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# Frameworks for institutional audits for quality in South African higher education

## Summary

This paper attempts to establish the most suitable a system for institutional audits of higher education institutions in South Africa. It focuses on four areas: theory, philosophy, categories and practice. The paper argues that self-evaluation is fundamental to the audit portfolio and the institutional audits (theory). An approach is suggested where the focus is on procedures and mechanisms for quality instead of on quality *per se* (philosophy). The author suggests eight categories for institutional audits: quality, policy implementation, evaluating mechanisms, teaching and learning, strategic management, student satisfaction, cost-effectiveness and external influences on the quality of the institutions.

## Raamwerk vir institutionele oudits met die oog op gehalteversekering in hoëronderwys in Suid-Afrika

Die doel van hierdie artikel is om ondersoek in te stel na 'n stelsel van institutionele oudits met die oog op gehalteversekering wat die beste geskik sal wees vir die hoëronderwysinstellings in Suid-Afrika. Die fokus val op vier areas: teorie, filosofie, kategorieë en praktyk. Hierdie artikel betoog dat self-evaluering ten grondslag van die oudit portfolio en die institutionele oudits lê (teorie). 'n Benadering word voorgestel waar die fokus op prosedures en meganismes vir gehalte is in plaas van gehalte *per se* (filosofie). Agt kategorieë vir institutionele oudits word voorgestel: die betekenis van gehalte, beleidsimplementering, evalueringsmeganismes, ondertig en leer, strategiese bestuur, studente satisfaksie, koste-effektiwiteit en eksterne invloed op die gehalte van instellings.

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The South African Higher Education Act (1997) introduced a Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) as a non-statutory body within the Council for Higher Education (CHE). The Act requires two types of official quality assurance practices from higher education institutions, namely institutional audits and programme assessments.

This dual mode of quality assurance is common practice in well-developed systems such as exist in the UK, where the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) was responsible for audits and the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC) for programme assessment. On the recommendation of the Dearing Report (1997) these councils have been amalgamated into a new body called the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). Currently, more systems are moving towards dual quality assurance activities. Although in the Dutch system the focus is officially only on programme assessment, some institutions are experimenting with institutional audits. The French CNE has also started experimenting with programme assessment along with to its official institutional audits.

For South African higher education institutions (universities, technikons and colleges) this dual approach (involving both the institution and its programmes) would be something new since in the past there were no statutory requirements for quality assurance at both these levels. Although professional council accreditation and assessment (as in the medical, nursing, chartered accounting, engineering and other professions) is part of higher education quality assurance, universities have only recently (October 1997) commenced a first cycle of institutional audits through the Quality Promotion Unit (QPU), while technikons are already in their second cycle of programme assessments, through Sertec (the Certification Council for Technikon Education).<sup>1</sup> Universities therefore have to begin with official programme assessments and technikons with official institutional audits. Although on their agenda, the official introduction of both these quality assessment activities is therefore

1 During the first cycle the focus was on minimum standards and in the second cycle it is on accreditation and quality assurance (cf Jacobs 1996).

new to these institutions (cf Brink 1997; Jacobs 1997). Quality assurance cannot be ignored by these institutions, since it is part of total quality management. According to Frederiks & De Haan (1997: 2) the evaluation of quality generally has four aims:

- to render of the educational, research and administrative processes of an institution more transparent;
- to validate standards and qualifications obtained by students;
- to fulfil the requirements of accountability to sponsors, consumers and other stakeholders in higher education, and
- to improve the quality of educational, research and administrative processes within higher education.

The key question, therefore, is how universities and technikons should embark on this dual quality assurance system in order to meet the requirements of the Higher Education Act. Due to a lack of space, this paper will not assess the situation at colleges in the higher education area and will focus on only one of the quality assurance components, namely institutional audits. The objective, therefore, is to present a common framework for institutional audits for higher education. The proposal will involve four areas, namely theory, philosophy, categories and practice.

But first it is necessary to analyse what is meant by 'quality'.

