases in the sample (Patton, 2002) (see 4.3.3). It is, however, acknowledged that it would be ideal to conduct interviews with participants from more universities, but the intricacies and logistics of including more institutions may be beyond the scope of this study; hence, a case study design was chosen.

Further, as regards the spread of participants, the study did not cover participants from various faculties at each university. The intention was to interview academics within similar faculties across all the three universities, which was achieved in two of the three universities (see section 4.3.3). This limited spread of participants within institutions requires a level of circumspection in interpreting the findings to ensure that invalid conclusions and generalisations are not drawn. In order to further address the concern regarding the spread of participants, a recommendation for further research has been added to this effect (see section 7.9.3).

As mentioned in section 4.3.3, some adjustments had to be made to the original sample of participants due to some potential participants' unavailability and unwillingness to participate. However, alternative arrangements were made to interview suitable replacements to ensure that the relevance and quality of the responses was not compromised. For example, the registrar at University A was replaced with the assistant registrar who was closely involved with all the core functions of the registrar's office, and the registrar at University C who was on long leave was replaced by the deputy-vice chancellor who was overseeing the registrar's functions at the time of the interview.

Each of the three universities was visited at least three times to conduct the interviews. Since the furthest university (University A) was approximately 300 kilometres from where the researcher lived, the repeated trips added to the escalated cost of the research and also resulted in the researcher taking an unnecessarily higher number of leave days at his workplace. In fact, on one occasion, the researcher ended up conducting one interview at University A, despite having scheduled and received confirmation of three interviews, due to unforeseen circumstances.

However, in hindsight, the extensive travelling and costs involved in this study were all worthwhile as they ensured that all three higher education institutional types comprising both urban- and rural-based institutions are covered.

The interviews generally ran smoothly as they were scheduled before hand and most of the interviewees made efforts to avail interview rooms that were conducive and free of interruptions. However, some of the interviews were punctuated by interruptions such as people knocking on the doors, ringing phones and loud noises outside the interview rooms. These were, however, effectively managed and the interviews continued as scheduled. Notwithstanding these occasional challenges, all 27 interviews at the three universities have been conducted and managed.

Since this study is comprised mainly of data collected from 27 interviews and complemented with data emanating from the analysis of audit report summaries, the researcher had to ensure that each of these interviews were transcribed. Although transcribing interviews is time-consuming and arduous, in this study the researcher transcribed his own recordings. The researcher could have used the services of typists or transcription service providers and only verify the transcriptions afterwards, which could have saved him time. However, he was better positioned to transcribe as he was exposed to the interview context, had face-to-face contact with participants, and wanted to know his interviews better (Seidman, 2013). The researcher's decision to transcribe his own interviews felt justified as the transcriptions brought back the interview situations which he conducted first hand. This process of mentally revisiting the interview situations made the process of data analysis and interpretation smoother and more accurate. As indicated in Chapter 4 (4.2.7), Atlas.ti, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, was used to analyse data (Yin, 2009). The researcher decided to analyse all the data in this study on his own as he had a full understanding of the interview contexts and also transcribed all 27 interviews. Thus, the researcher felt better placed to analyse the interviews. Indeed, the researcher was justified in analysing the transcribed interviews as his exposure to the institutional contexts and interaction with respondents afforded him a rich background which enhanced and optimised the data analysis process.

Despite the challenges highlighted in this sub-section, the processes of collecting and interpreting data were fairly well executed.

## **7.6 Major challenges encountered during interviews**

During the data collection phase of this study, a number of obstacles were encountered, particularly at University A and University C. After electronic letters were sent via e-mail to the three universities requesting permission to conduct interviews with their staff and students, positive responses were received from the three universities. At University B, the person designated to give such approvals responded within a few days and replied with a positive e-mail confirmation and even gave pointers regarding appropriate staff members to approach for the interviews. The interviews that were subsequently arranged went ahead as scheduled with the participants. However, the process was not as smooth at University A and University C.

After letters were sent and follow-ups conducted via telephone calls with University A requesting permission to conduct interviews with staff and students at University A, there was no response received for approximately five weeks. Subsequently, an e-mail was received from the University with the signature of the vice-chancellor on the last page of the letter that was sent to request permission to conduct the interviews. It was then confirmed telephonically that the page with the vice-chancellor's signature was indeed granting permission to conduct interviews at University A. Meeting invites were then sent electronically in accordance with the agreed dates and times. Participants electronically accepted the invites, including University A's registrar.

Although the Registrar had electronically accepted the interview meeting request which included the letter outlining the purpose of the interview, on the day of the scheduled interview when the interview was due to be conducted he declined the interview. Instead of participating in the interview as per his e-mail confirmation, the Registrar advised that there were new requirements that needed to be met before the interview could be allowed to take place; there was no other alternative but to leave the University and make new arrangements for the interview. Subsequently an interview was arranged and conducted with the deputy-registrar of the University. This experience with University A's highlighted the importance of confirming all

interviews telephonically up to a day before the interviews to ensure that any changes in the interview schedules or new requirements or documents are known and prepared prior to the day of the interview.

The other senior staff members at University A, who gave excuses to justify why they could no longer proceed with the scheduled interviews that they had confirmed, were the Dean of Students and the Director of Projects in the Vice-Chancellor's office at University A. The Dean of Students rushed out of his office just as the interview was about to start, after hearing news that one of his colleagues was involved in a car accident. The Director of Projects in the Vice-Chancellor's office simply refused. The behavior of some of the senior management staff at University A, such as the registrar and the Director of Projects in the Vice-Chancellor's office, suggest some discomfort and apprehension among senior members of the University about institutional audits. This apprehension could have emanated from the apparently inadequately implemented improvement plan.

As regards University C, an e-mailed approval was received from the office of the vice-chancellor to conduct interviews. However, on the day of the first set of interviews, the University's the research office indicated that there were new requirements that needed to be met prior to the interviews taking place. Subsequently after the required information was provided, permission was granted for the interviews to take place.

