

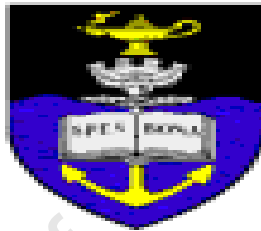
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**UNDERSTANDING HOW ACADEMICS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF
CAPE TOWN HAVE RESPONDED TO THE INTRODUCTION OF
QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AS A STATE STEERING
MECHANISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

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Masters of Philosophy in Public Policy



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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how academics at the University of Cape Town have responded to the introduction of quality assurance policy as a state steering mechanism in higher education. The study is based on the premise that the introduction of quality assurance as one of the state's three key levers represented a significant shift for higher education in South Africa. The theory of the Evaluative State is used to cast and examine the nature and responses from academics in the context of a new South African state that has been clear and explicit about the need to steer higher education towards national social and economic objectives while still accommodating the importance of being internationally competitive. This is investigated through a qualitative analysis of data gathered through policy analysis and interviews with academics at the institution. The study found that while academics place value on the external mission of the university characterised as fitness for purpose and value for money coupled with the continuation of academic excellence, they remain at odds with quality assurance policy, arguing that it has reinforced an unwanted managerialism and accountability on academics at the institution. As an implementation gap of quality assurance policy, academics at UCT argue that too much emphasis is placed on accountability and managerial responsibilities at the expense of improvement of educational outcomes. This study also argues that this policy reform of higher education has caused academics to become more active and conscious of their professional roles within higher education. This study argues that these findings reveal that academics find themselves having to reposition, and adapt themselves as key stakeholders in higher education affected by these changes. These findings lead the study to contend that the South African evaluative state, through the use of quality assurance as a lever, has been significantly challenged at achieving the central goals of transformation, equity and development.

Key words: Quality, quality assurance, higher education, transformation, managerialism, fitness for purpose, evaluative state, qualitative research, academic responses, democratisation

ABBREVIATIONS

QA-Quality Assurance

UCT- University of Cape Town

DOE- Department of Education

CHE- Council on Higher Education

HEQC-Higher Education Quality Committee

ADP- Academic Development Programme

NCHE- National Commission on Higher Education

SERTEC- Certification Council of Technikon Education

QPU-Quality Promotion Unit

NQF- National Qualifications Framework

HEI- Higher Education Institution

SAQA-South African Qualifications Authority

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Background to the study.....	2
2.1 The international context.....	2
2.2 The local context.....	3
3. Rationale for research.....	9
4. Significance of study.....	12
5. Central and Sub-research questions.....	12
6. Overview of Chapters.....	13

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Introduction.....	15
2. Quality assurance policy in a globalizing discourse.....	15
2.1 International approaches to Quality.....	18
3. Key debates in the global context.....	21
3.1 Quality as Politics: Managerialism, Accountability and Institutional Autonomy.....	21
4. The rise of the Evaluative State and its significance for quality assurance.....	24
4.1 The key characteristics of the Evaluative State.....	26
5. Quality assurance policy in South Africa.....	28
6. Academics and Change.....	31
7. Where does the debate leave us: Understanding the politics of quality.....	33
7.1 Quality as exceptional (excellence).....	34
7.2 Quality as perfection.....	35
7.3 Quality as fitness for purpose.....	35
7.4 Quality as value for money.....	36
7.5 Quality as transformation.....	36
8. Conclusion.....	36

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

1. Introduction.....	37
2. Research method.....	37
2.1 Qualitative research.....	37

2.2 The single case study approach.....	39
3. Data ollection.....	40
3.1 Sample selection.....	40
3.2 Data Collection Techniques.....	41
3.3 Interviews.....	42
3.4 Participant observation.....	44
3.5 Data Analysis.....	44
4. Conclusion.....	46

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

1. Introduction.....	47
2. The case study: The University of Cape Town.....	48
3. Summary of themes.....	49
4. Academic conceptions of quality.....	50
4.1 Quality as Fitness for Purpose.....	51
4.2 Quality as Value for money.....	53
4.3 Quality as Excellence (as Competitiveness).....	55
5. Quality assurance policy as reinforcing managerialism and accountability.....	56
6. Is quality about accountability or improvement?.....	57
7. Policy implementation perspectives.....	59
7.1 Need for Institutional specific Quality Assurance Mechanisms.....	59
8. Talking about acceptance: the micro politics of quality - acceptance, resistance or adaptation.....	61
8.1 Acceptance: A Societal Consciousness.....	61
8.2 Partial Acceptance: Adaptation Tactics.....	63
8.3 Understanding Resistance.....	65
9. Conclusion.....	65

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

1. Introduction.....	68
2. Summary of the study.....	68
3. Discussion of findings.....	69
3.1 The tension between academic conceptions of quality on the one hand and perceptions of quality assurance as more managerialism and contested accountability.....	71
3.2 Explaining the Implementation Gap.....	73

3.2.1 Is Quality about the Improvement of educational Outcomes or accountability? 73

3.3 Adaptive Responses: Explaining ‘Pro-Active Resistance’ From Academics to Policy 75

4. A challenged South African evaluative state 76

5. Limitations of the study 79

6. Implications for future research 79

7. Conclusions 79

REFERENCES

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

The first decade of the 21st century represented a significant time for policy reform in South African higher education. After the first democratic elections of 1994 the system was confronted with ‘social, political and economic demands of a special kind not encountered during the apartheid era’ (Cloete et al., 2006:8). To cope with these demands, the system underwent significant change. Much of this change was led by government which introduced important new policies (Cloete et al, 2006:8). Understanding how institutions responded and adapted to the new policy environment is fundamental. This study examines the responses of institutions in the arena of quality assurance. It looks at how institutions and key role-players within them responded to the reforms introduced by the new state in the area of quality assurance.

The University of Cape Town (from here on referred to as UCT) is an important example of an institution that had to deal with the new approach to quality assurance. It had to transform itself from being a largely white institution during the apartheid era with established quality assurance policies and practices to an inclusive university in the new democratic post-apartheid dispensation where the policies for quality assurance had become much more determined by the state. The transition from the old to the new was not without difficulties. For this reason, to understand the social dynamics in this environment, this study sought to make sense of UCT’s institutional response to the introduction and implementation of the state’s new policy. The study focused on the experience and views of 15 academics within the institution.

This study is conducted against the very specific dynamics of historically white English-speaking and “so called-liberal universities” in South Africa. As a key representative of this group of universities, UCT’s character was defined by a distinct paradox. It had simultaneously sought to resist apartheid policy pressures and so sought ways of defying the state’s strictures on the admission of black students into the university, while

remaining located in the culturally exclusive environment of the English speaking white community of apartheid South Africa. The study seeks to understand how quality assurance, as a reform measure of the new state was worked with by staff members in a university grappling with the dynamics of moving between a complex past and an equally complex future. Central in this process, as the study will show, was the changing relationship between the state and higher education in South Africa.

In this introductory chapter the broad notion of quality assurance (from here on referred to as QA) in higher education is explained. Important in this explanation is the location of the emergence of QA in its global context. This approach is used to situate South Africa within an international perspective but also to illustrate that the reform initiatives in South Africa did not take place in isolation from global policy developments. The section then uncovers the local context in which QA emerged in South Africa in the post-apartheid state. This introduction is used as the backdrop for the rationale of the research. The chapter then shifts focus to introduce UCT as the case study of the research. Finally the chapter outlines the significance of the study, the research questions and aims of the study.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The purpose of this section is to introduce quality and quality assurance as an emerging movement in higher education policy discourse globally. The first part describes the international policy context in which QA emerged and the motivating forces that underpinned its arrival as a distinct policy mechanism. It is followed by a discussion that outlines the local policy context in South Africa.

2.1 The International context

Towards the end of the 1980s, “the contours of a ‘new world order’ became more and more visible” (Cloete *et al*, 2006:7). The collapse of the communist regime and the increasing political hegemony of neo-liberal market ideologies were all instrumental in the ascendancy of this new order (Cloete, 1997:7-8; Morley 2003). Cloete *et al* (2006:8) make the observation that the arrival of the new order instituted significant socio-

economic and political change in the 1990s in virtually all sectors of society including that of higher education.

A number of interrelated factors can be cited that gave rise to the need for QA within higher education at a global level, and these same reasons can be drawn on to explain its emergence in the South African context. The first factor is that of massification. Several scholars have argued that massification in higher education in the second half of the 20th century caused a decline in the standards and the quality of academic institutions around the world (Van Damme, 2000:416; Morley, 2003). Second, it is suggested that key stakeholders, businesses, professional bodies and employer organizations lost confidence in the traditional management practices of universities, noting institutions' inability to match the needs of the workplace and labour markets under a new competitive global order (Van Damme, 2000:417; Morley, 2003). The third factor was that the decline of fiscal spending and overall government budgets for higher education required more effectiveness and efficiency from higher education institutions (Van Damme, 2000:418; Morley, 2003). The fourth factor related to privatisation. With the wearing away of traditional student recruitment methods, an increase in student mobility, the increased mobility of professionals and academics, and the growth of private provision through increased private higher education institutions, came the necessity for centralized quality assurance systems (Van Damme, 2000:418; Cloete *et al*, 2006:9). The final factor was an increase in demands for greater public accountability from higher education globally not only from government but all stakeholders, namely civil society and professional councils and employers (Van Damme, 2000:419; Cloete *et al*, 2006:9; Morley, 2003).

Strydom and Strydom (2004:101) argue that these factors mentioned above were often not well researched or understood in the early 2000s in the South African Higher Education context. These scholars argue that quality assurance policy making and implementation often led to uncertainty and conformity in the system on the part of institutions and academics.

2.2 Local context

The case for the emergence of QA in South Africa mirrors arguments made internationally. However, what gives the experience of the institutionalization of QA its special character was that it took place at the same time and found itself drawn into the complexities of the country's transition to democracy. In going through this experience quality assurance became closely associated with the politics of the country's transition from apartheid to democracy. This made the experience immensely complicated.

The post-apartheid government inherited a fractured higher education system that was differentiated in complex ways and was characterized by fragmentation, segregation based on race, gender, ethnicity, class and geography. The historic White Paper 3 of 1997 on Transformation in Higher Education (Department of Education, 1997:16-18) appositely described how this legacy was responsible for instituting inequality in the sector in terms of the availability of resources, student profiles, academic composition, staffing profile and support for research. It showed how the physical resources and academic profile of historically white institutions in South Africa enabled them to deliver an efficient quality teaching and learning environment, whereas, by contrast, historically black institutions, because of the inferior status in which they found themselves in terms of their resources and staff profiles, struggled to provide educational experiences of quality.

The most frequently used approach to quality assurance during the apartheid period was that of external examination for teaching and learning and of departmental reviews for the organization and management dimensions of the university. It was through these measures that standards were set and maintained at most historically privileged institutions.

In the case of the University of Cape Town and other historically privileged institutions for example, these measures were based on and took their legitimacy from a peer-based collegiality. The notion of 'peer' was deeply important for these institutions. 'Peers' were one's equals in a field. At universities such as UCT, it was a custom that the majority of one's 'peers' had to come from universities outside South Africa. These

measures had come to institute a culture of standards and a sense that the institution was operating at a high international level. UCT, and its sister institutions, had achieved this without the oversight of a national quality agency. It had, comparatively-speaking, high student throughput rates, internationally reputable research outputs, relatively good access to resources and was able to attract international student and academics (CHE Report, 2003:17, 33, 54). Its faculty members would be, as a result, suspicious of any intervention, especially a state-mandated intervention, to change the university's traditional way of doing things.

Historically black institutions, by contrast, had fundamentally different histories with respect to standards. In terms of their academic operations and institutional cultures, they were considerably weaker. A lack of access to resources and imposed administrations led by white administrators and professors were some of the reasons that led to the development of significantly poorer teaching and learning environments (Godden, 1992:36). Cloete (1997:14) states that "overall, in the previous system QA was erratic, the use of external examiners inspired little confidence, and quality was largely determined by reputation." In terms of these constraints and unique conditions historically black institutions devised different and what may have been inadequate methods of QA.

In sketching this background, it is necessary to emphasize that there were also distinct overarching regimes of QA for the different kinds of higher education institutions. The universities, technikons and colleges each had their own approaches (Smout & Stephenson, 2002). The two bodies responsible nationally for quality assurance were the Certification Council of Technikon Education (SERTEC) which catered for technikons and colleges and the Quality Promotion Unit (QPU) for the university sector. The difference between these two bodies was stark. The emphasis in the technikon environment fell largely on compliance. Institutions were provided with regulations which spelt out what minimum standards applied, how they should manage programme evaluation and statutory compliance, whereas that for universities was much more developmental, where there was an understanding of self-evaluation linked to fitness for

purpose in parallel alignment with institutional mission and goals (Cloete,1997:14; Kistan, 1999:129).

It was against this background that the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) was appointed in 1996 for the purpose of “preserving what is valuable and to address what is defective and requires transformation” (NCHE, 1996:1). The central twin-task of this Commission would be “to rid higher education of the aberrations of apartheid and to modernize it by infusing it with international experiences and best practices” (Cloete *et al*, 2006:7).

In considering its proposals the Commission took into account a number of fundamental policy documents tabled in 1994; the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, White Papers on Reconstruction and Development and on Education and Training, the Labour Relations Act, the draft White Paper on Science and Technology, the Report of the Labour Market Commission, and the new macroeconomic strategy.

Based on these policy propositions and a collection of stakeholder views, submissions and consultations the Commission identified a set of fundamental principles and objectives that would guide the transformation of higher education. These principles required that:

- Provision of resources and opportunities in higher education should be premised upon equity.
- Historical inequities must be redressed.
- Governance of the system and of individual institutions should be democratic, representative and participatory.
- Higher education should aspire to the ideal of a balanced development of national resources, material and human.
- All the services and products of higher education should pursue and maintain the highest attainable levels of quality.

- Clearly defined and appropriate tenets of academic freedom and institutional autonomy should be established and observed.
- Increased efficiency and productivity of higher education is an essential attribute of accountability for public funding.

The Commission envisaged a transformed system that would be able to:

- Ensure access to a full spectrum of educational and learning opportunities to as wide a range as possible of the population, irrespective of race, colour, gender or age.
- Meet, through responsive programmes, the vocational and employment needs of a developing economy aspiring to become and to remain internationally competitive.
- Support a democratic ethos and a culture of human rights by educational programmes conducive to a critically constructive civil society, cultural tolerance, and a common commitment to a humane, non-racist and non-sexist social order.
- Contribute to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, in keeping with internationally observed standards of academic quality, and with sensitivity to the diverse problems and demands of the local, national, Southern African and African contexts (NCHE Report, 1996:3).

The NCHE report, drawing on international experiences, noted that there were specific similarities among more established quality assurance systems globally. Their findings revealed that most QA processes included an initial self-evaluation process followed by an external assessment of the results and collective process of self-evaluation (mostly constituted by peers). Second, through this initial self-evaluation process and the extensive role of peers in the external evaluation, higher education largely *owned* the quality assurance system. Third, it was observed that an independent body would usually coordinate the external evaluation which was usually conducted under criteria ranging from detailed norms to checklists in some cases. It was also observed that these

results were often made public in most countries. Fourth, the conclusive process under the authority of the external agency had the powers of assigning negative sanctions (drawn from Cloete, 1997:14).

The recommendations of the NCHE resulted in a number of fundamental policy formulations that would collectively govern higher education. All the legislation enacted would be developed within the framework of an overarching new Higher Education Act of 1997.

The Higher Education Act of 1997 made provision for the establishment of a new statutory advisory body, The Council on Higher Education (CHE), as an umbrella national authority responsible for quality assurance and promotion throughout the system. This responsibility would be discharged through its permanent sub-committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The mandate of the HEQC would be to:

- To promote quality among constituent providers in higher education to facilitate the development of quality awareness and quality responsiveness in public and private provision.
- To audit all quality assurance mechanism in institutions
- To accredit providers of higher education to offer programmes leading to particular National Qualifications Framework (NQF)-registered qualifications by certifying their systems, processes and capacity to do so.
- To co-ordinate and facilitate quality assurance activities in higher education within a model that ensured partnership with all other Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) bodies.
- To undertake a host of functions within the higher education policy framework in accordance with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) knowing that the work of the HEQC would be to safeguard quality provision of qualifications in higher education and ensure a thorough monitoring and

evaluating (Strydom & Strydom, 2003:104; Badat, 2003:2; CHE Founding Document, 2004:7).