## 1. The notion of quality

The definition of 'quality' is indeed an elusive issue. Everybody recognises it but many find it difficult to define, due to its abstract nature (cf Lategan 1997a). In the literature, various descriptions of quality can be found (cf Harvey 1995, QPU Manual 1997). The most popular references to quality are the following:

- *Quality as being of exceptionally high standard*  
This is a very traditional approach, where certain institutions are identified as being of a high standard and other institutions will then compare themselves with these role models.
- *Quality in terms of the concept of fitness for purpose*  
This definition is the most widely used in higher education, either singly or in combination. An institution is required to formulate its mission and goals, and then is evaluated against these.

- *Quality in terms of the quest for zero defect*  
Here a comparison is made with certain preset standards. This approach is employed, for instance, by various professions when they compare the outcomes of higher education programmes with standards set by themselves.
- *Quality in terms of value for money*  
This notion is particularly attractive in the eyes of providers of funding such as governments. Quality can be measured in terms of performance indicators like failure rates and teacher-to-student ratios.
- *Quality in the transformative sense*  
This notion is particularly applicable in the world of higher education, where the student is not regarded as a finished product the day he/she graduates but as a person being transformed. This transformation process moreover continues in his/her productive life long after graduation. The notion of 'value added' is also relevant here in the sense of what value the education process is adding to a person's knowledge, life skills, earning power, and so on.
- *The ISO 9000 concept of quality*  
This is understood in terms of a product which is delivered to customers, and where quality is evaluated in terms of customer satisfaction. This concept has been used particularly by technicians, partly because it provides a good benchmark for the industries which employ their professionally trained graduates. The concept is problematic when applied to universities, however, since 'a product' and 'the customer' are not as easily defined in that context in the world of commerce or industry.

The QPU Manual (1997) argues for reference to a notion of quality instead of a definition of quality. This notion should be built up from the various concepts of quality which are in use within higher education and elsewhere. The QPU Manual (1997) goes on to claim that a clear notion of what is meant by quality is normally shaped by the following four considerations:

- The concept of quality is always influenced by political and economical developments.

- The notion of quality used in audits should be adaptable to suit the circumstances of each and every institution.
- The notion of quality used in audits typically involves a combination of different concepts of quality, with varying emphases.
- This openness and flexibility in the approach to the understanding of quality, however, does not imply that there is uncertainty or a lack of clarity in the approach.

It is therefore clear that the notion of quality agreed on by a particular institution will influence the way in which quality develops in that institution. Without an in-depth understanding of quality, it is extremely difficult to assess the quality mechanisms, structures and procedures in place at a particular institution.

## 2. The theory of institutional audits

Muller (1997) argues that institutional audits have a twofold aim. First, institutions can render themselves accountable in respect of the quality of their educational provision to all stakeholders and interested parties and, secondly, information can be offered to the whole of the higher education spectrum on the practices of individual institutions, thus facilitating a system-wide perspective. The distinctive characteristic of institutional audits is that they aim at the external assurance of adequacy and the success of the internal quality assurance mechanisms which apply to every aspect of the institutional spheres of activity. Quality evaluation at the programme level, on the other hand, aims at the assurance of successful provision of the relevant component and the levels of quality of the products (Jacobs 1997).

The difference between an institutional audit and programme assessment is that, where institutional audits focus mainly on the question of whether adequate quality assurance procedures are in place, assessments give a more in-depth analysis of the state of educational provision within the programme under review, often accompanied by a more or less detailed summative judgement of the quality of educational provision (Frederiks 1997).

The two main foci of any quality assurance activity are public accountability and quality improvement. Brennan (1997) subdivides these two functions into the following five purposes:

- Quality assurance is a mechanism which will stimulate competitiveness.
- Quality assurance imposes a quality check on new institutions.
- Quality assurance assigns institutional status in diversified systems.
- Quality assurance transfers authority from the government to the institution.
- Quality assurance may lead to the achievement of some kind of international comparison.