The negative reactions from some of the senior management staff members at University A and University C created the impression that they could have been feeling uncomfortable about interviews on progress pertaining to institutional audits as there might be lack of progress in some areas. Regardless of the difficult experiences encountered in conducting interviews, the quality and rigour of the research was safeguarded by securing interviews with the best possible replacements for the University members who were unable to participate in the scheduled interviews. The responses received were of high quality and led to solid and valid findings.

This research experience was all worthwhile as it provided full insight into the practical realities of qualitative research. These experiences will be used to ensure that future qualitative interviews are better planned and managed. As one senior manager at University C aptly put it, it is

essential for the researcher to be directly exposed to the intricacies of data collection as ‘it is part of the research drill’.

### **7.7 Generalising from the case studies**

It would not be appropriate to generalise about the effectiveness of a drug after observing its positive effects on one patient (Thomas, 2011). Similarly, the effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on University A, University B and University C should not be generalised to the other 20 public higher education institutions in South Africa. Yin (2012) distinguishes between statistical generalisations and analytic generalisations and identifies the latter as the appropriate type for case study research. Statistical generalisation makes inferences about a population based on empirical data collected about a random sample from that population (Yin, 2009). Analytic generalisation, on the other hand, uses a previously developed theory as a template with which researchers compare empirical results of the case study (Yin, 2009). Further, in analytic generalisation, if it is demonstrated that two or more cases support the same theory, the researcher may claim with high probability that the same findings can be expected in similar contexts, i.e. other South African universities.

Thomas (2011) corroborates Yin's view by stating that a case study provides a more complete and rich picture which allows researchers to gain analytical insights from it. Concomitantly, this study claims analytic generalisations to show how the study's findings have informed the relationships among a particular set of concepts and theoretical constructs (Yin, 2012).

### **7.8 Main conclusions of the study**

As has already been mentioned, the main research question for this study is: What effect have the HEQC's institutional audits had on the quality of relevant aspects of teaching and learning, support functions, and student experience across different types of higher education institutions? This section builds upon the summary of findings highlighted in the previous section and

presented in detail in Chapters 5 and 6. The conclusions will be presented in accordance with areas covered by each research sub-question, thereby providing an answer to the main research question. Conclusion (a) is related to the first sub-question: What discernible effect have the HEQC institutional audits had on the quality of aspects of teaching and learning policies, practices and behaviours?; conclusion (b) addresses the second sub-question: How have the HEQC institutional audits influenced the quality of aspects of support functions?; and conclusion (c) is linked to the third sub-question: What are the effects of institutional audits on the quality of student experience?

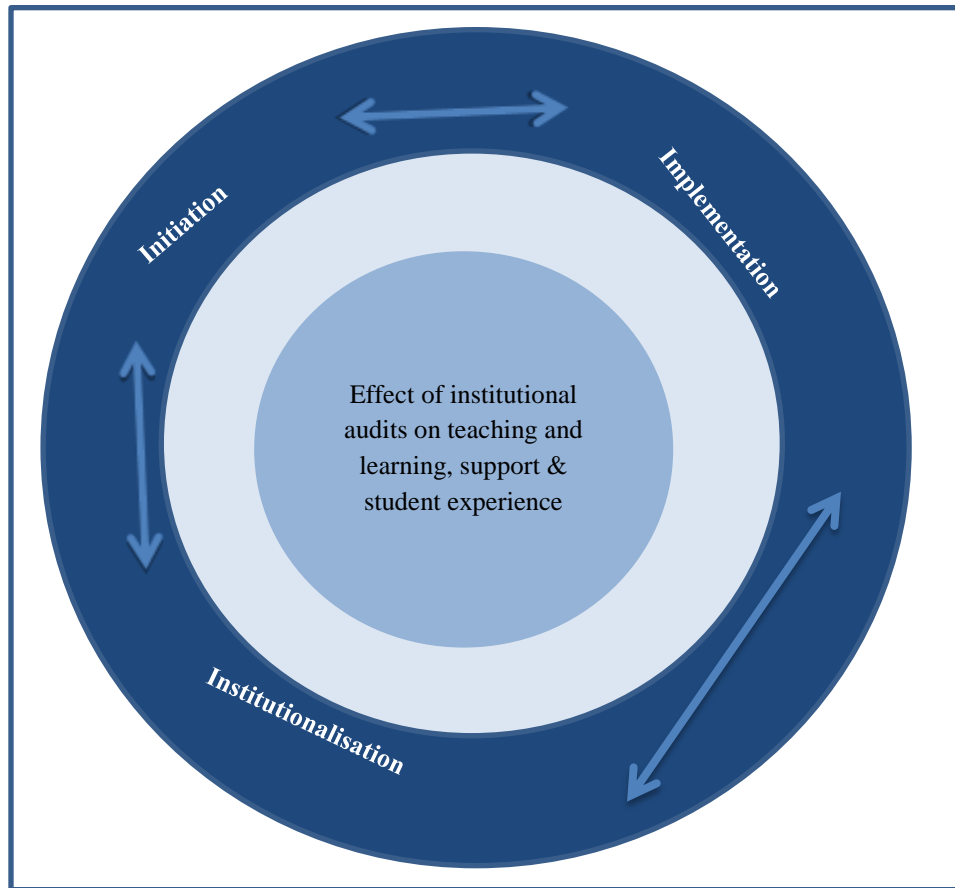
Further, two additional and disparate themes emerged during the review of literature and analysis of data. These areas were about (i) the difference between the perceptions of senior management on the one hand and students and academic staff on the other (Rosa, Tavares & Amaral, 2006; and Stensaker, Langfeldt, Harvey, Huisman, & Westerheijden, 2011), and (ii) the apparent differences in the manner in which a historically black and a historically white university (Ilorah, 2006; Mabokela, 2007; Nkomo & Schoole, 2007) responded to the HEQC institutional audit recommendations. It was deemed necessary to include these two extra disparate areas as they may provide a useful perspective on the three main conclusions and could even help to give more meaning to some of the findings. To this end, there are five conclusions drawn from the findings in this study. These conclusions are:

- (a) The HEQC's institutional audits have had limited but positive effect on the quality of teaching and learning policies, practices and behaviours at the three the universities, albeit at varied levels of acceptance and implementation.;
- (b) The effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on the quality of support functions have been variable but positive;
- (c) The effect of the HEQC institutional audits on the quality of student experience seems to minimal;
- (d) Senior management appear to have the most positive perceptions of progress made in addressing the HEQC institutional audit recommendations; and
- (e) There appears to be a difference in the manner in which a historically black and a historically white university responds to the HEQC institutional audit recommendations.