Three core functions of the system would be: to promote quality assurance in higher education, to audit the quality assurance mechanisms of institutions of higher education and finally to accredit programmes in higher education.

Institutional audits would constitute one of the mechanisms through which the HEQC would carry out its responsibilities for QA. The audit would be focused on the institution's policies, systems, procedures, and strategies and resources for the quality management of the core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement, including the relevant academic support services (CHE Institutional Audits Framework, 2004:4). It would also be geared at assessing an institution's capacity for quality management of its academic activities in a manner that met its specified mission, goals and objectives, and engages appropriately with the expectations and needs of various internal and external constituencies (CHE Institutional Audits Framework, 2004:4).

Programme accreditation as a separate function of the HEQC would deal with the judgments on the attainment of minimum standards at programme level. Institutional audits together with programme accreditation formed part of a cohesive QA system. It was the objective of the HEQC that institutions would be granted self-accreditation status informed by evidence of institutional quality arrangements derived from a range of sources, including evidence from audits. Self-accreditation would be one of the fundamental strategies of the HEQC in steering the higher education system towards a greater measure of quality self-regulation (CHE Institutional Audits Framework, 2004:4).

The core purpose of the evaluation would be to grant or maintain accreditation to existing programmes that met minimum standards while ensuring an enhancement of quality. The collective QA system would be focused on quality improvement and development rather than be punitive in nature. It would also be a mix of institutional self-evaluation and external evaluation (Strydom & Lategan, 1998:65).

As stated elsewhere in this chapter central to this new emerging higher education landscape were the different ways in which institutions responded, adapted or avoided the policy reform. The section that follows below outlines the rationale of this study in articulating personal observations made over time that served as a motivation for the undertaking of this study.

3. RATIONALE FOR RESEARCH

In the previous section institutional audits were introduced as one of the mechanisms of the newly established national quality assurance system. The scope of the HEQC's institutional audits extended towards institutional policies, systems, strategies and resources for managing quality in the core areas of teaching and learning, research and community engagement (CHE Institutional Audits Framework, 2004:4).

After much consultation with higher education institutions (HEIs) the HEQC established a set of criteria for the conduct of audits. The process to be followed for institutional audits would be:

1. Before the audit site visit there would be preparatory steps undertaken by the institutions themselves based on an agreement with the HEQC. These steps entailed an agreement on the scope of the audit to be conducted, the arrangements for liaison between the HEQC and the institution and an agreement on confidentiality; the selection and composition of the audit panel. Interactions between the HEQC and the institution before the audit site visit.
2. This would be followed by the preparation of an institutional portfolio by the institution. The preparation of this portfolio would be guided by guidelines developed by the HEQC. There were self-evaluation activities that were introduced which included commitments from the head of the institution (the vice-Chancellor and senior leadership), the establishment of an institutional steering group with clearly articulated roles and responsibilities, the scope of the self-evaluation, an incorporation of the HEQC's audit criteria within the self-evaluation, and resources and plans for the evaluation.

3. Third, audit site visits were to be conducted by the HEQC supported by an audit panel of experts and peers. The audit visit would follow a clear format including interview sessions, closed and open session and recall sessions. There would be panel-only meetings conducted concluded by an oral feedback to the institution.
4. Post the audit site the HEQC would prepare an audit report that would be sent to the institution that allowed for feedback, clarification and comments. This report would then be approved by the HEQC board before publication.
5. After the audit visit, institutions would provide feedback and develop a quality improvement plan based on the findings of the audit report. Three years after the audit site visit, institutions were expected to submit a mid-cycle progress report to the HEQC indicating progress made since the audit site visit and specifically the extent to which the recommendations have been addressed (CHE Institutional Audits Framework, 2004:7-10).

The first wave of institutional audits was conducted between the years 2004/05 with UCT being one of the first institutions to be externally audited by the HEQC in 2005. It is within the above description of the full audit process that UCT was required to produce an institutional self-evaluation portfolio. Within this process faculties were tasked with preparing and conducting departmental reviews across the institution. The aims of these reviews were to internally evaluate the quality of teaching and learning assessment, to evaluate the degree of student satisfaction, and the effectiveness of the department's leadership oversight and management. The University appointed committees that would report to and work under the leadership of the University Senate.

I was a student at UCT for almost seven years. Five of these seven years were spent as a student activist and leader who was heavily involved in university governance. I served two terms as Vice-President of the Student Representative Council and in this position had the privilege of representing students on various University structures and committees that dealt directly with issues of quality and quality assurance at the institution both internally and externally. This also meant that I had the opportunity of working intimately with academics, both senior and junior, and with management and

support staff at the institution. In this whole process as a student representative I sat on the University Council, Senate, Institutional Forum, and the University Quality Assurance Working Group and various other smaller committees at institutional level and faculty level that directly handled policy issues of QA.

I entered student governance with the expectation that those who represented students, academics and other constituencies and stakeholders on governance structures held perspectives and convictions that were in agreement with the broad post 1994 policy reform process. However being involved in these committees and structures of governance, I observed that a number of academics that sat on these committees were often sceptical and resentful towards national quality assurance policy at an institutional level. Observing these dynamics and the responses of academics, I felt it was important to understand the way in which academics at UCT responded to the implementation of state led quality assurance policy. I was led to ask the following questions; why is it that academics are so sceptical of this nationwide project of transforming higher education? What are academic perceptions and conceptions about quality and quality assurance? Why are academics and management receiving and interpreting quality assurance so differently?

This study will argue that there is much scepticism and management compliance from academics with regard to the implementation of quality assurance policy. A number of research studies have been conducted into the impact of these changes on the working lives of academics (see Newton, 2000, 2002a, 2002b; Trowler, 1997, 1998; Chalmers, 1998; Menon, 2003; Morley, 2003; Kinman & Jones, 2003). These studies present a picture of decline in academic freedom, deteriorating working conditions, an increase in burdensome tasks which consume academics energy and rising negative effects of psychological stress on their well-being (see Brown, 2010:47).

Kinman and Jones (2003:22) argue that the changes such as massification without an increase in resourcing, intensified state scrutiny on performance, and demands for greater accountability, efficiency and quality have led to job dissatisfaction and low morale.

Newton's work through his insider research has provided insightful accounts of responses of academics to these changes. Rather than assuming a negative posture Newton argues that academics are the real 'implementers' of policy as policy implementation takes place at 'grass roots' as they respond, adapt and resist policy (Newton, 2000:154).

This research will explore and examine the responses of academics to this new policy in South African universities, uncovering the tensions between different conceptualizations and management of quality. Brown (2010:4) argued that research of this nature has "tended to focus on universities in politically stable systems, such as Australia, United Kingdom and the United States". This research explores quality issues of an institution in the context of a political transformation process designed to change the nature and shape of the higher education landscape in South Africa.

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research examines the perceptions, the beliefs of academics on higher education policy implementation. The study emphasizes the importance of unpacking and understanding policy from the perspective of the actual implementers of national policy (academics).

Policy literature illustrates that policy will undoubtedly yield more success if the views and input of those at the 'coalface' of policy, the practitioners values and beliefs are taken into account during all stages of policy formation and implementation (Fullan, 1998; Ball, 1993; Jansen, 2002; Newton,2002:49).

This research is an in-depth qualitative case study of how a particular grouping at a previously white institution in the post-apartheid South African policy landscape has understood and interpreted one of the key policy tools aimed at steering the sector from national government.

5. CENTRAL AND SUB-RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary question that guides this research is:

How have academics at the University of Cape Town understood and engaged with national quality assurance policy in implementation?

In further addressing this question, the following sub-questions have been posed:

- What have been the perceptions and responses to state reform measures pertaining to academics of quality under the post-apartheid state?
- How have political forces affected the way in which policy has been received and subsequently implemented?
- How can the state through policy, improve existing quality assurance understanding and implementation through closer and meaningful engagement with academics?

6. OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

This study consists of five chapters. This first chapter provides an introduction to the study detailing the background for the study in introducing the policy context under which quality assurance emerged within the education policy landscape. The chapter elaborated the significance of the study within the broader field of educational policy studies in South Africa. The central research question and sub-research questions were also addressed in this chapter.

Chapter 2 of the study is a review of literature relevant to the emergence of quality assurance in higher education policy. This literature review sets in perspective the global context in which quality assurance as a movement emerged and the motive forces that gave rise to the kind of policy making one is seeing. The second section of this chapter considers some of the literature on academics and change, and reviews different debates around academics within institutional change processes. The politics of quality and the various dimensions of quality assurance are explored in this chapter. Focus falls on quality in relation to democratization, transformation and equity. The chapter ends with

a section that presents the theoretical and conceptual framework for the study which is the theory of the Evaluative State under New Public Management theory.

Chapter 3 of the study is a presentation of the methodology, detailing the qualitative methods used to gather data. The chapter outlines the case study approach as the preferred and relevant method for a study of this nature. The data collection and data analysis processes are also descriptively presented and the chapter concludes with some critical reflections in relation to this part of the study.

Chapter 4 of the study presents the findings and analysis of the study. The Chapter illustrates that academics' conceptualizations and responses as key policy actors are spread out and diverse over different themes and issues but interestingly similar on particular issues such as *Academic Freedom, Transformation, the importance of Research*. The findings reveal that UCT academics are consistently in agreement with the position that historical quality assurance measures at the institution had served them and their fields of study well and had enhanced academic excellence in teaching and learning at UCT. This Chapter will bring to light some of the existing tensions and contradictions within universities as they respond to national pressures and local realities of new policy.

Chapter 5 concludes the study through a discussion of the key findings incorporating them under a discussion of the South African Evaluative State as a conceptual framework. It was discussed that academics understand quality as fitness for purpose, as value for money and interestingly as excellence characterized as competitiveness. The study took time to unpack and classify academic responses as acceptance, adaptation and resistance. It was concluded that while academics at UCT have accepted quality assurance the very same aspirations articulated in national legislation have not been met by policy.

The Chapter will proceed to provide a discussion of the limitations of the study, implications for future policy and recommendations for further research before providing a brief conclusion to the study

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

As it was outlined in the previous chapter, the purpose of this thesis is to explore how academics at the University of Cape Town responded to the introduction and implementation of quality assurance policy. In order for this to be accomplished, this chapter will provide an overview of the theoretical framework within which this study is located.

The chapter examines the emergence of quality assurance as a movement in higher education globally and some of the major debates that accompanied this movement. The section that follows uncovers the emergence of QA as a global policy movement that came to characterize much of educational policy reform in the 1990s up to the mid-2000s. It begins with an overview of international approaches to QA policy. The purpose of this section of the literature review is to provide a backdrop to the theory behind QA policy as it has developed globally. This section is followed by an overview of the key debates within quality assurance policy discourse. This first half of the chapter concludes with a presentation of the Evaluative State in terms of the New Public Management paradigm as the conceptual framework which I will use to examine the emergence of QA in South Africa.

This comparative perspective is followed by a section that introduces South Africa's post-apartheid higher education policy reform. The chapter concludes with a section that provides the conceptual clarification that is necessary for the study. It provides a framework of definitions that is used to locate the conceptions of quality of government, academics and stakeholders in higher education.

2. QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY IN A GLOBALIZING DISCOURSE

Morley (2003) asserts that although globalization is a 'contested concept, theorized as both process and ideology with material and discursive influence', it significantly

affected the rise of 'the 'quality industry'. Castells (1996) has continuously emphasized that under globalization the power of the nation state has been compromised and reduced while that of the market is enhanced in favour of a more permeable nation state dependent on a transnational and networked society that links quality to the functioning of the market. Globalization is perceived as being both homogenizing as well as heterogenizing in as much as it increases similarities and differences across higher education systems (Vidovich & Slee, 2001: 433; Cloete, 1997:7).

The impact of globalization within higher education can be seen in the expansion and growth of higher education across countries, the second being the increase in complexity and competition among universities and other stakeholders in higher education landscape for decreasing public resources. These represent the central challenges amidst others that have influenced and placed a demand on the emergence of quality assurance and assessment mechanisms across countries (Morley, 2003; Luke, 2001; Strydom, 2000:11).

Deem (2001) argues that changes in funding systems, changes in organizational and cultural life of institutions, diversified forms of educational provision through the internet or the inclusion of new groups of students are the central effects of globalization on higher education. Other scholars such as Slaughter and Leslie (1997) see globalization through political and economic lenses, arguing that the changes have put pressures on public servants, policy makers to change the *modus operandi* of tertiary education. This led to governments wanting to shape higher education in relation to the needs of a technological society in keeping with the emergence of knowledge based economies demanding knowledge based occupations.

In keeping with the argument developed above, changes in higher education over the last decade seem to have been influenced and affected by forces originating from three main sources; namely the state, the market and the culture of higher education itself. This chapter argues that the emergence of quality assurance policies and mechanisms took place in a political and governmental environment characterized by a changing relationship between the state and higher education.

Van Damme (2000:10) argues that while globalisation has given rise to a range of innovations in higher education, quality has been its major focus since the late 1990s. By the end of nineties, traditional forms of QA, which for centuries had been regarded as sufficient for assuring quality, were being replaced by much more explicit QA mechanisms and accountability measures (Van Damme, 2000:10).

As the literature demonstrates, there are a number of issues and factors that can be referred to in order to explain the emergence of QA policy reform. First, as some scholars argue, higher education had reached its upper limits in terms of public funding by the end of the last century (Van Damme, 2000:11; Billing & Thomas, 2000:31, Cloete *et al*, 2006).

Second, both the state and the market began to raise concerns over what they saw as the decline in academic standards against the backdrop of massification in higher education (Neave & Van Vught, 1991:254). Third, these key stakeholders, mainly government, industry and professional bodies, were continuously losing confidence in the traditional and older quality assessment and management capacities of institutions (Van Damme, 2000:11). In this view, the ability of higher education institutions to qualitatively and quantitatively match their outputs with the needs of the modern workplace and the labour market in a competitive and transformative economy was a subject of disquiet.

There were added concerns about a lack of accountability of institutions to the public structures which funded them, and an expectation, therefore, that institutions should be expected to meet the demands of greater public accountability.

On a fourth note, scholars have suggested that the rise in QA can be attributed to increased competition in the higher education environment with the weakening of traditional forms of student recruitment, the growth of mobility among students and professionals and academics and also pressure from stakeholders with an interest in how well the higher education sector is performing (Van Damme, 2000; Neave & Van Vught, 1991; Goedegebuure *et al*, 1994; Westerheijden *et al*, 1991; Billing & Thomas, 2000).

This section of the chapter has argued that reform in higher education has taken place as a result of the interplay between state, market (in society) and even the culture of higher education itself (Maassen & Cloete, 2006:6).

Taking into consideration this backdrop, the next section focuses on international approaches that began to emerge globally.

2.1 International Approaches to Quality

There are significant differences among countries and regions of the world in their approaches to quality and QA (Van Damme, 2000; Lenn, 1993; Neave & Van Vught, 1991; Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1993; Frazer, 1992; Brennan, 1997; Harman, 1998b; Westerheijden, 1998; El Khawas, 1998).

These variations can be classified along three dimensions. The first element of variation has to do with the definition of the notion of quality itself. The definition of the concept of quality has significant consequences, as it defines the purpose and contents of quality assurance policies, the actors and stakeholders involved and the role of quality in public steering of higher education systems (Green, 1994:3).

The second important dimension of international variance in QA is concerned with the purpose or functions of the QA system. In terms of this dimension, four sub-purposes can be discerned; first, that which places emphasis on the improvement of teaching and learning; second, that which seeks to raise the question of public accountability; third, an approach which focuses on client information and market transparency; and lastly an approach which is concerned with the steering of the higher education system in resources and planning (Westerheijden *et al*, 2007). As it can be deduced, these sub-purposes have intrinsic to them, different methodological approaches and governance frameworks. It will be clear later on in this section that the variability that exists within this dimension has been responsible for a great deal of internal confusion in institutions (Strydom, 2001; Van Damme, 2000:11).