In order to ensure better clarity of the main conclusions, use is made of Michael Fullan's (2007) theory of change. Fullan's theory (2007) provides more insight about the extent of change that institutions might have undergone as a result of the HEQC's institutional audits, thus shedding light on the effect of these audits. Fullan (2007) identifies three broad phases in the process of change at an institution and classroom level: initiation or adoption, implementation, and institutionalisation or incorporation. Initiation or adoption refers to the process leading up to and includes a decision to adopt or proceed with a change, implementation involves the initial efforts to put the adopted idea or change into practice, and institutionalisation or incorporation refers to whether the adopted reform becomes embedded into the system or vanishes by being discarded or given scant attention (Fullan, 2007).

Figure 7.1 depicts the HEQC's institutional audits in the context of Fullan's (2007) change process.



(Source: Fullan, 2007)

**Figure 7.1: The institutional audits in the context of Fullan's (2007) change process.**

Figure 7.1 depicts a general image of a much more intricate process of change. The process of change involves numerous factors at each phase. The two-way arrows in the diagram (Figure 7.1) imply that the change process is not linear but involves continuous interactions and feedback between phases (Fullan, 2007). According to Fullan (2007), the total time frame between initiation and institutionalisation is lengthy, hence the longer arrow between implementation and institutionalisation. The way in which an institution goes through each of the three phrases could influence the extent to which the recommendations made in the HEQC audit reports were addressed, thus indicating the effect of institutional audits on teaching and learning and support functions. A discussion of each of these main conclusions is provided below.

**(a) The HEQC's institutional audits have had a limited but positive effect on the quality of teaching and learning policies, practices and behaviours at the three the universities, albeit at varied levels of acceptance and implementation**

A key function of external quality assurance is to stimulate change and improvement of teaching and learning (Stensaker, Langfeldt, Harvey, Huisman, & Westerheijden, 2011). Indeed, there appears to have been limited but positive changes and progress in the area of teaching and learning since the HEQC's institutional audits were conducted at the three institutions. These changes include the contracting of experienced postgraduate supervisors from other universities to help supervise postgraduate students and mentor novice supervisors, the determination to put in place measures to centrally manage short courses, dedicating resources such as cars for WIL purposes, so as to enable effective monitoring of students who have been placed in industry, and using technology to enhance the teaching of large classes. The positive effect of external quality assurance interventions on teaching and learning is corroborated by Ewell (2010); Stensaker, (2003); Minelli et al (2006) and Mohrman (2011) (see section 3.9).

However, the three universities appear to have variably addressed different areas of concern pointed out in the HEQC institutional audit reports. For example, the communication of the vision and mission is still a challenge at the three universities, assessment and resource allocation remain serious challenges at both University A and University C, and the administration of short courses remains a concern at University B. Thus, in effecting the suggested institutional reforms, the three universities have differently attended to Fullan's (2007) three broad phases to the process of change.

**(b) The effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on the quality of support functions have been variable but positive**

Like the teaching and learning area, the effect of the HEQC institutional audits support functions seem to be variable but mainly positive. There was general concurrence among the three universities that the self-evaluation exercise and institutional audits added value by making staff to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses, thus enabling them to improve on quality in the identified areas (see section 6.3). There also seemed to be support structures put in place to

support black and female academics at the three universities although it is evident that more needed to be done in this area (see section 6.5). On the converse, it is evident from interview responses that the crafting of the universities' vision and mission was not sufficiently inclusive and not effectively communicated to members of the universities' communities (see section 6.2).

The concern about resource allocation appears to be variably addressed across the three universities (see section 6.4). University A seems to be defensive and unwilling to address the apparent inequitable resourcing at its satellite campuses. In fact, the University's senior management blames complaints regarding inequitable resourcing on misperception by staff and students. On the other hand, University C, which received a recommendation to improve the quality support given to students and staff at satellite campuses, had not made any discernible progress in this area six years after the HEQC institutional audit was conducted. A deputy vice chancellor at University C blamed the lack of service quality at the University's satellite campuses on a lack of funding for the "*official satellite campus system*" by the Department of Higher Education and Training. An executive dean at the University added that the libraries at satellite campuses are under-resourced and academic staff are not adequately qualified nor committed to their work as they are mostly employed on a part-time basis.

The lack of commitment to address the resourcing of satellite campuses at both University A and University C suggests that these universities may be stuck on Fullan's (2007) initiation or adoption stage. It thus seems less likely that the two universities would proceed to implement resource allocation at satellite campuses with the required commitment and alacrity. In fact, pre-implementation planning activities (Fullan, 2007) may be sketchy, which could affect the quality of implementation.

At University B resource allocation at satellite campuses appears to have been given full attention. The University seems to have gone through a thorough initiation process, which has provided clear guidance to the implementation stage. Further, the initiation and implementation of the changes pertaining to resource allocation at University B appear substantive enough to suggest that the University may have moved to Fullan's (2007) phase of institutionalisation in the change process - institutionalisation. Indeed, resource allocation forms part of University B's registrar's (and some senior management members') key performance areas. In addition, some

whole faculties, together with their deans, were in the process of being relocated to various satellite campuses. Fullan (2007) suggests that a university's leadership needs to have moral purpose. A leader who has moral purpose acts with the intention to make a positive difference in the lives of clients, employees, and the society at large (Fullan, 2001). In the case of higher education, these clients would be students. There seem to be parallels between Fullan's (2007) change process and TQM; these include treating students as customers and a commitment to continuous improvement. Senior managers at University B appear to have the moral purpose, particularly in the area of resource allocation at satellite campuses that drives them to make efforts towards making a positive difference in the experience of students and academics. Conversely, University A and University C seem to lack that moral purpose as regards resource allocation at satellite campuses.

It is thus evident that more still needs to be done by the universities in addressing the recommendations made in the HEQC audit reports. This could be partly addressed by instilling moral purpose among members of the university community and subscribing to Fullan's (2007) change process and TQM.

**(c) The effect of the HEQC institutional audits on the quality of student experience seems to minimal**

The effect of the HEQC's institutional audits on the quality of student experience at the three universities appears to be limited. Overall, progress made to enhance the quality of student experience at the three universities appears to be scant. This is corroborated by Shah (2012) whose research on the external quality audits at Australian universities found that although the audits led to an improvement in systems and processes in Australian universities, they did not necessarily improve the quality of student experience. Further, a study by Rosa et al (2006) which focused on the opinions of Portuguese university rectors and academics on the quality assurance system and its impact at the institutional level, found, inter alia, that the leadership of the universities focused more on internal procedures and services, strategic management and institutional management structures than to actual student experience.

Like Rosa's (2006) study, the findings in this study suggest a lack of moral purpose to improve the quality of student experience at the three universities. Indeed, Fullan (2001) contends that an important end result of moral purpose in education is to make a difference in students' lives. This apparent lack of moral purpose could have caused universities to fail to move beyond the implementation phase in Fullan's (2007) change process.

There seems to be general reluctance to acknowledge and address some aspects of the institutional culture, particularly racism and xenophobia, at the three universities. Most senior managers, staff and students do not explicitly admit that there is a prevalence of xenophobia or racism at their institutions. In this study the term racism is used to refer to a condescending attitude and/or unfair treatment towards people who have different physical characteristics or speak a different language to yours. During interviews at the three universities, staff and students' general response was that there was no prevalence of xenophobia and racism at their universities. However, as the interviews progressed, academics and students revealed a subtle prevalence of xenophobic attitudes and racism. Senior management, on the other hand, generally felt that xenophobia and racism did not exist, and that they were being proactively addressed. For example, during interviews with staff and students at University A and University C students raised concerns about the existence of ethnic-nationalism, including a somewhat clandestine prevalence of xenophobic attitudes among staff and students at the two universities. The denial of the existence of xenophobia and racism by the universities' senior leadership could make it difficult for the universities initiate or adopt change in these areas.

At University B, some black South African academics complained about the University's tendency to prefer foreign African academics. This was corroborated by a report in the Sunday Times newspaper which reported that at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, black South African academics felt marginalised by the University as they felt that the University preferred foreign African academics. The University, however, dismissed the claims about its preference for foreign African academics to black South African academics as "spurious and defamatory" (Mthethwa, 2013). The tendency to deny the prevalence of xenophobic tensions does not appear to be limited to the South African higher education sector. For example, in reporting about xenophobic attacks in Duduza, a township outside Johannesburg in South Africa, the Mail and Guardian newspaper (Sosibo, 2013, p. 3) pointed out the following:

*“Ask any police officer about xenophobia in Duduza...and the answer is the same: there is no fear or hatred of foreigners in the area...the marauding gangs of youths who damaged 72 foreign-owned shops last month, following a shooting incident involving a Somali shopkeeper and two people, have been attributed to a criminal element rather than xenophobia.”* (Sosibo, 2013, p. 3).

The above report from the Mail and Guardian newspaper shows a tendency to deny the existence of xenophobia in the broader South African society. Concomitantly, Bond, Ngwane and Amisi as cited in Everatt (2010) point out that in December 2007 when former president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, was presented with a report of xenophobic tendencies by the African Peer Review Mechanism which indicated that ‘xenophobia against other Africans is currently on the rise and must be nipped in the bud’, he responded by saying that the report’s assessment that xenophobic tendencies prevailed was ‘simply not true’. The following year in May 2008 xenophobic attacks erupted in an ‘orgy of violence’ that spread rapidly from Alexandra to other sites across the country (Everatt, 2010).

The perception of discriminatory attitudes against black academics does not only seem to be limited to xenophobic perceptions. Mabokela and Wei (2007) found that black academics at one of South Africa's historically white and Afrikaans language universities had to contend with discriminatory attitudes and practices both on-and off-campus. Similarly, University B is a historically white and Afrikaans language university and its black academics expressed some discriminatory attitudes against them as regards employment practices. These parallels may be pointing to an institutional culture prevalent in historically white Afrikaans universities which makes black academics not to feel welcome and supported.

As indicated earlier, students at each of the three universities pointed to the prevalence of racism, including ethnic-nationalism, at their institutions. Some students even thought that the university management was glossing over the issue or racism. For example, some students at University B indicated that *“racism is played light (StudentB3)...because if it does not affect you directly you never even know. (StudentB6)*. As indicated in Chapter 2, University B is a historically white university that originally catered for Afrikaans-speaking white students (see Chapter 2).

Another historically Afrikaans university, University of Free State, appears to be faced with challenges pertaining to the issue of racism more than seven years after the HEQC institutional audit report urged the University to monitor the impact that tensions among, and between, staff and students about various aspects of its institutional culture, including racism. The audit report further noted that the University of Free State (UFS) faced resistance to change on the part of some students, staff and parents regarding racism and other transformation issues. In the front page of *The Times* newspaper of 20 February 2014 it was reported that *‘in an apparent racist incident, two white students at the University of Free State allegedly drove deliberately over a black student and repeatedly beat him when he confronted them’* (Louw, Hosken, & Davids, 2014, p. 1). The attack mirrors a similar one at the University in 2010 and the 2008 incident at the University’s Reitz residence <sup>3</sup> (Louw, Hosken, & Davids, 2014). The UFS student who was driven over and then beaten up in the apparent racist attack at the University said that it was common for black students to be called derogatory racist names. The student lamented that “being black makes you feel like a mistake...everything you get to do is through pity...because one is black” (Hosken, 2014).

This apparent alienation of black students at historically white and Afrikaans universities is corroborated by Mabokela and Wei (2007) whose exploratory case study of a historically white and Afrikaans speaking South African university revealed that the institutional culture at the university was such that black students were not feeling welcome and supported and that there was a lot of dissatisfaction and frustration among these students. Indeed, responses by black students at University B suggest that they may be harbouring similar feelings.