The third dimension of variability of QA mechanisms has to deal with the question of methodology. There are important similarities and variations in the methodologies

applied internationally to implement quality assurance systems (Westerheijden *et al*, 2007; Van Damme, 2000:11). These questions of methodology relate to the deeper issues of control, oversight and democracy which will be returned to later in the discussion. The first type of methodology observed and preferred in many countries has been that of *self-evaluation*. This is based on institutions or academic units initiating the process through the development of a self-analysis portfolio. This has become popular for two reasons: it ensures political buy-in from the academic community and is attractive to government because of its cost-effectiveness. The second type is that of *peer review* conducted by external experts which is mostly combined with site visits as a complement to the internal self-evaluation. The third, is the development of performance indicators and the generation of statistical information by the institutions themselves. The fourth type is the *quality audit*; an approach used in countries where the institutions individually control the quality assurance process, and where the audit itself becomes a meta-review of the functioning of quality control mechanisms in an institution (Van Damme, 2000; Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1993; Harman, 1998a, Morley, 2003).

As the foregoing discussion shows, there are considerable variations in the way that QA has developed and in the way that it functions around the world. Van Damme (2000:12) says by way of explanation that it is important to note that the political policy environment in which higher education institutions are operating in European countries is very different, with important differences in relation to the recruitment and the statutory position of academics, the openness of access and possibilities for institutions to select students or not, and the management systems and cultures that exist in departments, among faculty and at the institutional level (Van Damme, 2000).

Important as these similarities are, it is critical to emphasize the considerable convergence that has taken place internationally. This convergence can be attributed to the rise of neo-liberalism, the emergence of a much more connected global economy and the development of important political structures to oversee this new global economy. In both Europe and in the United States there has been what can be described as a 'neo-liberal' and neo-conservative preoccupation by the state with budgetary constraints,

perceived decline in standards, performance, institutional accountability and 'value for money' approaches to quality assurance (Van Damme, 2000; El Khawas, 1995, 1996; Dill 1998). Accompanying this has also been a movement in the United States and in many Western European countries towards self-regulation and institutional autonomy aimed at bringing about more competitiveness in the system. The argument is made that this is beneficial for quality and performance levels.

Interestingly, alongside these developments, older and more social democratic ideas continued to circulate in universities focusing on meeting the needs of students (Van Damme, 2000).

A number of observations can be made about the general orientation developing in the QA environment. In spite of the fact that there are differences among countries, such as, for instance, whether or not they all have a central agency, the similarities and congruencies in functions that have emerged amongst them are significant.

The first point to note about these systems is how much the fact of their common infancy has conditioned the scope and imagination of what they set out to do for themselves. They all essentially developed at the same time and were able to observe how they were each making decisions. This was particularly the case in the emerging crucible of the European Union where politicians and policy-makers found themselves thrown together in new and consolidating networks. Almost inevitably their early years saw them taking similar paths (Westerheijden *et al*, 2007; Brennan & Shah, 2000:331; Van Damme, 2000).

On a second and related note, most QA systems, being in visible proximity to each other, evolved in close co-operation with each other. In the case of the British Commonwealth, the influence of models developed in the United Kingdom has been marked (Mhlanga, 2010:25; Ntshoe, 2003:382). This was evident, for example, in the establishment of the South African (Cloete, 1997; Lange, 2006) and in the United Kingdom quality assurance systems (Morley, 2003). There was a great deal of co-operation between them. Similar close co-operation was also witnessed in Netherlands, Italy, Finland, Denmark, Belgium, Germany and possibly other countries not reviewed

by this study (Westerheijden *et al*, 2007; Brennan & Shah, 2000; Van Damme, 2000). Comparative studies further illustrate that the British quality assurance and programme accreditation system has been exported to most members of the commonwealth, while the US system has been copied by Asian countries, Latin America and some European cases (Wolff, 1993, Brennan & Shah, 2000:331; Finkin, 1994).

Tomusk (2000:176) says that early Eastern Europe democracies were very open in sharing their successes in westernizing their higher education systems with Eastern countries catching up and adopting these models. Billing and Thomas (2000:33) refer to a study by Tomusk (1995) that looked at how post-communist higher education systems were overhauled and replaced by Western Europe approaches. It is important to note, however, as Tomusk has shown, that this change was not entirely successful. He has shown that after two years of implementation (Tomusk, 1995) the new procedures advocated by international organization and consultants had not been completely internalized by the academic community or adapted to the character of the higher education system. Ryan (1993:90), having conducted a similar study of Central and Eastern Europe, concluded that countries had to individualize the evaluation and accreditation that they adopted so that these could become embedded in and attuned to the importing country's national and cultural characteristics while upholding international standards.

Cognizant of these developments, and acknowledging the need for variation in approaches of QA, interestingly, a number of scholars have even become advocates of convergence in international quality assurance systems (Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994; El Khawas, 1998; Woodhouse; 1996). They speak of the importance of having a 'general model of quality assessment in higher education' that integrates in varying degrees all the above elements mentioned in this section, arguing for an integration of all the key elements of various approaches (Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994:355). This view has had important resonances in the South African situation.

3. KEY DEBATES

3.1 Quality as Politics: Managerialism, Accountability and Institutional Autonomy

Convergence has not stopped the emergence of fierce international debates. The most strident criticism has been that convergence has produced unprecedented levels of managerialism in higher education. This section of the literature review is divided into two sections, the first section explores the relationship between universities and their stakeholders namely the state, the labour market and civil society. The holding rubric for this debate is that of academic autonomy. The central issue is that of quality assurance being instituted through the prism of a particular kind of accountability, and the anxiety that this is new managerialism which threatens both academic and institutional autonomy. The second section introduces the discussion that is developing around the impact of these changes on the working lives of academics.

Higher education scholars have approached the issue of accountability in a number of different ways. Ball et al (1997:148) suggest there are two broad types of accountability, market accountability and political accountability. The former, they suggest, has come to prevail internationally. Elaborating the kinds of accountability in a more detailed ways, Vidovich and Slee (2001:432) say that four main types have emerged; First, what they call professional accountability, an approach that has mostly been associated with traditional and adhoc forms of quality assurance practices in institutions. Second is what they describe as democratic accountability. This form of accountability refers to institutions having to account to the direct community and wider society within which institutions exist. Third, they refer to managerial accountability. This refers to the political accountability of an institution to the elected leadership of whatever authority they find themselves in a relationship with. Finally, Vidovich and Slee (2001:432) refer to market accountability where students are customers (some authors argue that employers are indirect customers as well).

Putting a participatory gloss on this discussion, Corbett (1992) describes four types of accountability, upward accountability, downward accountability, outward accountability and inward accountability. Upward accountability refers to the legal and constitutional

emphasis of accountability mechanisms. These involve compliance-driven reporting to government or external statutory agencies or bodies empowered by the law to exercise oversight. These bodies are mandated by government, on behalf of the electorate or society, to ensure that quality is maintained and enhanced by institutions.

The second type for Corbett is downward accountability based on a manager-subordinate relationship, where the manager is accountable to subordinates. The emphasis in this accountability is on participation. Staff-members are heavily involved in the co-determination and co-production of quality assurance in the institution. This form of accountability is progressive in that consensus reigns and the manager's responsibility is to monitor subordinates and manage systems that have been put in place on a consultative basis.

Outward accountability, as the third type, is based on the values of consultation. Stakeholders within the institutions like the vice-chancellors, professors, research directors and quality assurance managers in institutions are in constant interaction with external constituencies and ensure that those views and principles filter into "the life of institution".

The fourth type of accountability that Corbett presents is that of inward accountability. This is based on an appeal to the personal conscience of institutional insiders in guiding their actions. The actions of academics and quality assurance managers are informed by an ethical awareness of having to conform to professional standards which in turn safeguards the clients (students). This approach has been subjected to intense critical scrutiny with critics such as Henkel (1998) and Power (in Morley, 2003) drawing attention to the presence of discordant views. She suggests that while there are some who see centralized systems as an infringement on academic freedom, others make the point that mass-based systems cannot rely on intrinsic motivation alone. Central to this discussion is the issue of trust and the role of oversight structures in framing values and ethics

Taking the different approaches of Ball et al (1997), Vidovich and Slee (2001), Morley (2003) and Corbett (1992) together, it can be agreed that there are essentially two broad

forms of accountability; internal and external forms of accountability. Ball et al's political approach, Corbett's emphasis on the participatory and Vidovich and Slee's managerial framing coalesce around, on the one hand, personal responsibility, and, on the other, on constitutional and legal obligation. The first, the inward, pivots on the self. The individual academic sees him or herself as the locus of decision-making for all the facets of his or her discipline. His or her whole academic preparation has been premised on cultivating his or her capacity to make judgements about his or her field. Acknowledgment and respect of his or her expertise is central to his or her integrity as a scholar. The argument advanced by supporters of this view internal accountability is that the inward approach enhances collegiality and institutional improvement. All stakeholders have to be constantly in engagement, in an upward, outward and inward form. Outward accountability emphasizes the responsibility of the state to define and protect public interest. Quality and quality assurance are seen as meeting the requirements and expectations of the client. Quality assurance here is to be mirrored and aligned with the changes and shifts in the market.

Central to the discussion of inward and outward accountability is the increased presence in higher education of external authority. Several different approaches can be taken to show how this external authority has come to assume power and influence. There is now a great deal of interest in the role of the market in determining the direction of higher education and quality. In this study, given the particular dynamics of the context of South Africa, the emphasis is on the direction that this outward accountability has been given by the evaluative state. The discussion now turns to the role of the state in accountability. The significance of this discussion for the study is great in terms of facilitating the development of a broader analytic framework within which to comprehend the response of academics to the new quality assurance environment in which they find themselves.

4. THE RISE OF THE EVALUATIVE STATE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

This study has, to this point, sought to put into perspective the significant changes that have taken place over the last two decades in higher education with respect to quality

assurance. Central to these changes, some scholars have argued (see Morley 2003), is an ideological shift that has taken place in society as a result of neo-liberalism and its scepticism and distrust of traditional forms of governance. Where these traditional forms in their Keynesian guises gave the state the responsibility to provide *for* the people and so played a welfarist role, in the new neo-liberal conception the role of the state was fundamentally changed to act *in* the people's best interests. In this new approach it was not the role of the state to determine what that public interest was (see Bleiklie, 1998). The state had to be guided by the market. This led to the evolution and adoption with the state of what can be described as the approach of New Public Management. New Public Management is at the heart of the *ideological* foundations of the Evaluative State.

In explaining the emergence of this new public management discourse within the evaluative state Bleiklie (1998:300) explains that the state was confronted with three different sets of frameworks with which to make sense of its expectations of the public university. First, it had available to it the idea of the autonomous university. The primary task of the university here was to engage in academic activity based on autonomous research and teaching. In assessing this idea the state was required to respect the independence of the university. Traditionally it would have been reluctant to interfere in university business, fearing claims of infringement against academic freedom and institutional autonomy. The second was the idea of the university as a public agency. In terms of this the university is seen as an essential part of the civil service with its primary responsibility being to implement state policies and to educate candidates for top civil service posts with the state being seen as the primary financial and political authority. The third approach was based on the university 'as a producer of educational and research services. Institutions are called on to assume an entrepreneurial nature, as corporate enterprises the institutions here consists of different leadership and functional groups (academic, technical, administrative) servicing different user groups which require the services the enterprise offers' Bleiklie (1998).

In assessing what was before the state, Bleiklie (1998) essentially argues that it was a combination of the latter two approaches which came to prevail for it. The central consideration was that of how to ensure that the public good as it was determined by the

market could best be served by the universities. In this argument if *quality* was to be achieved then a fundamental objective of the university had to be the achievement of *efficiency*. The question then became that of what managerial approaches could be generated which 'related to the (considerations) of rapidity and cost at which ... useful services (could be produced)'. Bleiklie and Hostaker (1994) argue that it was this consideration that centrally came to give the policy reforms of the 1990s their ideological character. In terms of this efficiency would be achieved through a new public management philosophy in which performance became the central watchword. Determining performance indicators for institutions became ubiquitous. Institutional strategies and goals, and the use of resources crucially were all framed and given power through these new public management approaches (Bleiklie, 1998:301).

It is this new orientation which, Bleiklie (1998) argues, comes to explain the new Evaluative State, where the focus of the state has moved from its traditional aloofness with respect to the university to a new oversight emphasis on rules, procedures and budget decisions to facilitate performance, efficiency and monitoring of policy goals. Bleiklie (1998:303) terms this as a move from *ex ante* regulation to *post facto* control.

The central activating element in this development is that of *evaluation*. The major motivation for instituting evaluation is that where state external agencies are provided with comprehensively formulated goals and a set of incentives and sanctions based on behaviour, efficiency will increase. The focus moves from abiding by rules and procedures to goal formulation and performance control under this form of state. This is the central premise of the Evaluative state.

4.1 The Key Characteristics of the Evaluative State

Guy Neave (1998:265) asserts that:

Evaluation has always been an intrinsic part of policy making. Governments have never dispensed with evaluation in the sense of keeping track of policy developments and expenditure. In those systems where governments laid down the basic framework conditions for degrees and course content and set out the conditions of academic

employment, they have, by dint of prescribing such conditions, the power to ascertain whether they are observed or not, and thus, the power to enforce their observance...where there is public control over public institutions, there one has evaluation in some form or another.

Neave introduces this theory of the evaluative state as a way of describing the changing relationship between the state and higher education in the 1980s in Western Europe.

What Neave is pointing to is the emergence of a new approach in the relations between the universities and the state. Because the state saw the higher education sector as key for driving social, or at least the kind of change it thought was desirable, it increasingly emphasized the strategy of state-steering. It is assumed within this approach that the Evaluative State, in order to achieve social change, should play a much stronger role in determining the direction of the modern university.

Two arguments are made for this stronger role. The first relates to the increased responsibility of the university in stimulating economic growth. The massification of higher education and the rise in private providers required the delivery of a high-quality higher education to increasingly large numbers of young people. This would have an effect on the human resource development agenda of nations; higher education institutions would take central stage in the economic growth agenda of nations (Neave, 1998). The economic growth of nations meant that the requirement of a highly skilled workforce around science engineering and technology would be needed for this globalised knowledge based economy.

The second argument for state-steering emerged against the backdrop of decreased public funding and the need for greater monitoring on the part of the state over higher education. The rise in massification of higher education meant that the state had to be more vigilant in how budgets were to be expended. These are undoubtedly trends that we witnessed in the policy proposals of the post-apartheid democracy concerning higher education policy.

The third argument for the evaluative state is the increased need on the part of the state to have institutions that are responsive to its national agenda (Neave, 1998). This shift to strategic evaluation in Western Europe saw an emphasis on quality and

accountability, coupled with a shift from what we described earlier as a shift from traditional *ex ante* regulation to *post facto* control.

The emergence and establishment of quality assurance systems and policy mechanisms took place in many countries within a political and governmental environment distinguished by a significant change in the relationship between the state and higher education (Sutherland, 2007:1; Cloete, 1997:4). This very change is argued in this study to constitute the rise of the Evaluative State.

Characterising this Evaluative State then is its emphasis on performance, its emphasis on rewarding institutional performance, its emphasis on financial efficiency, and its emphasis on monitoring performance against national policy goals matched up with institutional evaluation and institutional goals (Neave, 1998). The ideal is that higher education systems operating in this environment will be able to align themselves better with the state or government's policy vision and goals.

To forestall the criticism of universities becoming handmaiden institutions to the state, Maassen (1997) explains that state steering is evolving and formulations are emerging in which institutions are being given the freedom to act autonomously. The modality that is emerging in many countries is essentially that of granting institutions the freedom of deciding the best course of action to achieve the state's policy goals. Central to this development is not only a reliance on performance measurements and rewards but also the encouragement of institutional competition as a method of steering the sector into a particular direction. The state encouraged universities to compete for specified funding allocated for prioritized academics projects. This is argued to have enhanced the character of the entrepreneurial university where funding research and knowledge production has somewhat assumed a business mantle where professional councils and industry have had an influence (Morley, 2003).