Like University B, University of Free State appears to be addressing the issue of racism in general terms and not tackling it directly in a dedicated manner. Indeed, the report of *the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions* (2008), also known as the Soudien Report, noted that discrimination, particularly with regard to racism and sexism, was pervasive in South African universities. The report further pointed out an apparent disjuncture between

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<sup>3</sup> In 2007 some white students at the University of Free State’s (UFS) Reitz students residence shot a video which showed them humiliating black middle aged cleaners by giving them food mixed with urine in a mock initiation ceremony (Pattman, 2010).



institutional policies and the real-life experiences of staff and students, particularly in languages, learning, teaching and governance. Concomitantly, University A and a few other universities appear to have policies and plans in place to address racism and institutional culture; however the experiences of some staff and students seem to suggest that these policies and plans have hardly had any effect on the issues as raised in the HEQC institutional audit reports.

It thus appears that the efforts to curb xenophobia, racism and other aspects of the institutional culture have not had the envisaged effect at University A, University B and University C. In order to positively address racism and xenophobia, it is imperative that the universities create a culture and not just a structure of change (Fullan, 2001). According to Fullan (2001), institutions are likely to achieve success in the change process if they transform their culture by ‘changing the way we do things around here’, a process he refers to as reculturing. Fullan (2001) argues that reculturing is the sine qua non of progress and involves incorporating new ideas and practices. It would thus follow that senior management, together with academics and students, at University A, University B and University C may have a better chance of successfully addressing xenophobia and racism if they engage in the reculturing process. In addition, the three universities would have to be fully committed to addressing racism and xenophobia if they are to positively change their institutional cultures since reculturing involves hard work, takes time and never ends (Fullan, 2001). It therefore stands to reason that if the three universities are fully committed to the reculturing process, they are more likely to move into Fullan’s (2007) institutionalisation or incorporation phase. Institutionalisation allows the university to embed culture change in the system, thus ensuring that xenophobia and racism are substantively addressed.

In response to *Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions* (2008) recommendations, the Minister of Higher Education and training in South Africa, Dr Blade Nzimande, established the *Ministerial Oversight Committee on Transformation in the South African Universities* in 2013 (Department of Education, 2008). The purpose of the Oversight Committee is to monitor progress on transformation in universities and to advise the Minister on: (i) policy to combat racism, sexism and other forms of unfair discrimination as elaborated on in the Soudien Report; (ii) policy to promote social cohesion and an institutional environment where every student and

staff member can live, study, work and flourish free of any constraints resulting from unfair discrimination; and (iii) the role of universities in promoting the development of a free, fair and non-discriminatory society.

The oversight committee is expected to, *inter alia*, identify any major problem areas or incidences affecting universities transformation in a quest to help universities truly transform (Zide, 2013). However, Professor Gordon N Zide, himself a chairman of Higher Education South Africa's (HESA) transformation managers' forum advises that the committee's mandate should not create the impression that the initiative will be a panacea for all the transformation challenges facing higher education in South Africa as transformation is both a moral and a legal imperative, and that no amount of regulatory enforcement will result in substantive change while the playing field of the sector remains so uneven (Zide, 2013). Indeed, Zide's assertion is consonant with Fullan's (2001) argument that institutions need to engage in the process of reculturing and institutionalisation of change if they are to truly transform.

In addition to the need for the moral purpose and reculturing, the HEQC's institutional audit reports and mechanisms for tracking the progress made by universities in addressing the concerns raised in the institutional audit reports, which are largely paper-based, may not be sufficient to direct universities towards real transformation. There may be a need for these tracking mechanisms to be more robust and include more visits by the HEQC representatives to the universities to monitor and report on the actual progress made in addressing the issues raised in the institutional audit reports. Subsequent to these visits, the necessary interventions could be made by the HEQC to steer higher education institutions towards the attainment of the envisaged goals.

#### **(d) Senior management appear to have the most positive perceptions of progress made in addressing the HEQC institutional audit recommendations**

Senior management members seemed to be more positive than academics and students about the progress made by the institutions in addressing the areas flagged in the audit reports. This observation is supported by studies conducted by Rosa et al (2006) and Stensaker, et al (2011) (See Chapter 3).

Rosa et al's (2006) study which analysed the opinions of Portuguese university rectors and academics on the quality assurance system and its impact at the institutional level, found that, inter alia, that university rectors were more positive than academics regarding the universities' capacity to implement recommendations made by external review panels and undertake quality improvement and quality management measures.

A study by Stensaker et al (2011), which investigated the impact of the external quality assurance evaluations conducted by the Norwegian quality assurance agency (NOKUT), revealed the perceptions of different institutional stakeholders on the evaluations. The results reveal members of executive management were more positive in their assessment of the external quality assurance results than staff and students. For example, the executive management saw more positive effects of the evaluations as regards the quality of teaching, on the internal quality assurance system, on the discussions of teaching and learning, on governance structures, and on the establishment of new routines and procedures, interestingly, on the effects of the evaluations on student involvement in teaching and learning, only 14% of students were able to identify positive effects of evaluations, whereas approximately 30% of executive management staff indicated that the evaluations had positive effects on student engagement in teaching and learning.

The positive perceptions of senior managers could partly be due to their direct involvement in decision making regarding the universities' plans to address the concerns raised in the institutional audit reports, while academics and students are mainly dependent on the efficacy of management's communication of these decisions. Another reason could be that staff and students are more involved with the university's core activities, while senior management largely has a high-level and vicarious understanding of the university's core activities. Initiation of change seldom takes place without an advocate, and some of the most powerful advocates at a university are its senior managers (Fullan, 2007). Senior managers need to lead the change process and mobilise staff and students towards the adoption of the envisaged change, which will serve as a precursor to the implementation phase (Fullan, 2007).

Senior management members at University A, University B and University C were generally more positive than academics and students about the process of crafting and communicating the

mission and vision. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, this could have been due to the senior leadership's direct involvement in discussions pertaining to the vision and mission, while academics and students felt that the vision and mission were not adequately communicated to them. Even when senior managers indicated that the universities were addressing certain identified challenges, students would still point out these ostensibly addressed as being problematic. For example, the management of WIL was cited by students as one of the serious challenges at University C while senior management felt that the issue was being effectively addressed. Another example is the prevalence of racism and xenophobia which seems to be under control according to senior management but there were undertones of the continued prevalence of these issues during interviews with academics and students.

On the other hand, students seem to have the least positive perception of the various aspects of their university, particularly regarding the communication of the university's vision and mission, resource allocation, institutional culture, the management of work-integrated learning (WIL), assessment and security of exams and postgraduate supervision. This could probably be because students are directly at the receiving end of the service provided by the university while senior management and academics act on behalf of the university as its employees. As has been indicated in the chapters on findings (Chapters 5 and 6), students generally felt that: (i) the universities' missions and visions were not effectively communicated to them (see 6.2); (ii) resourcing, particularly at satellite campuses and in libraries was not adequate (see 6.4); (iii) there was a prevalence of racism and xenophobic attitudes (see 6.6); (iv) the placement and monitoring of students in WIL programmes was not adequate (see 5.6); (v) the leakage of question papers was prevalent (see 5.2); and (vi) there was a shortage of adequately qualified postgraduate supervisors (see 5.3).

In order to reduce the discrepancy between perceptions of change between senior managers on one hand and staff and students on the other, it is important for senior managers to understand the process of change. (Fullan, 2001). Fullan (2001), however, concedes that understanding the process of change is 'exceedingly elusive' and requires leaders to, inter alia, appreciate early difficulties in attempting to introduce a change, lead and guide the reculturing process, and redefine resistance by some staff and students as a potential positive force. Further, as has been mentioned earlier in this chapter, senior managers need to have moral purpose so that they can

act with the intention to make a positive difference in the experiences of staff and students (Fullan, 2001). It stands to reason that if senior managers act with moral purpose to effect the required change, the apparent gap between senior managers' and students' perceptions of the change at the three universities could be narrowed.

**(e) There appears to be a difference in the manner in which a historically black and a historically white university responds to the HEQC institutional audit recommendations**

University B, a historically white and Afrikaans university located in a metropolitan area, seems to have made the greatest commitment in addressing the recommendations in the audit report. The University has either made considerable progress or has put in place concrete plans to address the HEQC's concerns in most of the areas (or themes) that cut across the three universities, particularly in postgraduate education and supervision capacity, security of exams, and resource allocation. One of the possible reasons that enabled University B to have the requisite resources to address concerns raised in the HEQC institutional audit report could be due to it being a historically white and Afrikaans university. According to Mabokela (2007), during the apartheid government, historically white Afrikaans universities received a disproportionately high percentage of state funding and also enjoyed some of the best academic facilities in South Africa.

As indicated in section 5.3, the University B has addressed the lack of supervisory capacity by (i) putting in place a staff qualifications programme to help its academic staff to obtain masters and doctoral degrees, (ii) instituting grievance procedures to enable postgraduate students to raise any problems regarding supervision without fear of reprisals, and engaging in efforts to attract rated researchers who would, inter alia, mentor novice supervisors and also help to improve the university's research output (see 5.3). Of the three universities central to this study, University B appears to have in place the tightest examinations security measures to safeguard the leakage of examination question papers. The other two universities, University A and University C, continue to be faced with serious challenges regarding the leakage of examination question papers (see 5.2). Further, University B has invested resources to improve the infrastructure at its main and satellite campuses to enhance their capacity and quality, and has even relocated

faculties of Education and Health Sciences to its satellite campuses where the Deans of these faculties are based (see 6.4).

Of the three universities, University B has a history of the most stability in its leadership management. Leadership stability, together with historical advantage could have created a more enabling environment for University B to address the HEQC institutional audit recommendations. The relatively strong leadership is likely to have had the moral purpose to guide the university past Fullan's (2007) initiation and adoption phase. The availability of resources, partly due to historical advantage as argued by Mabokela (2007), could have made it easier for University B to move through Fullan's (2007) implementation phase. The empowerment of satellite campuses by allowing them to host whole faculties and their leadership is a suggestion University B may have moved into Fullan's (2007) institutionalisation phase.

University A, a historically black institution which is rurally based, seems to have made the least efforts and doesn't seem to address the recommendations from the HEQC with the vigour and alacrity they require. For example there does not seem to be much commitment from University A to address issues such as postgraduate supervision capacity, student assessment and security of examinations, resource allocation and private work by academic staff. On the issue of supervision, the lack of sufficiently qualified academics at University A is so severe that, at the time the interviews for this study were conducted, some schools such as Pharmacy and Optometry had not enrolled postgraduate students at all, some students complained about supervisors who did not even have a master's degree, there were delays in the proposal approval process, and supervisors also served as examiners of their own students (see 5.3).

As regards student assessment and security of exams, of the three universities central to this study, it seems University A had the worst case of repetition of examination questions. For example students pointed out that whole question papers were repeated, the lecturers had a habit of cutting and pasting question papers, and the leakage of question papers was prevalent (see 5.2). With regard to resource allocation across campuses, most of the senior management staff who were interviewed attributed complaints about inequitable resourcing of the University's satellite campus to misperception and a lack of understanding of the University's resource allocation model (see 6.4).

Academics' private work appears to have had an adverse effect on the performance of their core duties at the University as those involved in private work were reported to be absent from the University during working hours, which tended to compromise the quality of their output (see 5.4). The University's lack of regulation of private work seems to have exacerbated the problem.

University A's apparent lack of moral purpose to address the HEQC's institutional audit recommendations could be partly due to its history of instability in administration and leadership, which culminated in the appointment of an administrator in 2001 by the minister of education to take over the functions of the vice-chancellor and the university council (Mawasha in Nkomo, Swartz & Maja, 2006). The lingering effects of leadership and administration challenges at University A seem to have negatively influenced what Fullan (2007) calls the initiation and implementation phases. According to Fullan (2007), the process of initiating change presents serious dilemmas, and it is likely to be even more intricate if it occurs in an environment fraught with leadership challenges. Further, initiation of change can affect the implementation phase as the relationship between initiation and implementation is interactive (Fullan, 2007). Once an institution experiences challenges in the initiation and implementation stages, it is virtually guaranteed that it will have difficulty in institutionalising the change because the change process is not linear but one in which the three phases are continuously interactive (Fullan, 2007).