Neave and Van Vught (1991) argued that these changes equally brought about a new managerial approach to institutional leadership and management which developed as a response to demands for greater efficiency and productivity from the state.

5. QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY IN SOUTH AFRICA

The key question to ask at this stage is how these developments have been incorporated into the South African context?

This study argues that the trajectory of the Evaluative State in Western Europe as outlined by Guy Neave (1998) mirrors the South African post-apartheid policy trajectory. Many of the steering mechanisms that came into being in the European Evaluative state were considered in South Africa and adopted in modified form. A difference between the European system, where the measuring and rewarding of performance was a strong feature of that system, and the South African one, was that in the former the state chose to steer the system through developing stronger legislative frameworks.

Three key levers of the higher education policy in South Africa that function as state steering mechanisms are the funding framework, the national institutional planning framework and quality assurance policy (see the NCHE Report, 1996; White Paper, 1997; National Plan on Higher Education, 2001). These policy proposals and legislation emphasized that government would steer the system through a combination of incentives and evaluation and quality would be 'central as a principle for transforming higher education as a basis for a new relationship between government and higher education sector' (NCHE Report, 1996: 7). Under this spirit a mix of both the development of internal quality assurance and external quality assurance at institutions would be led by national government.

Distinct though from the broad emphasis on efficiency that is evident in European systems, the South African higher education system has had to respond to complex history of apartheid. There are, as a consequence, several key themes that have emerged in state steering in South Africa. The most crucial of these is that of transformation. This is evident and witnessed in the goals of redress, equity and later development in the post-apartheid democratic government's policy. Taking a somewhat different direction to the Europeans, the emphasis on inclusion and participation, and thereby the broader

issue of democracy, has been much stronger in the South African higher education environment.

In making sense of this distinct character of the South African environment, it is useful to refer to the literature on quality assurance as fundamental to democratization. The work of Harley (see Symes, 2006:762) and Dahl and Bernstein is important here.

Harley (in Symes, 2006: 762) draws on the work of Dahl and Bernstein in outlining the three preconditions that are necessary for democracy. These are; inclusion, participation and enhancement. I use these three preconditions for democracy as a frame for the discussion over literature that deals with whether or not quality assurance policy widens or deepens democracy.

In a special issue of the South African Journal of Higher Education, Mammen presents some salient thoughts on higher education policy and democracy in the South African context. Interestingly he starts off by emphasizing that ‘human dignity, equality and freedom’ are the three core and necessary pillars of democracy. He asserts that ‘the South African constitution protects the right of every citizen to the enjoyment of quality of life in which their potential can be freed’ (in Le Grange; 2006: 906).

This assertion is important in our South African context, knowing that there are differences in the quality of life enjoyed by the citizens of South Africa and that there are still great disparities in terms of access to quality education. The Founding Document of the Council on Higher Education (2000) notes that the objective of the South African quality assurance system is an equal and broadened mass higher education system. In the very same issue Mammen (2006: 901) refers to the NCHE Report (1996), White Paper on Education and the Higher Education Act of 1997 as documents that are undoubtedly in line with the spirit of the Constitution in their aspirations.

Under the first precondition of inclusion, Symes (2006) evaluates discussions that have unpacked whether certain voices have been included in quality assurance in higher education. At the epicenter of these discussions have been the following questions: who decides what constitutes quality? Who should be involved in the process? These are

questions not only raised by South African scholars and academic peers but by scholars all over the world (Symes, 2006; Ratcliff, 1998; Tomusk, 2000).

It is contended that fitness of purpose in relation to higher education quality is a matter for co-determination by government, the HEQC, the higher education community and their stakeholders. Under this co-determination the intrinsic and extrinsic purposes of higher education will be realized. It is worth mentioning here that inclusion and participation are related concepts as preconditions.

Mammen (2006:115) concurs with this perspective arguing that in order for quality assurance to widen democracy, quality assurance must be inductive, that a bottom-up approach should be embraced over a deductive, top down approach. Quality assurance policy should be made compatible with processes that engage academics as well as other stakeholders in realizing the intrinsic and extrinsic purposes of higher education in South Africa.

On the one end there is the debate that quality must be conceptualized to include multi-dimensional views, beyond the often cited cost-benefit models. That quality assurance should take into account the options, historical context, socio-economic conditions and trade-offs, tensions, contradictions and paradoxes' necessary in adequately responding to state imperatives, student expectations and the requirements of the labour market and civil society (Menon et al, 2003:6).

Within this debate there is consensus (Menon et al, 2003; Mammen, 2006; Symes, 2006) that if inclusion is to be regarded as a condition for democracy and public higher education is to serve as a public good, then an inclusive and socially accountable understanding of concepts such as fitness of purpose, value for money and transformation should be achieved and then implemented.

Under participation as a precondition for democratization participation is seen as referring to the co-production of quality in higher education's core functions (teaching and learning, research and community development/engagement). These debates focus on the structural and processual means of involving various stakeholders through

organized means in the achievement of quality. Also key in these debates have been the capacity development efforts for stakeholders to play their roles.

Quality assurance becomes compatible with democracy where the goals and purposes of individual autonomous institutions as well as stakeholder involvement under an inductive approach can exist. In the South African higher education landscape, including the HEQC there are various bodies at an institutional level that have emphasized this co-determination and co-production imperative.

Lastly there is a body of literature that considers enhancement (Enlightenment) as a precondition for democracy. Harley (cited in Symes, 2006: 768) follows Bernstein who states that 'enhancement is not simply the means to be more personally, more intellectually, more socially, more materially, it is the right to the means of critical understanding and to new possibilities'. Symes goes on to assert that quality assurance in higher education ought to contribute to answering the question; what is an educated South African? The second theme under this dimension is introduced Barnett (1994) where stakeholders and role players are involved; this is to foster their appreciation for, and proactive contribution to, new and evolving meanings and assessments of quality (Symes, 2006).

One of the key questions to ask, is if the self-understanding of those involved in the quality assurance processes of accreditation and evaluation is being enhanced? There is an embedded premise that understanding will be maximised where it is self-generated rather than being the assimilation of others' insights and judgments. Where actors (academics) have control over the processes of evaluation, in other words where it is a form of self-evaluation there is the likelihood not just of an advance in self-understanding but also of a self-transformation taking place. That is to say, through the change in understanding acquired through the self-evaluation, a change will result in the views the lecturers have about themselves, their educational goals and their approaches to the curriculum and their students. Professionally, they become transformed and empowered individuals.

6. ACADEMICS AND CHANGE

But what have academics made of these developments? There are several studies that have been conducted that show the impact of changes in higher education on the working lives of academics. Central to this dissertation are studies that have analyzed and commented on changes to the lives of academics under the emergence of quality assessment and assurance policy in higher education (Newton, 2000, 2002a, 2002b; Brunetto & Wharton, 2005; Menon, 2003; Brennan & Shah, 2001 and Trowler, 1997).

It is undoubtedly true that the majority of these studies are negative towards these collective changes that have taken place in higher education. They argue that the last two decades of quality assurance policy implementation, coupled with the rise of a neo-liberal managerialism spirit invading the academy, have worsened the quality of life of academics.

Threats to academic freedom, institutional autonomy, the deterioration of collegiality in the academy, increased unnecessary administrative burdens, uncosted extra workloads are cited as the key developments that have taken hold of the higher education landscape by scholars (Newton, 2000, 2002a, 2002b; Brunetto & Wharton, 2005; Menon, 2003; Brennan & Shah, 2001; Trowler, 1997, Morley, 2003 and Trow, 1994). Newton (2002:2) argues that in this changing context of academic work, the “turbulence and uncertainty has become a defining characteristic of today’s higher education systems”. It is argued that the concepts of deprofessionalisation and proletarianisation of the profession have been coined to describe the global state of affairs brought on with the implementation of quality assurance policies in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

It is argued that there is a widespread decline in levels of satisfaction and career outlooks for academics, that a career in academia is no longer satisfying and rewarding as it once was (McInnis, 2000:140; Brown, 2010:6).

The massification of higher education coupled with the decrease in fiscal budgets and resourcing, the increase in demand for more public accountability, efficiency and effectiveness are argued to have led to job dissatisfaction and low morale.

The implementation of quality assurance policies has equally seen a shift from traditional forms of quality assessment and management to a new managerialism. This shift has meant a greater workload and control by institutional management through new systems of quality assurance and monitoring, which have been both internal and external.

In the context of the issues that have been cursory explored, further studies that have researched the forms of responses of academics to these changing conditions (Trowler, 1997; Newton, 2000, 2002a; 2002b; Brown, 2010), have had a significant impact on this dissertation. These studies have focused on the ways in which academic responses during implementation have served to change and remake policy.

Newton's (2000:154) study provides evidence that academic staff, more importantly those involved in the front line, do not mutely accept change or particular demands of quality assurance made on them. He emphasizes that in the process of adaptation, adjustment and acceptance, academics become 'policy makers and policy implementers' (Newton, 2000:154). A significant feature of policy implementation is the discretion exercised at the point of implementation by 'front-line' workers, or 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 1976, 1980; Prottas, 1978).

Trowler and Newton identify forms of response strategy from academics. Trowler identifies four forms: sinking, swimming, coping and active policy manipulation. Newton (2000:162) emphasises that academics are 'policy makers and policy implementers' as they respond to adapt, resist and work around policy'.

7. WHERE DOES THE DEBATE LEAVE US: UNDERSTANDING THE POLITICS OF QUALITY

This dissertation has argued elsewhere that in the late 1980s and 1990s, when quality assurance first made its way into academic discourse, the question of definition dominated (Brink, 2010:140). This section of this chapter will argue that quality is a "highly contested concept and has multiple meanings to people who conceive higher education and quality differently" (Tam, 2001: 47). If we were to ask a cross section of the population the question 'what is quality in higher education?', the responses would

indicate that quality means different things to different people who therefore demand different outcomes and methods of assessing quality (Tam 2001: 47).

Harvey and Green (1993:2) refer to quality as a 'relative concept'. It is relative to the stakeholders within the higher education landscape. They argue that "it is relative to the user of the term and the circumstances in which it is invoked. It means different things to different people, indeed the same person may adopt different conceptualizations at different moments" (Harvey and Green; 1993: 2).

There are a variety of 'stakeholders' in higher education, including students, employers, teaching and non-teaching staff, government and its funding agencies, accreditors, validators, auditors, and assessors (including professional bodies) (Burrows & Harvey, 1992). Each stakeholder will hold a different perspective on quality influenced by their interests in higher education. Giertz (2001) argued, because more and more stakeholders want to contribute to deciding what quality is in higher education, in order to be able to negotiate quality meanings, those meanings and understandings have to be made explicit and defined.

There are widely differing conceptualizations of quality in use (Schuller, 1991). However, these can be grouped into Harvey and Green's (1993) five discrete but interrelated ways of thinking about quality. Quality can be viewed as exceptional (excellence), as perfection (or consistency), as fitness for purpose, as value for money and as transformative.

These definitions are presented individually below. Of the five definitions given, this study will focus in depth on three, namely; quality as fitness for purpose, quality as value for money and quality as transformation. This research will use the conceptions of quality as introduced by Harvey and Green as discussed above in relation to the findings of responses to academics' understanding of what quality and quality assurance are. I will use these definitions as a launch-pad into unpacking the responses to the introduction and formalization of quality assurance policy in higher education, arguing that these multiple definitions while often agreed to and accepted by institutions,

governments and external stakeholders (namely professional bodies and civil society) often manifest themselves in different ways quality assurance policies and in practice.

I now turn to a discussion of Harvey and Green's approaches.

7.1 Quality as Exceptional (Excellence)

This conception of quality says that quality is 'something special' (Harvey & Green, 1993). Three variants of this notion exist, namely that quality is viewed as being distinctive; as embodying excellence (adhering to a level of standard), and finally, in a weaker register, as passing a subset of required standards. Quality here is perceived as 'something' that cannot be attained by everybody, as something of 'high class', this notion of quality implies exclusivity (Pfeffer & Coote, 1991).

7.2 Quality as Perfection

This second approach to quality views it as a form of consistency that focuses on processes. It sets levels and specifications that an assessment process aims to meet (Harvey, 2007). This notion is premised on values, First, that there should be 'zero defects' and Second getting, 'things right the first time around' (Harvey & Green, 1993:8). Under these notions the traditional notion of quality is transformed into something attainable with excellence being redefined in terms of conformity with specifications rather than exceeding standards (Harvey & Green, 1993:8).

Arguably this conception is problematic for a number of reasons; higher education cannot be compared to a factory belt producing products in terms of specifications. Rather higher education is about encouraging the analytical and critical development of students and graduates. This mission is continuous and developmental and takes expression through research and knowledge production in a context of peer review (Morley, 2003; Barnett, 1994; Harvey and Green, 1993).

7.3 Quality as Fitness for Purpose

This third conception of quality assumes that quality only has meaning in relation to the purpose of the product or service being focused on (Ball, 1985; Reynolds, 1986; Harvey

& Green, 1993). What this, therefore, means is that quality is judged in terms of the extent to which the product or service fits its purpose. An example of this definition in relation to higher education is often interpreted by governments as the extent to which universities and institutions of higher learning contribute to national socio-economic development.

In terms of this conception quality is achieved when higher education meets its defined purpose and is able to produce graduates who are employable and can contribute to national productivity. Kathy Luckett (2005) argued that “quality assurance approaches that are informed by rationality external to the educational institution and that regard students as clients, citizens or potential voters subscribe to this view of quality as fitness for purpose” (in Mhlanga, 2010: 22).

7.4 Quality as Value for Money

Quality under this conception is equated with levels of specifications that are directly linked to costs, as value for money (Harvey & Green, 1993:15). At the heart of this approach is accountability; namely accountability to government and accountability to the labour market needs and civil society and other stakeholders of higher education (Ball, 1985; Kogan, 1986). In terms of this definition higher education institutions continuously involve stakeholders in the affairs of accrediting and approving their programmes. The changing balance of forces with market led institutional missions in competitive environments is associated with this notion of quality as value for money.

7.5 Quality as Transformation

Quality as transformation is grounded in the belief that higher education is required to play a role in social change. Quality education under this notion is one that affects the participants (students) and subsequently enhances and empowers them. Quality is assessed and audited in terms of the value added to the student as a recipient of the educational process.

As we saw the South African quality assurance system adopted a distinct mixture of these definitions that Harvey and Green (1993) have laid out.

8. CONCLUSION

This literature review has discussed the literature that is relevant to the research question on how academics have responded to the introduction of quality assurance policy in South Africa. What could be concluded from this overview would be that there are various themes that come to capture the changes in the relationship between higher education and the state that brought about the introduction of quality assurance policy in higher education. In the South African case we witness the usage of progressive goals of transformation equity and redress as the foundation for a policy wide reform that could be attributed to the rise of the Evaluative State. But what have been the responses of academics at a university such as UCT to the incorporation of these progressive goals into state-steering?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this exploratory study is to understand the perceptions and responses of academics at the University of Cape Town to the introduction of quality assurance as a state-steering mechanism.. The rationale for this study originated from my experience with academics at UCT during the first five years of the introduction of the quality assurance policy (within this institution) as mandated and led by the national government.

Through my interactions with academics it became evident that a number viewed the initial measures as bothersome and unnecessarily bureaucratic. They often responded to quality assurance-led initiatives with resentment arguing that these shifted their focus from their core business as academics and researchers. For this reason, this study sought to explore this research question utilizing a single case approach drawing on a mixture of qualitative methods of data collection and analysis.

The Chapter is organized into four main sections, First an introductory overview of qualitative research, followed by a justification for the usage of the single case study approach for the study. Third is a presentation on the processes of data collection process and data analysis ending off with a section on critical reflections on the limitations of the study.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research, as opposed to the somewhat artificial approaches of experimental and surveys study, is appropriate for the study of everyday attitudes and behaviours (Creswell, 2007). Babbie and Mouton (2001) explain also that qualitative research is useful not only because it seeks to make sense of social actions and processes in their natural setting, but because it also provides an ‘insider perspective’. This approach

comes out of anthropological studies that sought to understand the world through the eyes of actors themselves (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Bogdon and Taylor (in Babbie et al. 2001:271) explain this in the following way:

The phenomenologist views human behaviour as a product of how people interpret their world. The task of the phenomenologist, and for us, the qualitative methodologists, is to capture this process of interpretation. In order to grasp the meaning of a person's behavior, the phenomenologist attempts to see things from that person's point of view.

With regard to this research I began with a focus on the responses and behaviors of academics towards policy in their natural setting. It was important in this study for me as the researcher to reinforce an insider perspective by putting myself in the shoes of academics, under their actions, decisions, behaviour from their perspective.

Creswell (2009:179) in outlining key characteristics of qualitative research mentions that the researcher keeps a focus on learning the meanings that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the table or that which scholars express in literature.

Important as this value commitment is that qualitative researchers make, it is important to be aware, however, of the responsibility that a qualitative researcher has. He or she is responsible for interpreting what he or she experiences in the research act. Qualitative research, in these terms, is a form of interpretive inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear and understand (Creswell, 2007: 176). It is also true that these 'interpretations cannot be separated from the researcher's own history, contexts and prior understandings. The task of the researcher is to consistently follow an objective course throughout the study.

In this study I focused on the meaning that academics at UCT as social actors hold about quality assurance as a state-led quality assurance policy. I actively and purposefully made an effort not to let my own experience in dealing with quality assurance policy at the level of a student leader in all the university structures I sat on influence me. I had to be diligent at different stages of this research in reminding myself that I was learning

and accumulating the meanings and understandings of quality of academics, to constantly remain in a state of working through ‘the lenses’ of academics.

2.2 The Single Case Study Approach

The single case study design was chosen as the preferred research method for this study. The study was based on extensive interviews with 15 academics and managers from UCT about their understanding and perceptions of quality assurance and its implementation. The research uses a single case study in the sense that one university was selected for the study.

Yin (2003:3) says that within available qualitative methods, the case study method is most appropriate for examining contemporary events and is particularly strong because it relies on a variety of techniques not used in other research methods, such as a combination of interviews and direct observation with persons involved in the event. Yin (2003:18) makes an important distinction that the case study approach unlike experimental designs and surveys allows the researcher to understand a real-life phenomenon as it unfolds while taking contextual conditions into consideration (Yin & Davis, 2007).

The second observation Yin (2003:18) makes is that phenomena and context are not always distinguishable in real life situations which is why the twin processes of data collection and data analysis are pivotal. In this study the problem and the context are inextricably linked in that the problem can only be thoroughly understood when the researcher unpacks the roots of the problem in its specified context. The responses of academics and managers to the introduction and implementation of quality assurance as a policy is directly affected by the contextual conditions in which they find themselves. Against situations such as these Yin (2003) makes a strong argument for the appropriateness of the case study approach. He argues that a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2003).

In Chapter One the point was made that quality assurance in South Africa had emerged as one of the policy tools used by the new government to effect reform. UCT in

particular, as a previously white institution, assumed a significant position within these reforms. I argued that although UCT was a liberal institution and had defied apartheid policies and admitted black students, it had to engage with its legacy as an historically English-speaking white institution. This meant that UCT, and other previously-white institutions like it, had to redefine and reposition themselves within the public higher education landscape.

Both Yin (2003) and Creswell (2007) advise that case study research lends itself to understanding conceptual issues. The decision of choosing UCT as a case study should maximize what we can learn about the introduction and implementation of quality assurance in higher education. Stake argues that the key criterion in selecting a case should be equally based on the 'potential for learning' (1978: 5). The intention of this study was to gain a detailed in-depth understanding of responses from a particular grouping within the institution toward new policy. There was hope that these findings and analysis would assume relevance within the body of studies conducted on post-apartheid higher education policy in South Africa beyond the borders of UCT.

3. DATA COLLECTION

In this section I will outline the data collection process by introducing the unit of analysis followed by an explanation of the sample selection process. The section then proceeds to present the data collection techniques that were applied and concludes with the data analysis procedures.

3.1 Sample Selection

The primary unit of analysis that was chosen for this study was a group of individuals (academics) drawn from specified faculties at the institution.

The sample consisted of 15 academics who were all faculty heads (deputy deans, heads of department, members of faculty boards) involved in quality assurance practices at the university. Sampling for this research was purposeful in that the selection of participants was based on prior knowledge that these participants, due to their office, were involved

in quality assurance at departmental level but also in the external institutional audit conducted by the HEQC in 2005 for UCT.

In accessing my respondents I made use of a list of academics that were members and sat on various university committees (namely: Senate, Senate Academic Planning Committee, Quality Assurance Working Group, Institutional Forum), at UCT and derived a short list from that initial long list of names.

It was my intention that the study should represent the diversity of senior academic staff at UCT. I initially wanted the sample to be balanced in terms of experience, years in employment, race and gender and in faculty representation.

I then proceeded to send out interview requests to my list of academics calling for participation in interviews for a study on 'academic perceptions and views on the implementation of quality assurance policy at UCT'. After sending out this first communication I received feedback from 26 academics from all six faculties noting that 15 academics responded and participated in the interviewed:

- Six (5) Commerce Faculty
- Five (2) Health Sciences Faculty
- Eight (3) Humanities Faculty
- Four (2) Engineering & Built Environment Faculty
- Three (3) Science Faculty

3.2 Data Collection Techniques

The Data Collection techniques used for this study included interviews, observations and document analysis.

1. Interviews conducted with academics who were heads of departments, and deputy deans, directly involved in the implementation of quality assurance.

2. An analysis of relevant policy documents, minutes of selected University committee meetings directly related to quality assurance, University transformation.
3. An analysis of relevant legislation and policy documentation on quality in higher education, the transformation of higher education in South Africa
4. Observations were conducted during Senate, Institutional Forum and selected University policy meetings that dealt with issues related to quality assurance and University transformation.

I argue that interviews together with direct observation are appropriate approaches used to achieve the aims and purposes of this study. Interviews were used to collect and gain an understanding of the context of the subjects of the study and to further elicit their understanding of quality, their perceptions and attitudes on the implementation of policy. Participant observation allowed me to observe academic heads within various contexts in direct relation to quality assurance. The analysis and review of relevant legislation, University policy documentation and reports strengthened the triangulation process. Using these different and multiple sources and methods allowed this study to corroborate evidence from different sources on established themes and perspectives (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Cresswell; 2007).

3.3 Interviews

The first instruments used were semi-structured qualitative interviews. As Doyle (2004) mentions, semi-structured interviews are flexible and exploratory in nature. It is in their exploratory nature that these interviews allow for respondents to elaborate on their responses.

Semi-structured interviews allow participants to speak freely while also allowing the researcher to probe for more answers. In order to ensure standardized data when probing for these answers I used a thematic-led questionnaire guide which enabled me to expand on issues raised. In other methods this information would have been disregarded and

kept confidential but with in-depth qualitative interviews it enhances the quality and depth of the research project.

As is the practice of qualitative research I accepted that the responses that I reconceived from participants were authentic and honest.

Though I accepted the authenticity of the responses from participants I remained open to the possibility that some answers and responses could be over-overstated and misplaced.

Triangulation through direct observation of participants allowed for the minimization of exaggeration from participants. What participants said was measured up against how they acted in University committee meetings and other settings where quality was discussed and engaged.

The interview protocol was designed to elicit data on my respondents' views on quality assurance processes at the University, on the role of academics and managers in the university on how the organizational structure has changed with the post apartheid state, on the relationship between the state and higher education and on their perspectives of the external audit.

I conducted my first round of four preliminary interviews early in 2010 to test my questionnaire and sample of how the interviews would unfold and to eliminate biases from my end. Clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study is important as it alerts the reader to the researcher's position and any biases or assumptions that may impact the inquiry (Merriam, 1998). On my end these biases may have been developed through my four years in student governance and also being a member of several University committees and also as a Board Member of the HEQC.

After much deliberation over the first preliminary interviews I decided to strengthen the study through the usage of a snowballing technique to develop a more diversified sample. Through this technique I asked the respondents whom I interviewed in the preliminary process to suggest and recommend colleagues in either in their faculties or different faculties who would enrich the study through providing different and alternate views on issues of quality assurance at UCT.

I then returned a week later and over two weeks concluded the remaining eleven interviews with academics from the initial shortlisted sample and more from the suggested list from respondents.

In summarizing the interviews I interviewed 15 academics in total: five from the Commerce faculty, two from the Health Sciences Faculty, three from Humanities Faculty, two from Engineering and Built Environment, three from Science. Out of the fifteen interviewed, three were female, and twelve were male. In terms of experience and number of years at the university, all academics were relatively senior with all having served at the University for more than six years and some over 20 years, and had also served on various University committees over the period of their tenure.

After conducting the interviews I thought about the advantages and disadvantages of having interviewed senior academics. The most powerful advantage of interviewing older academics was that they would offer thicker and richer perspectives, having worked at the University over a longer period and importantly as key witnesses to the changes of policy higher education over time even before the 1994 policy overhaul and afterwards within South African higher education. The disadvantage would be that older academics would be prone to established biases and change and too habituated in existing perspectives of the role of universities and government in quality assurance and the academic project of institutions. The dimensions of these advantages and disadvantages will be unpacked and uncovered more in the Findings Chapter of the study.

3.4 Participant Observation

While I was conducting the study I took notes of Senate, Institutional Forum meetings I attended at the University and other University committee meetings. I recorded notes in a journal I had kept during my days as an SRC Vice President. These meetings were pivotal as they were attended by academics, institutional management, representatives from different constituencies within the institution mainly administrative and support staff and student leaders. I used these notes to gain a better understanding of answers I received from respondents.

In terms of the documents reviewed were selected minutes from UCT's Quality Assurance Working Group (QAWG), selected Senate Committee meetings and Institutional Forum meeting notes I accessed these minutes from my own SRC archived folders at the SRC Office.

The aim of reading and analyzing these minutes and notes was to find information that I had recorded on the attitudes of certain senior academic and heads of department during these meetings when certain quality assurance related policy matters and issues were on the agenda. These notes proved to be particularly helpful as will be evident in the Findings chapter that certain issues or policy suggestions that were introduced or discussed in meetings brought about significant patterns of response and rejections from academics.

3.5 Data Analysis

The purpose of data analysis is to categorize, describe and discuss patterns and themes generated from the data and then to correlate them with themes from the literature in generating an understanding (Creswell,2009). This data analysis section will provide a detailed description of specific steps taken to analyze the qualitative data from the multiple sources utilized. This information allows for a systemic interpretation for drawing conclusions and generalizations on the phenomena studied (Stake, 1995).

3.5.1 Specific steps taken to analyse the data

Step 1: First, a descriptive analysis of the data was conducted manually which involved reading through all typed-out interview transcripts from participants (De Wet & Erasmus, 2005). This systemic close reading gave me the opportunity of getting an initial sense of what issues were arising from the data.

Reading through the transcripts gave me the opportunity to interact with data while it was still 'unfettered'. As De Wet and Erasmus (2005) illustrate, this process helps in understanding fragments of data in context. It allows the researcher to listen to the voices of respondents without imposing codes on them; the texts are read in their 'raw' form. Drawing from Miles and Huberman (1994: 58) who recommend that transcripts be

read for regularly occurring phrases, and with an eye to surprising or counterintuitive material', I followed this recommendation added with De Wet and Erasmus's (2005) advice to read the transcripts more than once before entering the coding process in order to capture alternative and unexpected responses from respondents. For example it was evident when I started reading the transcripts before adding codes that academics generally had different views of the role that management ought to play within quality assurance processes, I noticed that these views were somewhat initially linked to the office occupied by each academic.

Step 2: The second step involved moving beyond the descriptive analysis of the data as presented above to coding the data. Coding is the process of assigning unique labels to text passages that contain references to particular categories of information (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Coding is significant as it brings the data together in order to identify emerging themes (De Wet & Erasmus, 2005).

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) note that coding assists in organizing, interpreting and retrieving meaningful segments of data, this process is not simply mechanical but codes link various segments of the texts to particular concepts.

This study used NVivo software to analyze the transcripts. The advantage of using NVivo as a software tool was that it allows for easy organization of data through registering codes and providing definitions of codes. The software is also advantageous in that there is flexibility of refining codes once they are loaded. Unlike manually coding data the software systematically organizes the data and analyses the loaded transcripts.

The process started with importing the rich and detailed transcripts onto the software individually and then rechecking that each interview was recorded accordingly in order to protect the integrity of the data (Creswell, 2009; De Wet & Erasmus, 2005). These codes were developed from the research problem and by absorbing certain codes that emerged from the data. NVivo is useful software in that it allows for the researcher to provide definitions for the codes which assist in the systemic organization and analysis of data.

Step 3: Third I went back to the coded data and cross-checked every transcript individually again for correctness of codes. In some instances this process involved adding new codes and amending existing ones. De Wet and Erasmus (2005) refer to this process as *second phase coding*. Miles and Huberman are clear when they state that ‘first-level coding is a research mechanism for summarising segments of data’ (1994:70) while ‘pattern codes are explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emerging theme, configuration or explanation’ (De Wet & Erasmus, 2005).

The second phase was useful in that my analysis, explanations and inferences were possible once these final fine codes were created.

Step 4: This process represented the final step in the data analysis process as it involved deducing an interpretation or providing meanings to the data (Creswell, 2009). At this point the research software NVivo was helpful as it had organized the data systemically, this provided for quicker access to the list of the broad first level codes attached in the first phase and the fine codes attached in the second phase of coding. The software was useful in that I generated electronic copies of the code reports of findings. The reports from NVivo allowed me to generate and organize data along various themes, most of which came from relevant literature

4. CONCLUSION

This chapter presented a detailed description of the research method and thus described how the study was conducted. First, a discussion on the relevance of qualitative research methods coupled with the single case study method are presented as relevant methods for a study of this nature. This final sections of this chapter presented how I went about selecting my sample, collecting the data through various techniques and finally analyzing the data using qualitative research software. The next chapter will present the findings and analysis of the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The Discourses of Quality and Quality Assurance at UCT

1. INTRODUCTION

As was explained in Chapter One, the purpose of this dissertation was to explore how academics at the University of Cape Town responded to the introduction and implementation of the country's new quality assurance policy.

The first chapter of this dissertation provided an introduction to UCT. It focused on the last 20 years of the life of the organisation as it went through significant policy and political shifts. This chapter argued that those 20 years provided the internal political and policy bedrock at UCT upon which the responses of academics to national quality assurance policy were built. The findings of the study in this chapter suggest that this era indeed influenced and set the attitudinal tone for academics in receiving, accepting and interpreting quality and quality assurance policy at an institutional level.

In both Chapters One and Chapter Two quality assurance was presented as one of three state steering mechanisms employed by the post-apartheid South Africa government. The point was made that this quality assurance intervention was not unique to South Africa but that it was part of a greater change in higher education policy globally. These findings will reveal that although there are some significant South African similarities to the global situation in how academics have responded to and understood quality assurance policy reform, there are also some distinct features to the South African response.

The findings of this study also reveal that academics' conceptualizations and responses as key policy actors are spread out and diverse over different themes and issues but interestingly similar on particular issues such as *Academic Freedom, Transformation, the importance of Research*. The findings reveal that UCT academics are consistently in agreement with the position that historical quality assurance measures at the institution

had served them and their fields of study well and had enhanced academic excellence in teaching and learning at UCT.

They argue that the culture of excellence has been built up through the achievement of historical high throughput rates and exceptional research output to name a few. Against this, they question the effectiveness of government-led quality assurance procedures and measures. The findings paint a picture of an academic work-force that understands quality and quality assurance in very particular ways and which prefers to tactically continue implementing what has traditionally been the practice at the institution and in some instances disregard policy leadership from management and government. This Chapter will bring to light some of the existing tensions and contradictions within universities as they respond to national pressures and local realities of new policy.