Perhaps, in addition to the apparent lack of commitment and moral purpose to address the recommendations made during the institutional audit, University A as a historically black institution, may be lacking capacity to address at least some of these issues. This lack of capacity could be partly due to the apartheid government's University Extension Act of 1959, which extended racial discrimination even at the higher education level and resulted in historically black universities being under-privileged institutions in terms of resources (Ilorah, 2006).

Further, the gross neglect suffered by rural areas (and their universities) from central governments whose focus was invariably on the urban centres (which included urban universities) during the apartheid era, and the corresponding lower level of interest, effort and investment given to the former by the government (Nkomo & Schoole, 2007), may have contributed to the level of resourcing and capacity on various fronts at these institutions. And,

while the South African government has developed policies aimed at addressing these past imbalances, there is still much to be done (Osunkunle, 2006).

## **7.9 Recommendations**

The recommendations for this research are discussed under three categories: (7.9.1) recommendations for practice, (7.9.2) recommendations for policy, and (7.9.3) recommendations for further research.

### **7.9.1 Recommendations for practice**

This sub-section presents the recommendations for practice under five subheadings. Firstly, the need to provide focused support to institutions that are plagued by serious financial and/or leadership challenges is discussed. Secondly, the subsection argues a need for a more synergistic link between institutional audits process and the process of placing institutions under administration. Thirdly, an argument on a need to put in place more robust follow-up mechanisms and conduct compulsory follow-up site visits by the HEQC is presented. Fourthly, the subsection presents an argument regarding the adherence by universities to principles of TQM and the systems theory. Lastly, it is recommended that the HEQC develops a bespoke professional development programme for universities' senior leadership.

- *The need to provide focused support to universities beset by serious financial and/or leadership challenges*

The two universities which seem to encounter serious challenges regarding resource allocation, University A and University C, are historically black Universities which were at some point placed under administration by the ministry of Higher Education and Training in South Africa following maladministration. University B, on the other hand, is a historically white institution that was never placed under administration. Historically white institutions tend to have better resources than historically black institutions due to historical advantage and attention that they received from the apartheid government. It would thus be prudent if historically black



institutions, particularly those that have a history of maladministration, were provided support on two levels: resource allocation and bespoke leadership training. The HEQC could help develop a bespoke leadership programme which promotes high quality leadership and equip participants with skills to decisively address identified areas of weakness. Another option is that these universities could be paired with a seasoned quality executive from a university that has made great strides in implementing its improvement plan for the HEQC's institutional audits. The quality executive would then work in tandem with one of these universities to provide guidance and share good practice in order to help the university to effectively address the recommendations made in the HEQC institutional audit report. However, the external support provided to these universities will mostly help them to get through the first two stages on Fullan's (2007) change process, namely, initiation and implementation. The more substantive institutionalisation stage requires an intrinsic will and culture change that is contingent on internal processes. It is therefore imperative that there is political will, particularly among members of the universities' senior leadership to change their institutional cultures to ensure that real change takes place.

- *Ensuring a more synergistic link between institutional audits process and the process of placing institutions under administration*

It is recommended that Institutions that are, at the time of the audit, experiencing leadership or administration challenges should be given an extended period to address those challenges simultaneously with the recommendations made by the HEQC institutional audit. Thus there needs to be a strong synergistic link between the process of placing an institution under administration and the institutional audit of that institution as it is likely that some of the causes or effects of these administration and leadership challenges will have been identified during the institutional audits.

- *Putting in place more robust follow-up mechanisms and conducting compulsory follow-up site visits*

Instead of the current primarily paper-based practice of assessing the progress made by institutions in addressing the recommendations made in the audit reports, the HEQC should put

in place more robust follow-up mechanisms and consider making it mandatory for each institution to be subjected to follow-up visits by HEQC delegates, during which pertinent site visit inspections and short interviews with selected members of the university community are conducted. The nature and extent of the follow-up visits should be contingent on the severity of the shortcomings identified in the audit reports. Accordingly, institutions with severe shortcomings should be subjected to more intense follow-up visits whereas those with less serious shortcomings should be followed up less intensely. Subsequently, a report should be written about the progress made by the university. If the report points to continuing challenges in addressing the recommendations, appropriate interventions should be made by the HEQC. It is difficult to ascertain if institutions have substantively addressed the recommendations and entered what Fullan (2007) calls the institutionalisation phase based primarily on documents submitted by institutions. There would need to be follow-up visits to institutions that include interviews with various members of the university communities.

- *Encouraging adherence to principles of TQM and the systems theory*

Despite challenges pertaining to capacity, the findings in this study also seem to suggest a measure of nonchalance and laxity at some universities in dealing with some issues raised in the HEQC institutional audit, which could suggest an organisational culture that is less focused on quality improvement. The deteriorating situation at University A regarding postgraduate supervision capacity, which resulted in some schools within one faculty not offering postgraduate degrees is a case in point. In fact during the audit it also emerged that the University was instructed by a professional body to suspend the enrollment of new students into a certain professional degree due to lack of senior academics in the school and inadequate practical training for students. This lack of action suggests that University A may be struggling even get started with the adoption phase of Fullan's (2007) change process. This is worrying as it may mean that the University did not accept some of the recommendations by the HEQC. It is thus recommended that institutions like University A be advised to implement TQM to help them to be more focused on quality improvement of their offerings. TQM is the process of changing an organisation's fundamental culture and redirecting it towards an improved product or service quality (Gaither in Ali & Shastri, 2010). Providing these like University A with a well tried out conceptual tool may make it easier for them to implement a new approach. In this way, TQM

will enhance and promote the quality improvement process as it would serve as an enabler for institutions in addressing their shortcomings.

It may also be worthwhile for the University's progress to be explicitly monitored in accordance with Fullan's (2007) change model. The HEQC could also track the progress made by the institution until it reaches and stays at the institutionalisation stage. Further, in view of the inconsistencies in assessment practice and lack of articulation of the mission and vision within universities, it is recommended that senior managers in higher education subscribe to the systems theory so that they can continuously view the institution as a whole rather than its constituent parts, and also focus on how the institution fits into the national higher education system. This, for example, implies that deans need to always be cognisant of the interrelationships between all the departments in their faculties as well as the relationship between their faculty and other faculties in the institution. Furthermore, they should understand how their faculty fits into the overall mission and vision of the institution. The interconnections between various parts of the institution will determine the efficiency of its overall functioning. Indeed, wholes function the way they do because of the manner in which the parts are organised and interact with each other (Von Betalanfy, Ketchum & Trist in Wang, Solan & Ghods, 2010).