This chapter will begin by introducing the findings detailing how academics have understood quality and quality assurance. The second section will discuss quality and democratization under two key subheadings, First the social expectations of a university and Second the rise of managerialism at the institution. The last section looks at implementation perspectives of academics concluding with a classification of their responses.

2. THE CASE STUDY: THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

The University of Cape Town, founded in 1829 initially as the South African College, is South Africa's oldest university. With the economic success of the 'mineral revolution' in South Africa between 1860 and 1900, the institution built the first dedicated science laboratories in the country and established departments of mineralogy and geology. It was formally launched as a university in 1918 and would in a number of years, come to establish a medical school, a department of education as well as engineering courses. It would come to enjoy exceptional support from private donors and business, which would help the institution to develop and build sophisticated academic and physical plant and infrastructure across its several campuses (UCT archives, 2005).

By the end of the second decade of the 20th century, UCT was to experience a second wave of democratization. Leuscher (2008:149) contends that the first wave took place in

the 1960s and 1970s with the ‘opening up of internal decision-making processes to non-professional academic staff and students’. The second wave of democratization took place in the politically turbulent times of the late 1980s and the early 1990s in national politics. The changes in leadership at UCT would take place with the incoming transition from apartheid to a post-apartheid democracy in South Africa. By 1996, UCT was at the pinnacle of the second wave of democratization, with the formation of its University Transformation Forum. The formation of this forum was significant as it laid the foundation for the reforms that would come to characterize the South African higher education landscape (Leuscher, 2008:151).

In 1996, the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) recommended a new model of quality assurance for South African higher education. Significantly, by the time the NCHE reported, UCT had already affirmed its internal quality assurance approach (Leuscher, 2008:151).

The reporting of the NCHE took place at a time when the University was experiencing significant changes. The most crucial manifestation of these changes took place during Dr. Mamphela Ramphele’s term of office as vice-chancellor. Her tenure was characterized with a concern, on the one hand, for ‘equity and democratization to a commitment to, (on the other), greater efficiency and world class standards’. This led, argues Lesucher (2008:151) to the ‘emergence of managerialism at UCT.’

This shift at UCT was congruent with the changes in higher education globally, and also with the proposals articulated in the NCHE’s report in its call for modern forms of management for institutions and greater fiscal responsibility and efficiency on the part of higher education system.

3. SUMMARY OF THEMES

In the previous Methodology Chapter I explained how I approached the task of coding the data. This introductory section will briefly outline the findings that will be discussed in greater detail in the subsequent section. Using this approach the major themes and threads that emerged from the data were as follows.

First, academics invoked conceptions of quality ranging from quality as fitness for purpose, to quality as value for money and quality as excellence. The majority of academics at UCT, however, understood and agreed with the conception of quality as fitness of purpose and excellence. The remaining percentage of academics also quoted and agreed with this combination in definition of quality but also added the definition of quality as value for money.

Second, QA was seen as reinforcing managerialism and accountability. Interestingly all 15 respondents argued that QA brought about more managerialism and external accountability at the institution. While most respondents seemed to agree on an increase in managerialism and accountability, the distribution of those who held strong views was higher than those who merely agreed that QA policy increased managerialism and accountability.

The third major theme in the findings is the view that there was a need for the development of faculty and department specific QA mechanisms. The need to further develop faculty and department specific QA mechanism was a strong theme, with over 80 percent of the academics (11 respondents) demonstrating a thorough understanding of UCT's current QA system and with all 15 giving examples and suggestions of how the system could be improved to suit their faculties and departments.

The fourth major theme to be generated related to the resistance and subversion on the part of the academics to policy reform. Although academics understood and agreed with QA, they found ways of resisting and selectively implementing policy at faculty and departmental level. Over 50 % percent of academics provided examples of how they did this.

The sections that follow below will present these findings within the themes that have been introduced.

4. ACADEMIC CONCEPTIONS OF QUALITY

All the academics interviewed for this study had understandings of quality that were consonant with important elements of Harvey and Green's (1993) conceptions (as was

introduced in Chapter 2). These understandings related to; Quality as Fitness for Purpose, Quality as Value for Money and Quality as Excellence (as Competitive).

In the literature review quality as fitness for purpose was described as a value determined by stakeholders external to the university community who would put a heavy premium on the instrumental purpose of higher education (Mhlanga, 2008: 22). Quality as value for money was described as accountability, especially accountability to government and accountability to the labour market needs and civil society and other stakeholders of higher education (Ball, 1985; Kogan, 1986). In this definition higher education institutions continuously involved stakeholders in the processes of accrediting and approving their programmes. Quality as excellence was presented as 'something special' (Harvey & Green, 1993:8). Three variants of this notion were described, namely that where quality was viewed as being distinctive; Second as embodying excellence (adhering to a level of standard), and Third in a weaker register, as passing a subset of required standards.

The data revealed that 80 percent (12 respondents) of academics gave quality as fitness of purpose as their understanding of quality, However for 50 percent of the 12 respondents, there was an overlap with quality as value for money and quality as excellence (competitiveness) being primary as well while the remaining percentage of academics only cited quality as fitness of purpose.

The sections that follow will look at these three conceptions of quality in more detail.

4.1 Quality as Fitness for Purpose

Out of the 15 interviews conducted, 80 percent (12 of the respondents) agreed that fitness of purpose defined what quality meant for them. For these academics, new policy measures introduced at the institution should have an impact on work at a faculty level, which should in turn ensure a graduate product that could respond to societal problems at a pragmatic level and which could apply its knowledge in this regard. They defined it as; the institution being conscious of its societal mission (which was described as higher education ensuring that it produces skills required by society, the labour market).

Illustrating this societal mission view, a former head of department in the humanities faculty remarked that for him quality "...is the external mission of a university catering to the needs of society... so I think in that sense QA is linked to a societal mission. So for instance if society places an emphasis in terms of research and teaching and enrolment then it is incumbent for the institution to follow that direction in that sense".

Another senior academic in the sociology department said the following regarding the institution's societal mission;

I think society, through government, should continue to have a say... around the content of teaching and even to some extent research. I think that the broad direction of where society is should in part lead us. It is not wrong to see that there is a dimension that assists higher education, that because the tax payer is funding higher education, therefore society and people should have some say over the direction and mission and the activities of a university. So more directly, government has a right to say we are going to subsidize more medical places than in sociology places and pay a subsidy...this is just...our emphasis as an institution needs to be linked to the type of graduates we want as a country. Society has a right and the government has a right to say we are going to fund more biotechnology in the next 20 years than say religious ethics research.

Reflecting the conception of fitness for purpose being about labour- market readiness, one senior professor in the commerce faculty remarked that for him quality meant "producing for the labour market, a graduate output that is relevant to what the country needs. One example would be us producing enough doctors for the country". In the same faculty, another senior professor also highlighted that for him quality meant "Our graduates affecting society and being relevant".

The above quotes illustrate the view of the number of respondents who understood quality as fitness for purpose being about the external societal mission of the university.

One respondent in the Health Science Faculty, for example, commented that they had conducted a cohort study of doctors leaving the Health Sciences educational system and entering public practice, but found that, after their first year of service, the curriculum (at both the classroom and clinical levels) had not adequately prepared the new doctors to conduct basic procedures and diagnoses as required by most public hospitals. The curriculum was geared at preparing doctors to perform medical operations not relevant

for the hospitals they were entering. A second respondent in the Commerce faculty stated that the aim was “to look at what we are doing and try and improve it for the professions and contribute meaningfully to society”.

These quotes below further illustrate more views of academics from commerce, engineering and science faculties who value the societal mission of the university.

An academic in the Engineering faculty emphasizing this societal mission stated: “If our society needs higher education to produce more engineers then for me it is teaching an engineering student the theoretical base of building a bridge and making sure that that is engrained in the student. The second area or dimension is that to deal with the practical...that is teaching the student the practical aspect of building a bridge... that is our part.”

Commenting on the importance of producing enough scientists for the country, an academic in the Science Faculty remarked:

We need more scientists in this country and UCT should be leading that charge with more vigour. We should have worked hard to sustain the momentum created after the institutional audit by the HEQC in 2005. That process had its flaws but it caused an internal reflection which really showed us what we're doing right and wrong. More importantly we need to be taking charge in society.

An academic who also sits on the Senate Research Committee argued for research that matches the developmental needs of the country by stating that:

I say UCT should further strengthen the research groupings, I mean the units that have added value in various ways to the developmental needs of this country and region as well. For instance I can name the DPRU and SALDRU who are doing amazing work that government has relied on.

An unexpected finding was the variety of views of academics in defining what was required for a university to be fit for its purpose.

The length in description to which eighty percent of the respondents went into when expounding on this question illustrates the intensity and passion that academics held of quality as fitness of purpose. The frequency of the explanation of this conception - as the University meeting its societal obligation and adding value to communities, illustrates

that these academics' conception of quality was in essence in agreement with a developmental approach of QA.

4.2 Quality as Value for Money

The second prevalent theme within academics' perception of quality focused on *Quality as Value for Money*. For Harvey and Green (1993: 28) the concept of quality is stakeholder relative. They suggest that "the best that can be achieved is to define as clearly as possible the criteria that each stakeholder uses when judging quality, and for these competing views to be taken into account when assessments of quality are undertaken".

In the literature review it was mentioned that at the heart of the value for money approach was accountability; namely accountability to government and accountability to the labour market needs and civil society and other stakeholders of higher education (Ball, 1985; Kogan, 1986). In this conception higher education institutions have to continuously involve stakeholders in the process of accrediting and approving their programmes. A small percentage of academics (three academics in the Commerce, Engineering and Health Science faculty) cited the importance of professional bodies in specifying their requirements to accredit their programmes.

Out of the 15 interviews conducted, 60 percent of respondents (9 respondents) could be said to endorse the idea of quality as value for money.

A deeper look at the data of academics who endorsed this view reveals that most understood quality as meeting the expectations and standards of the labour market needs and producing good graduates.

A senior professor in the Commerce faculty made strong remarks about the importance of UCT maintaining its reputation of producing the best graduates for the labour market, while also emphasizing the point that students should equally feel that their learning outcomes were consistent with what they paid in fees.

This notion of quality as value for money from this academic is related to Muller and Funnell (1992: 2) as they argue that quality should be explored in terms of a wide range of factors leading to a notion of 'value addedness'. For them “the role of institutions is to ensure that students fully participate in, and contribute to, the learning process in such a way that they become responsible for creating, delivering and evaluating the product” (Muller & Funnell, 1992: 175).

In short, students should be both at the centre of the process in which learning is evaluated and at the centre of the learning process. They argue that feedback from students is a crucial aspect of evaluation, placing the learner at the centre shifts the emphasis from the value-added measures of enhancement to empowerment (Muller & Funnell, 1992: 175).

An academic at the Graduate School of Business also remarked that “Ours is to ensure that we produce engineers, who are capable and are equipped with all the necessary skills that employers require”.

Another academic in the Health Science Faculty stated that;

It can be defined quite simply, I think it has to do with ultimately the extent to which the product that we deliver continuously - if you like, ... our students meet certain standards ok... so I think that we need to be very clear about what kind of educational offering if you like that we should be giving to the students. Let me also mention that our colleagues from professional bodies work with us in ensuring that what we do here is aligned with their standards. That is the twin task that we should meet at UCT.

In closing, a closer look at these responses reveals that these views came mainly from faculties, departments and academics linked to professional programmes (Health Sciences, Commerce and Graduate School of Business respondents).

4.3 Quality as Excellence (as Competitiveness)

The final conception that was unexpected yet prevalent was *Quality as Excellence* (as Competitiveness) which viewed excellence as the ability of the institution to be able to maintain international competitiveness, intellectual excellence and high expertise in a

discipline. Out of the 15 interviews, 60 percent (nine academics) of academics subscribed to this understanding.

The data shows that academics equate quality with the institution consistently producing internationally competitive research. The summary of these statements from these four academics illustrates this. A professor in the Science Faculty remarked: “Adding to that definition of quality that I just gave you, I’d like to add that I think UCT continuing to produce research that is recognized internationally is part of quality”. Another respondent in the commerce faculty commented that: “Part of our institutional mission is to have a high research output, which is in our mission, and our own faculty has really taken this on board, it informs our understanding of quality”. A former head of department in the School of Economics mentioned that: “it is an honest reflection that in my own department we regard our high disciplinary expertise as a competitive edge, and that distinguishes this department within the institution, nationally and institutionally”.

The data suggested that these academics, who view quality as the institution remaining internationally competitive, understood and agreed that this definition must find a balance with quality as fitness for purpose. The following remarks from three academics, in the Science, Engineering and Built Environment and Humanities demonstrate this understanding. The professor in the Science faculty mentioned that: “Even as we meet that societal mission I’ve talked about, we have to ensure we also spend time in our labs and publish more, conduct research as we should”. The academic in the EBE faculty remarked that: “We view your HEQC and professional councils as being vital. It is important for our graduates to be fully prepared for the labour market, however we have to match this with what we enjoy as academics, and that is research, we have to match that too. You know new knowledge has to be generated”.

5. QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AS REINFORCING MANAGERIALISM AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Prevalent as these views were, also emerging strongly from the interviews was the idea that quality assurance measures reinforced managerialism within the institution.

In the literature review, a discussion was introduced around the discourse of QA as having given rise to an audit culture in higher education. This discourse argued that policy reforms associated with new public management within most democracies changed the way public organizations operate. The reason for this was that new public management discourse involved the systemic use of strategic planning, programme budgeting, risk management and an increase use of accountability to achieve stated outcomes (Brunnetto & Wharton, 2005: 162).

A classification of the data of responses illustrate that academics linked the reinforcing of managerialism as increased accountability to management, as the continuous reporting to management and an increase in administrative staff. There were more academics who argued negatively against an increased managerialism than those who argued for the positive effects of increased managerialism.

The data revealed that although there was acknowledgement of and agreement with QA driven and steered at a national level, which was necessary in transforming higher education, there still remained a considerable percentage of academics who perceived these changes as obtrusive, interfering and bringing about managerialism at the institution.

Out of the 15 interviews conducted 73 percent of respondents (11 respondents) gave both harsh and moderate negative statements about QA reinforcing more managerialism. One senior academic from the Science faculty expressed the view that: “There are whispers of managerialism in certain corridors not too far from your very own department that you are in, some do not agree”. This academic went on to say that in many conversations with his colleagues there were disgruntled junior lecturers and senior academics. He mentioned that they argued that too many managerial and administrative posts were being advertised for Bremner (the administration building at UCT) by senior leadership. He went on to explain that “for these academics quality assurance policy seems to usurp a level of power from academics and redirecting it to managers”.

For this academic and other respondents, there was an equating of an increase in accountability to their own faculty leadership and senior management with greater managerialism. The following shortened statements from respondents listed below illustrate these views and attitudes from academics across four faculties:

“It is a whole lot more managerial than it was in the old days for sure” (Commerce faculty respondent).

“There are just too many admin staff down there (Bremner) telling us what to do up here” (EBE faculty respondent).

“There is just too much reporting happening to the faculty and too many University committees and we wonder sometimes what happens to all these reports at the end” (Science Faculty respondent).

“I’m seeing a lot of underground rumblings in my own department, a right wing group if I may say so, that are against this constant reporting that comes from Senate and the SAPC” (Humanities Faculty respondent).

An analysis of the accounts of these academics reveal that the increase in the requirement of having to report to leadership and the increase in the creation of new committees and structures as a result of policy was viewed negatively. A further analysis of these statements reveals that for these academics quality assurance policy sought to usurp their authority and to redirect it to managers. In the concluding section of this findings chapter this study further explores these views and attitudes.

6. IS QUALITY ABOUT ACCOUNTABILITY OR IMPROVEMENT?

In the literature review it was argued that the debate of whether quality assurance was about accountability or improvement was an important feature of the global higher education discussion (Morley, 2003; Bundy, 2005; Cloete, 2000; Olsen & Peters, 2005; Van Damme, 2000). Detecting this debate through an analysis of the South Africa data was not unexpected but important, nonetheless, in demonstrating the connectedness of the South African system to its global partners.

The data reveal that academics at UCT hold similar views to their counterparts across the world. In the previous section it was mentioned that 73 percent of academics held these views on the increase in managerialism. The seven respondents who held negative

views¹ (55 percent) on quality assurance policy argued that the institution and government's implementation of QA policy should have been more focused on improvement rather than on an increased accountability.

These quotes listed below illustrate this concern from the 73 percent of academics who saw quality as reinforcing managerialism.

A senior academic in the commerce faculty made the following remarks after stating that quality assurance policy had increased managerialism at the institution:

Bremner should be leading the charge on issues such as re-evaluating our ADP programs and other courses and programs...but we are doing too much reporting instead of really focusing our energies on ensuring that we are effective.... for me it is really about effectiveness, are we being effective at what we are doing, as opposed to the constant reporting.

In agreeing with these sentiments an academic in the Humanities Faculty concurred, stating his views on the importance of quality as enhancement rather than continuous accountability;

I think the approach that we took after the HEQC did its institutional audit was rather weak... there were several credible recommendations made that we should have followed up on across specific faculties and departments. I will not take much time but in our faculty we have noted a number of course that have high failure rates, the issue for me has been that we have not focused enough on these courses and actually began to look deeper at who these students that are failing are... and subsequently responding to this serious issue of failures.. For me quality has to also be about enhancement of the student.

Speaking on the need to be more focused on the issue an academic in the Science Faculty stated:

Academics in my own faculty remain skeptical of any kind of interference, more so my task as a senior academic has been to find ways of influencing my juniors and my peers... but at times with the constant reporting, which is at times unnecessary, I also wonder if we devote too much attention to bureaucracy rather than improving the core business of what we do.

¹ The term negative views here refers to views expressed by academics negatively towards quality assurance policy.

Newton (2000: 156) mentions that it is not only within the context of internal monitoring that such concerns have been raised. He argues that external monitoring may outweigh quality enhancement efforts and ensuring that quality becomes associated with managerial preoccupations rather than emanating from the activities of frontline staff.

Newton (2002: 49) citing Harvey and Knight (1996) noted that “accountability approaches tend to demotivate staff who are already involved in innovation and quality initiatives. Not only do they face the added burden of responding to external scrutiny there is also a feeling of being manipulated, of not being trusted or valued, by managers and outside agencies.”

7. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PERSPECTIVES

The purpose of the following section is to present the perspectives of the academics with respect to implementation of institutional quality assurance policy. This section is divided into two main sections. First views that articulate the need for institutional specific mechanisms are presented and discussed; Second, I group academic responses into four categories.

7.1 Need for Institutional specific Quality Assurance Mechanisms

The response from academics to the opening question of how they perceived quality and quality assurance at UCT undoubtedly cast a light on a pertinent policy gap that is institution specific. It was an interesting finding that although academics appeared to accept the importance of quality assurance at a national level, as interviews progressed their individual views illustrated a confidence in and a preference for internal processes rather than new policy from national government. These findings illustrate a picture of policy not adequately addressing department specific challenges.

Academics from four faculties (Commerce, Science, Engineering, Humanities) all made reference to their respective Academic Development Programs (ADP), citing them as areas of serious improvement in ensuring graduate throughput. It was an unexpected finding to see respondents give both descriptive and analytical detail about their

respective ADP programs and point out areas that they as individual academics had been working on despite the loopholes in implementation of the institutional QA system.

A respondent in the Health Science Faculty went into great detail to explain how in their faculty they reformed their ADP program and even changed the name. She gave a detailed account of the power of implementing effective monitoring mechanism on student success and continuous support programs that work in their faculty.

A former head of department in the Humanities Faculty gave an account of a department specific intervention aimed at improving the learning outcomes of a specific cohort of first-year students in the department. He explained that in his faculty they needed to adapt institutional policy to their department specific needs. He cited the importance of implementing new testing and examination methods, combined with continuous assessment mechanisms that were significantly different from other departments in the faculty that eventually resolved the unique nature of problems within that department.

A senior academic from the Commerce Faculty gave an account of the significant examination changes implemented in their particular programme. She attributed this success to a vigilant academic monitoring process within this programme. She attributed part of the success in this particular programme to the self review process required by the HEQC before the institutional audit in 2005 created and enhanced a unique awareness within the department.

A respondent from the Science Faculty made reference to the need to continuously review quality assurance policy in the changing higher education landscape, referring to the growth in the numbers of students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. He mentioned that in his faculty they identified a high failure rate in certain courses and subsequently designed courses that required a lesser workload on the part of the students.

A senior academic in the Humanities Faculty described the innovation they had developed:

I'm speaking from a teaching and learning perspective ...we can talk about other things but in the teaching and learning...Effectiveness is very

important to our understanding of quality, So in other words...the teaching and learning process must be effective, now what does that mean, that the student ends up really learning and really succeeding... The second part of that is that it is effective for whom? And our point of view is that the teaching and learning process if it's going to have real quality in our context must be effective for the full range of our students that we admit and maybe even beyond that.... And those are the crucial elements in fact I very often I prefer to talk about effectiveness because it has a sharper meaning, which can be theoretical, that oh it's a good lecture, oh its academically sound well-presented but if it's not effective for the full range of students then we are not clear

This viewpoint emphasises that quality assurance at UCT should be reviewed to address the challenges of teaching and learning in the classroom in the context of a diverse and mass-based student body. QA policy should be further reviewed to respond to the educational needs of students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds.

Institutional quality assurance policy should play a significant role in not only ensuring that learning takes place in the classroom but that students succeed in the system. The common thread within respondents that held this notion of quality as fitness of purpose and transformation, all agreed that new measures introduced had little or no serious impact at improving existing quality assurance practices at faculty level.

8. TALKING ABOUT ACCEPTANCE: THE MICROPOLITICS OF QUALITY - ACCEPTANCE, RESISTANCE OR ADAPTATION

This section of the chapter now turns to a categorization and classification of the responses of academics. Three categories of responses can be identified, namely: acceptance, resistance and adaptation of policy at UCT.

The findings showed that academics, as policy actors, either fully accepted policy and genuinely complied, or they fully resisted these changes or applied adaptation tactics that often remain undetected by management.

8.1 Acceptance: A Societal Consciousness

A considerable percentage of respondents (66 percent) were steadfast about the importance of the institution's mission of producing graduates that were capable and

ready for the labour market. These academics were in agreement that a national system was necessary in order to ensure quality as the higher education system produced graduates for the nation.

A senior professor in the Health Science Faculty gave this example:

So in the past we trained people to be able to diagnose, brain tumors and so forth... big issues. But often our graduates couldn't identify the symptoms of the common cold or things that affect most people in our country. So we needed to shift our training, we needed to shift from tertiary hospitals where we treat big problems to the local clinics the day hospitals, community help centers, as they are called today and that shift meant a huge curriculum change, this faculty, most universities in South Africa from 1994 onwards changed. Our faculty introduced this new curriculum in 2002. So First we changed what we teach, we had to have a complete curriculum restructuring to ensure our students at the end of this respond to the needs of South Africa then we changed how we teach. We introduced and changed problem based learning we shifted from teaching at exclusively at Groote Schuur and Red Cross hospital to teaching across the peninsula at the local clinics.

Another professor in the Humanities Faculty repeated a similar view;

That is what my book is about there should be a third mission in society and that is a third mission, which is the development of society. There is no clear idea of a third mission that would mean then a lot of QA would be around that third mission. A good example is our masters program, I'm getting a master's program, I am getting a masters stream, we are not training people to become lecturers but we are training people to go and help society develop. We are training them to become professional masters' sociologists, to be development people, yet we are only evaluated in terms teaching ...or whether they can they do research.

These two quotes from academics who have each been at the institution for more than 20 years illustrates that there is a percentage of academics who value higher education's societal mission. The sense from academics who shared these perspectives illustrate the presence of an academic core who have fully accepted quality assurance as a state steering mechanism but argue that all measures and systems put in place to assure quality must be geared at strengthening the institution's role in fulfilling its societal mission. Interestingly it was this group of academics who stressed the need for innovation and more freedom and autonomy on the part of faculties improving their

internal ADP programs and other student learning support services and structures to ensure higher throughput rates.

8.2 Partial Acceptance: Adaptation Tactics

The data reveal that in as much as there are those who have fully accepted quality assurance as a national state steering mechanism, there remain those who have assumed 'political adaptation tactics' in partially complying with new policy measures and systems. This form of policy acceptance is detected in academics that understand quality assurance but only choose to go through the motions or as one academic termed it 'window dressing' without fully engaging in what is required from them as policy actors at ground level. A case in point was a resolution that came from the Senate through the Senate Academic Planning Committee (SAPC) for faculties to strengthen and implement, where there was no governance structures, Faculty Review Boards and departmental level review committees that would amongst other key priorities deal with student success rates and continuous assessment.

A senior professor at the Graduate School of Business agreed with this resolution but had a perspective which suggested a slightly different view;

For instance I don't have exams... I have out of the box teaching styles...I don't ask students for exams. I ask students to submit projects, which is a different mode of examination for example personally as an academic I am free. There needs to be more freedom, it is a question of flexibility and control, how flexible do we allow the academic planners to be versus how do we control the system...I am for more innovation and more freedom.

Another senior academic in the Humanities Faculty while talking about resolutions that come from Senate having to be implemented at faculty departmental level stated: "Academics have ways; don't underestimate their power... for instance we could influence through word of mouth for students to take a particular direction without policy being instituted from management."

A senior academic in the Science Faculty recalled conversations with colleagues in his faculty citing examples where they reworked and delayed implementation in their own department. Through various tactics they individually devised ways of avoiding

implementing these mandates. He further mentioned that “some academics here have rejected quality assurance from the onset but complied as a matter of principle.”

Another academic in the Commerce Faculty remarked that “academics will always be smart, and will, every now and then, find intelligent ways of playing the game without substantively adhering to what is required.” She went on to say that in her department there was a level of skepticism associated with quality years before it was fully formalized through the HEQC as colleagues had heard accounts from their counterparts in the United Kingdom who held negative views of policy led by national government (namely Britain and Scotland).

These comments reveal a partial acceptance from academics, some of who are senior academics who know policy and who sit on key policy governance structures but choose to exercise methods that have not been instituted. While this is not illegitimate, it reveals tactics and ways in which academics have chosen not to comply with University policy at faculty level. This partial compliance illustrates that academics pick their fights strategically and avoid placing their agendas in University structures where they are aware they will receive opposition but instead they apply different adaptation tactics.

8.3 Understanding Resistance

The data also revealed that there is a cohort of academics that have outrightly resisted quality assurance as a state steering mechanism. Of the 15 interviews conducted over 50 percent of respondents fell within this category. It is important to note that within this percentage of academics there was an overlap of those who initially accepted quality assurance policy but also demonstrated circumstances where a resistance attitude was detected.

This resistance is undoubtedly worth noting but what is critical are the reasons stated within these views.

A senior professor in the Commerce Faculty commenting on the institutional audit conducted by the HEQC stated that: “I don’t think that the CHE understood the role of their work themselves; they did not understand the institutions very well. They even

criticized the social relevance of a business school at that time. It is a dress up game at the one end, if you know how to dress up for the game then you know how to play the game.”

This academic continued to explain and demonstrate the ways in which he took the opportunity of completely disregarding University policy guidelines and measures. He cited cases in his MBA class and how he devised new methodologies of examination for his students with which the faculty had initially disagreed but which he went on to partially implement in his class anyway and so argued that he had won the war in the department and subsequently the faculty. His views were tied to a policy, which in his view, was imposed by a leadership that never fully understood the institution at that time. His statement continued to outline how government policy was narrow in terms of course design, stating that government policy was of a positivist nature instead of being flexible and liberal.

An interview with a senior academic in the Sociology Department of the Humanities Faculty, said that “Academics do not always have to disagree with policy at Senate level but our faculties and departments are fairly autonomous and we can find ways of dealing with policy from national government imposed through management... if we feel that our academic freedom is being threatened... we know how to respond”.

One academic in an animated response stated: “The work of QA is associated with a kind of draconian policy sort of thing you know”. This same academic in the Science Faculty continued to mention that several of his colleagues within his faculty held the same view.

A respondent in the Commerce Faculty made a comment alluding to resolutions taken at Senate level saying; ‘You cannot impose these measures on academics’. He commented on the need to win them over progressively over time through a genuine continuous engagement at all levels of implementation.

9. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a discussion of the findings that had been derived from the coded data. The chapter began with a discussion that detailed academic understanding of quality. It was evident that the majority of academics at UCT fell in the quality as fitness of purpose grouping, valuing the institution's social mission. The remaining percentage of academics held this conception but argued that quality should equally be perceived as value for money and excellence.

The chapter then introduced two sections which suggested that there were analyses which identified gaps in the implementation of the QA policy, where implementation of quality had brought about more managerialism. In the same section the findings suggested that academics were concerned that quality was also seen as being more focused on accountability rather than on improvement of teaching and learning.

The chapter then categorised academic responses as being those of acceptance, resistance or adaptation under the themes of full acceptance as societal consciousnesses, partial acceptance through 'adaptation tactics', and lastly that of resistance from academics.

The next chapter undertakes an analysis of the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data. It draws on the literature from Chapter Two to provide a deeper understanding of how academics have responded to the introduction of quality assurance policy at UCT.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSING CONTESTATION AND FACULTY RESPONSES

1. INTRODUCTION

As it has been highlighted throughout this dissertation, the purpose of this study was to explore how academics at the University of Cape Town had understood and responded to the introduction of state-mandated quality assurance policy at the institution. This was investigated through analysis of data gathered through policy analysis and from interviews with academics at the institution.

This Chapter will begin with a summary of the study. This will be followed by a discussion of some of the key findings incorporating them under a discussion of the South African Evaluative State as a conceptual framework. The Chapter will then provide a discussion of the limitations of the study, implications for future policy and recommendations for further research before providing a brief conclusion to the study.

2. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore how academics at the University of Cape Town had responded to the introduction of quality assurance policy as a state steering mechanism. The study was based on the premise that the introduction of quality assurance as one of the state's three key levers represented a significant shift for higher education in South Africa.

The literature review began by examining the emergence of quality assurance as a movement in higher education globally and some of the major debates that accompanied this movement. The section uncovered the emergence of QA as a global policy movement that came to characterize much of educational policy reform in the 1990s up to the mid-2000s. The purpose of this section of the literature review was to provide a backdrop to the theory behind QA policy as it has developed globally. This section was followed by an overview of the key debates within quality assurance policy discourse.

The discussion thus far in the literature review put the section in a position to introduce the theory of the Evaluative State as an analytical framework for this global policy shift. This overview of the literature placed the transformation of higher education in South Africa within a global policy shift of higher education policy. This global change was articulated as a rise in university student numbers, a decline in fiscal spending by governments and the call for more efficiency and effectiveness and lastly a loss of confidence on the part of key stakeholders such as businesses and professional bodies in the traditional management practices of higher education. The change in traditional student recruitment methods, student mobility and professional staff mobility practices and the growth of private sector funding are equally manifestations of globalization which all set the backdrop that necessitated quality assurance policy. The chapter then introduced and discussed quality assurance policy as a lever used by the state to transform higher education in South Africa, to steer higher education towards being more socially accountable and developmentally orientated towards the needs of the country. This change is analysed from the unique perspective of a historically white institution that had to restructure and realign itself with a more involved and centrally controlled quality assurance system. The chapter is concluded by introducing the concepts quality and quality assurance and concluded that Harvey and Green's (1993) typology would be used as a framework of definitions for this study.

After being in student governance for several years and having the opportunity of sitting on several university governance structures and committees at both institutional and national level, the conflicting responses of academics to the introduction this new policy influenced my need to understand how they responded with such political resistance and caution.