- *A bespoke professional development programme for universities' senior leadership*

It is further recommended that the HEQC makes available a bespoke professional development programme for university management. The programme should, among others, enable the university's senior leadership to inculcate a quality culture at their institutions. For the programme to be effective it should, among others, address areas such as (i) TQM as conceptual tool, (ii) how to apply TQM in higher education, (iii) addressing key findings of this study, such as how to strengthen the assessment of students and how to effectively address issues such as xenophobia and racism in higher education.

### **7.9.2 Recommendations for policy**

In this subsection the recommendations for policy are presented under three headings. The first urges government to provide clear direction for institutional development. The second argues for

a compulsory assessment course or workshop for all academics and the third presents an argument to increase the retirement age of prolific academics.

- *The provision of clear direction for institutional development by the government*

The government, through the Department of Higher Education and Training, should provide clear direction for institutional development and also some means in the form of resources such as the budget to realise these. The leadership and support from the government is crucial as successful implementation needs to be realised at the lower levels but directed and facilitated at the top level (Fullan, 2007).

- *A compulsory assessment course or workshop for all academics*

In order to address the challenges pertaining to the assessment of students by academics, it is recommended that the Department of Higher Education and Training considers making it compulsory for all university academics to have done a course or attended a workshop on assessment in their first year of teaching at a university to ensure that they are apprised of the university's assessment policy and practice.

- *Increasing the retirement age of academics*

In view of the challenges encountered by the universities as regards supervision capacity, it is recommended that the retirement age of prolific researchers and supervisors be increased so that they can bolster supervision capacity and also mentor novice supervisors. Indeed, it is encouraging to note that the minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, has considered the increase in the retirement age of academics so that experienced researchers can be retained for a longer period in the higher education system to, inter alia, continue to supervise postgraduate students and provide training for younger academics (Phakathi, 2012).

### **7.9.3 Recommendations for further research**

This subsection identifies areas that could be explored further by future research. Firstly, further research on the effect of institutional audits on universities should be conducted on more universities. Secondly, research on the effect of institutional audits should be spread across

different faculties and departments. Thirdly, research could investigate the effects of institutional audits by covering private higher education institutions that underwent institutional audits. Fourthly, future research could focus comprehensively on all aspects of each recommendation. Lastly, further research could investigate the morale of black staff and students at historically white universities. These possible research areas are discussed below.

- *Conducting similar research at more universities*

Findings in this study could be validated by conducting similar research at more universities. This could be realised by applying both qualitative and quantitative approaches to interview and distribute questionnaires to a larger number of universities and participants.

- *Research on the effect of institutional audits should be spread across different faculties and departments*

It is recommended that further research on the effect of institutional audits on higher education institutions should include participants from various faculties and departments. Views of participants spread across different faculties are more likely to give richer and more representative research data.

- *The effect of institutional audits on private higher education institutions*

Secondly, the study focused only on public higher education institutions in South Africa. None of the private higher education institutions that underwent institutional audits were included in this study. It is thus recommended that future research on the effect of the audits covers private higher education institutions.

- *Comprehensive focus on all aspects of the institutional audit recommendation*

Thirdly, it was not the purpose of this study to investigate how the universities have responded to each recommendation made to the three universities in the institutional audit report nor find out how every aspect of each recommendation made was addressed by universities. The study identified cross-cutting themes and mainly looked at the overall essence of recommendations to the extent that they were relevant to the identified themes and for comparability across

institutions. It is recommended that future studies track down how universities have addressed recommendations made in the HEQC institutional audit reports by comprehensively focusing on all aspects of each recommendation in a detailed manner.

- *The morale of black staff and students at historically white and Afrikaans language universities*

Further, the findings in in this study, as well as supporting literature, point to a need to investigate the morale of black staff and students at historically white and Afrikaans language universities. This is particularly important as a number of historically white institutions merged with historically black institutions and there have not been sufficiently comprehensive studies that investigated the resultant morale of academics in general and black academics in particular. The complaints of academics and students in this study could be indicative of an urgent need to investigate this phenomenon. A possible research question that could be investigated is: *To what extent does the institutional culture at historically white institutions constrain or enhance the advancement of black academics and students?*

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## Appendices

See attached CD

Appendix A:	Summary of the criteria for the HEQC's audit system
Appendix B	The Ethics clearance certificate
Appendix C	Declaration of originality
Appendix D	Example of letter to students
Appendix E	Example of letter to academic staff
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## APPENDIX A

### SUMMARY OF CRITERIA FOR THE HEQC'S AUDIT SYSTEM

<i>Area</i>	<i>Sub-area</i>	<i>Criterion</i>
<b>Institutional mission; links between planning, resource allocation and quality management</b>		
	Fitness of purpose of institutional mission, goals and objectives in response to local, national and international context (including transformation issues)	1
	Links between planning, resource allocation and quality management	2
<b>Teaching and Learning, research and community engagement</b>		
General quality-related arrangements for teaching and learning	Management of the quality of teaching and learning	3
	Academic support services	4
	Short courses, exported and partnership programmes, programmes offered at tuition centres and satellite campuses	5
	Certification	6
<b>Quality-related arrangements for programme development, management and review; and for student assessment and success</b>		
Programme development, management and review	Programme management	7
	Programme design and approval	8
	Staffing	9
	Programme review	10
Student assessment and success	Management of assessment	11
	Moderation system	12
	Explicitness, fairness and consistency of assessment practices. Security of recording and documenting assessment data	13
	Recognition of prior learning (RPL)	14
<b>Research</b>		
General quality-related arrangements for research (for all higher education institutions)		15
Quality-related arrangements for research (in depth evaluation for research-intensive institutions)		16
Quality-related arrangements for postgraduate education		17
Community engagement		18
Benchmarking, user surveys and impact studies		19

(CHE, 2007a, p. 26)