The methodology section in the study detailed an analysis of coded interviews from a mixed purposeful sample of academics at UCT. Based on the insight garnered in the literature review the findings chapter presented the data within five overarching themes deduced from the literature review chapter. These themes included: academic conceptions of quality, which unpacked notions of quality as fitness for purpose, as transformation, as excellence and as value for money; quality assurance as reinforcing

managerialism and accountability; whether quality assurance is about improvement or accountability; the need for institutional specific mechanisms; and the micropolitics of quality. Within these overarching themes, a number of key features were identified and discussed in detail.

3. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

There are three key central findings of this study that characterize and explain the new relationship between the state and higher education within this policy reform era. These findings reveal areas of agreement, tension and contestation between academics, management and the state.

In the literature review the study introduced the theory of the evaluative state as a way of describing the changing relationship between the state and higher education in South Africa. It was argued that this change represented an ideological shift in society as a result of neo-liberalism and its scepticism and distrust of traditional forms of governance.

Three main arguments were made for this stronger role. The first relates to the increased responsibility of the university in stimulating economic growth. The massification of higher education and the rise in private providers required the delivery of a high-quality higher education to increasingly large numbers of young people. This would have an effect on the human resource development agenda of nations (Neave, 1998:265).

The second argument for state-steering emerged against the backdrop of decreased public funding and the need for greater monitoring on the part of the state over higher education. Finally, the third argument for the evaluative state was the increased need on the part of the state to have institutions responsive to national agendas (Neave, 1998).

Characterising this Evaluative State, both in South Africa and Europe, was an emphasis on performance, an emphasis on rewarding institutional performance, an emphasis on financial efficiency, and its emphasis on monitoring performance against national policy goals matched up with institutional evaluation and institutional goals (Neave, 1998).

This study puts forward three main central findings in the context of this analytical framework. The first central finding is that while academics place value on the external mission of the university characterised as fitness for purpose and value for money coupled with the continuation of academic excellence, they remain at odds with quality assurance policy, arguing that it has reinforced an unwanted managerialism and accountability on academics at the institution.

Second, under the theme presented as the implementation gaps of policy, academics argue that too much emphasis is placed on accountability and managerial responsibilities at the expense of improvement of educational outcomes.

Third, the policy reform of higher education has caused academics to become more *politically* active and conscious of their professional roles within higher education. This study argues that these findings reveal that academics find themselves having to reposition, and adapt themselves as key stakeholders in higher education affected by these changes.

In conclusion these discussions are brought together to make conclusive remarks on the South African evaluative state. The findings from this research have in some instances mirrored those of previous studies that examined the responses of academics to higher education policy reform.

3.1 The tension between academic conceptions of quality on the one hand and perceptions of quality assurance as more managerialism and contested accountability

This study has shown that while academics at UCT agree with the policy rhetoric of a transformed '*higher education system that responds to the educational needs of South Africa*' (DoE, 1997; 2002) by valuing the societal mission of the institution, there seems to be a tension between their agreement and their response to the very policy mechanism put in place by the state to steer the system in this desired direction.

The findings reveal an academic community at UCT who place a premium on the institutions' ability at meeting the developmental needs of the country through

producing graduates that are adequately ready to solve societal problems and ready enter the labour market needs of South Africa. The findings undeniably illustrate an academic community that is committed to its academic duty of preparing students for their entrance in society.

While academics at UCT are committed to this external mission they vehemently disagree with the managerialism that the evaluative state has brought. The dilemma that UCT academics face is found in the implicit character of the evaluative state that has characterised post-apartheid educational policy.

The policy standpoint has brought about a moment in policy where two key stakeholders in higher education, academics and the state, genuinely agree on the goals and aspirations of policy, but disagree on the mechanisms put in place to achieve those goals. The findings revealed that academics often felt that new policy structures and measures introduced were too narrow and encroached on responsibilities that have traditionally been left to academics.

They argued that that the HEQC, through its institutional audits and accreditation functions, has assumed an unnecessary direct role in curriculum design and the course structures of degree programmes, arguing that policy has been too narrow and has lacked flexibility where it is required. In the Findings chapter, the study provided evidence of academics who had responded negatively to what they perceived as a rigid framework for course design to which they were subjected in the Commerce and Humanities Faculties. They argued that both the HEQC and management through the IPD had failed to see the benefit of innovative teaching methodologies relevant to their specific disciplines.

The academics who expressed this tension felt that although national policy committed itself to academic freedom and autonomy, it did so in ways that were contradictory. UCT's Self-Review Report (2005:45) reflected that there is "recognition of the tensions inherent in the quest for a balance between values such as academic freedom and critical enquiry on the one hand and responsibility, obligations and accountability on the other." The HEQC Audit Report goes on to say that this was an issue that surfaced in many

interview discussions on the policy and system requirements of the university (CHE, 2006).

It is clear that state-driven quality assurance initiatives have not won sufficient support from academics. Their view is that the policy reforms came with increased managerialism that has worked negatively towards achieving the transformative goals of the white paper.

These findings reveal the importance and necessity of full acceptance and support from the academic community. This is critical for the success of quality assurance initiatives in higher education.

3.2 Explaining the Implementation Gap

Newton (2000:154) citing Lipsky (1980) and Prottas (1978) argued that a significant feature of policy implementation is the discretion exercised at the point of implementation by frontline workers or ‘street level bureaucrats’. These scholars argue that there is a gap between what is designed into a policy and situational factors which prevent this from being achieved. How a policy is received and decoded they argue is of paramount importance. This is an important insight to take away from working with the opinions of the academics at UCT.

Newton’s (2000, 2002a, 2002b) work demonstrates evidence of the implementation gap between policy intentions and policy outcomes, where, in the process of development and implementation, quality assurance policy becomes changed and subverted by situational factors. This next section of the chapter discusses the findings that reveal what Newton (2000:154) described as an ‘implementation gap’ within policy implementation in higher education.

3.2.1 Is Quality about the Improvement of educational Outcomes or Accountability?

The second central finding, under the theme presented as the implementation gaps of policy, academics argue that too much emphasis is placed on accountability at the expense of improvement of educational outcomes of students.

While academics at UCT agree on the need for transformation of higher education and the introduction of a centrally controlled quality assurance system they are disappointed at the inability of policy to effectively deal with issues of success, retention and throughput. More specifically academics are disappointed with the inability of policy to deal with students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, primarily black students.

In the previous chapter I suggested that academics at UCT have demonstrated a genuine commitment to ensuring that students succeed once they enter the system. For academics at UCT transformation should be about more than numbers. Transformation should go beyond purely diversifying the student body in terms of demographics to ensuring academic success at all levels for students. This point needs careful explanation. While it may be the case that academics at UCT do not wholeheartedly subscribe to the national transformation agenda, there is amongst them real concern about the inability of the quality assurance policy to deal with success issues of students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds.

Academics at UCT demonstrated a thorough understanding of quality assurance in terms of being able to engage and unpack historical traditional quality assurances mechanisms in relation to new practices introduced through the state. A high percentage of them spent time explaining the different and in some cases, unique methods of external examination and continuous assessment. These findings did not reveal an apathetic and unengaged academic community.

They could point to policy they had developed at the University to deal with the challenges of throughput, such as the introduction of ADP programs across faculties that were designed to support 'weaker' students. In some faculties academics had been proactive and innovative at devising faculty and department specific mechanisms that addressed the loopholes that institutional policy had missed. An analysis of historical documents confirmed how proactive the University had been since 2001. In evidence were more than 14 policy documents and initiatives that aimed at strengthening quality within the institution. These findings revealed that academics defended their

institutionally developed quality initiatives, rejecting national initiatives that were not institutionally relevant.

This finding is particularly surprising, as earlier on the study it seemed as if academics were resistant to quality assurance policy, advocating for preserve and the maintenance of traditional *white* standards, but the findings suggest that this resistance is due to academics wanting to be left alone because they understand what the quality assurance needs of their context are. The findings revealed the elaborate detail in which most academics understood their respective quality interventions and displayed the depth at which academics understand the link between quality with ensuring retention and throughput of students at UCT.

Harvey and Knight (1996: 100) note that “accountability approaches tend to demotivate staff who are already involved in innovation and quality initiatives. Not only do they face the added burden of responding to external scrutiny there is also a feeling of being manipulated, of not being trusted or valued, by managers and outside agencies”. These findings are significant in that where it initially seemed that resistance was linked to the preserve of an institution that was previously white, and academics assumed a resistant stature as a preserve of white standards, they are in fact disappointed at the inability of national policy at dealing with issues specific to previously disadvantaged students, black students.

3.3 Adaptive Responses: Explaining ‘Pro-Active Resistance’ From Academics to Policy

The third central finding of this study relates to an analysis that categorises the political responses of academics to policy that is externally driven. This study argues that these findings reveal that academics find themselves having to reposition, and adapt themselves as key stakeholders in higher education affected by these changes.

A collective analysis of responses from academics leads this study to conclude that academics are in fact not passive recipients of policy, but are pro-active in their responses. While academics displayed feelings of mistrust and disappointment as Harvey and Knight (1996) point out, they still found ways of being pro-active in

responding to policy. The very cohort of academics who outrightly stated their resistance to quality assurance policy, also, interestingly, provided examples of how they implemented department-specific initiatives that addressed issues that the quality assurance policy missed. For the purpose of this study I have characterized this form of resistance as ‘pro-active resistance’.

A significant feature of policy implementation that is explored, as a result of these findings of this study, is the discretion exercised at the point of implementation by ‘front-line’ workers, or ‘street-level bureaucrats’ (Lipsky, 1976, 1980; Prottas, 1978). This discretion debate is centered on the importance of discretionary behavior on the part of academics and the need to make judgments and discretion concerning policy.

Prottas (1978:286) argues that given their relative autonomy at the point of implementation, ‘front-line workers’ (academics), despite the controls of the evaluative state on them, are the real makers of policy since management effectively loses control to them. It is argued that “the policy-making roles of ‘street-level bureaucrats’ are built on considerably high levels of discretion and relative autonomy” (Lipsky, 1980:17). As this study has shown academics can choose to withhold cooperation and often develop coping mechanisms that are unsanctioned by managers at the UCT or the HEQC as an external agency.

The responses from academics in this study have proven what Newton (2002:15) argues to be a gap between what is designed into a policy and the situational factors that prevent policy from being achieved thus earlier it was argued that how a policy is decoded and interpreted by academics is critical.

4. A CHALLENGED SOUTH AFRICAN EVALUATIVE STATE

These discussions thus lead this study to make comments on the politics of South African evaluative state. This study has clearly argued that higher education policy reform in South Africa to a large extent mirrored the changes that were taking place in higher education in the West, most notably in commonwealth countries. This new South African state was clear and explicit about the need to steer higher education towards national social and economic objectives while still accommodating the importance of

being internationally competitive (Brown, 2010:130). This study argued that the fundamental difference between the evaluative state globally and its South African version is primarily that the transformation agenda was underpinned by progressive ideals with equity and redress as its pillars.

The new state form in South Africa, more so than the European Evaluative state, was heavily interventionist in nature. This evaluative state was eager to see rapid and radical policy shifts as opposed to the more organic evolutionary trajectory that characterized the European development (Brown, 2010: 130). The degree of control achieved primarily through legislation and statutory bodies in South Africa has been significantly different to that evident in Europe.

An analysis of the findings asserts that while the system has rapidly improved access, it remains heavily challenged on issues of success, retention and throughput. These challenges are not unique to UCT as an institution but national statistics reveal that this has been a national system wide challenge. This research has shown that the efficiency demands of the state have often been counter to student success at UCT. Policy has to be further equipped to delve deeper into the dynamics of an underprivileged student body from poor families and disadvantaged educational backgrounds.

The South African Evaluative state needs to strike a balance between facilitative steering and constraining interference at an institutional level. Institutions need to be afforded greater autonomy at implementing their transformation strategies. This study has shown that external evaluation has not necessarily worked in favour of quality improvement. UCT's work with students from poor and underprivileged backgrounds has been unsupported by national policy and institutional policy has equally not been up to the task of meeting this complex challenge.

Statistics on enrolment and graduations, classified in terms of race, illustrate that black students in South African universities have experienced the lowest levels of success, while white students the highest (Brown, 2010:199). It is reported that in 2007/2008 black students formed 63% of enrolments, but only 57% of graduates, while white students 24% of enrolments, but 30% of graduates (Brown, 2010:199). In order for

South Africa to meet its developmental objectives of equity in human capital, the huge challenges facing black students need to be addressed more vigorously.

All three key levers of higher education policy need to be continuously revisited and restructured to enable the fulfilment these developmental objectives. The funding framework rewards output achievements of universities against national agreed benchmarks, but as this study has shown, it has failed to support the input needs of achieving equity, access and success in South Africa.

One of the most important functions of a national quality assurance system is the need to satisfy public accountability requirements. Policy development does not necessarily *enhance* quality but it can be used to *measure* and to *monitor* quality. As this study has already demonstrated, the existence of policy is not, in itself, an assurance that there is quality of teaching and learning. Similarly, it cannot be assumed that there was no quality in teaching and learning at UCT prior to the current quality assurance systems implementation. But what it does mean is that it is possible to use policy to assess the progress that has been made towards better quality within teaching and learning. One of the ways in which this has been done is by the introduction of the self-evaluative process for institutions that have the capacity to make reliable and valid judgments on their institutional operations and their effectiveness.

The policy development of quality assurance in higher education should also be seen as a positive move forward. National policy has defined the current quality assurance environment and has gone beyond traditional definitions of quality in teacher and learning. It has correctly focused on the imperative to address some of the inequalities of the previous educational system, by focusing on issues such as access to higher education, support for underprepared learners, recognizing prior learning and gender equity. Similarly, national policy requires institutions to examine the relevance of their educational offerings in terms of the need to be responsive to economic and social imperative.

It is also been evident that one of the most important roles that the implementation of a quality assurance system has played has been that of facilitating dialogue around issues

of quality. McKenna (2006) cited in Sutherland (2007:2) argued that “the need to engage in critical dialogue on quality-related issues in teaching and learning, rather than taking the view of the current HEQC documentation as a set of rules that need to be complied with”. It is true that with insight and the space to engage in thoughtful debate, HEQC processes, however flawed, hold the possibility of engendering such debate within and across institutions of higher education.

5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As mentioned above, the purpose of this study was to investigate how academics have responded to the introduction of a government led quality assurance policy in higher education. One of the limitations of this study was that it could have been broadened to include the perspectives of all stakeholders in universities, namely students and management and workers to strengthen its generalisability.

The second limitation of this study was that it appeared to generalise the findings to all academics as a whole. It is important to note that a specific set of respondents were selected and used to explore the research question. This sample cannot be assumed to be representative of all academics within the South Africa higher education landscape. However, this sample was useful in enabling the exploration of this topic as an initial study into how academics at a previously white institution have responded to government’s transformation agenda through quality assurance policy as a steering mechanism.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has primarily been focused on academic perceptions and responses to quality assurance policy in South Africa, a study that would look at institutional responses taking into consideration all stakeholders at universities could prove to be more insightful. Second a national cross-sectional study of all universities (both historically black and white institutions) in South Africa on the impact on quality assurance would be significant for the system as a whole and for policy makers.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This study has explored how academics at UCT have understood and interpreted the introduction and implementation of quality assurance policy at UCT. It was discussed that academics understand quality as fitness for purpose, as value for money and interestingly as excellence characterized as competitiveness. The study took time to unpack and classify academic responses as acceptance, adaptation and resistance. It was concluded that while academics at UCT have accepted quality assurance the very same aspirations articulated in national legislation have not been met by policy.

The findings of the study revealed a need for a more flexible and less rigid policy regime that allows academics the opportunity of being innovative in solving institution specific challenges of assuring quality. The study revealed that in order for the nation's developmental objective to be met, national higher education policy would have to be more responsive at addressing the input needs of the system as a whole.

This study has concluded that the Evaluative State in South Africa has not been a failure but rather that the next phase of policy making and implementation should devote and note the values of a key constituency within institutions-academics. The central findings of the study have revealed that while policy has increased access of students, there still remain challenges around success and retention.

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