Regardless of the need to be accountable or see improvement, all quality audits rely on a combination of self-evaluation and peer review. The QPU Manual (1997) considers self-evaluation as the cornerstone of quality assurance, while Lategan (1997c) refers to it as "looking in the mirror". Three approaches to self-evaluation are identified (Hall *et al* 1997: 6):

- Institutions may undertake a periodic review of their systems, irrespective of any involvement with academic audit.
- They may perform a direct analysis of the quality assurance system as part of their long-term preparation for an audit.
- They may do an institutional audit and deal with the actual self-evaluation statement submitted to the quality assurance agency.

The QPU Manual (1997: 8) identifies the formulation of a mission statement and consequent internal and external review, as the main steps in the auditing process. It is often considered that quality exists in a higher education institution to the extent that adequate and appropriate resources are being successfully directed towards the accomplishment of mission-related institutional outcomes (Bergquist 1995: 43). It is therefore important to reflect the requirements of all the stakeholders in the mission, goals and objectives of an institution (Vroeijenstijn 1995: 14-5). This is the best way in which institutions can ensure that their stakeholders take responsibility for and ownership of quality and the assurance thereof.

By identifying its strengths and weaknesses, an institution is able to see itself as it really is. This in itself is a step towards becoming accountable to a range of internal and external authorities. Remedial action in respect of weaknesses will lead to improvement. Brennan *et al* (1995) advise an academic approach instead of a paper-driven, bureaucratic approach to quality (the administrative approach). Self-evaluation is concerned with whether educational objectives are being achieved and whether current practice can be improved upon. As such it is a process which is intrinsic to academic work.

The significance of the internal review of the self-evaluation report (also called an audit portfolio) is that it involves the staff of an institution. This results in their taking ownership of the self-evaluation process and of its findings and recommendations. It also promotes an awareness of quality and acknowledges that the achievement of quality is not a once-off exercise but a continuous process. Self-evaluation is not without reward. Van Vught (quoted in the QPU Manual 1997: 9) says:

A good self-evaluation makes clear what role quality plays within the university and how quality is cared for. This can be very helpful in the development of the university as an institution.

Bearing in mind the importance of self-evaluation, the identification by Kells *et al* (1991) of the following essential critical factors for self-evaluation is illuminating:

- internal motivation in the institution;
- commitment to involvement by management at all levels;
- consideration of the unique character of each institution;
- accurate demarcation of the procedure, with a clear beginning and a clear ending;
- involvement of staff at all levels in the process, and
- effective leadership.

### 3. A philosophy of institutional auditing

In developing a philosophy for institutional audits for South African higher education institutions, the following structures are proposed:

- Taking the diversity (of language, development, infrastructure, culture, staff and student bodies, and so on) of South African

higher education institutions into account, it would be almost impossible to audit all these institutions at the same level, since one cannot compare (and rank according to abilities) apples and pears. Furthermore, some of these institutions are of a very high quality while other institutions lack quality.<sup>2</sup> The best way of handling this situation is to embark on the promotion and improvement of quality as reflected in a management audit (which asks what procedures exist to promote quality) rather than doing a performance audit (which assumes that everything is already in place). The QPU chose the approach of promotion and not control. An atmosphere of control or inspection should be avoided. After all, the rationale for rejecting the notion of 'quality as control' is that the term quality control intrinsically implies punitive measures and that no further improvement is needed once a required minimum standard has been achieved. Ensuring that the accreditation of quality is formative in nature and leads to improvement, rather than merely giving account, is the crux of the matter. This implies an incomplete process in which there is always room for the improvement of quality (cf Vroeijenstijn 1990). This quality improvement approach therefore assists institutions in developing their quality.

- Institutions are advised to opt for an approach to quality based on fitness for the notions of purpose. The underlying issue here is whether the institutions are doing the right things (fitness *of* purpose) and whether they are doing things right (fitness *for* purpose). In other words whether they are achieving the institutional objectives (fitness for purpose) and whether the right objectives have been chosen (fitness of purpose). This approach provides institutions with an opportunity to establish their own notion of quality and to adopt this notion in their self-evaluation processes.
- Quality improvement should be regarded as an ongoing process and not a once-off exercise. Therefore the focus should be more on the continuous availability of mechanisms, structures and proce-

2 Quality, of course, is not synonymous with standards.



dures for quality improvement than on aiming for a completed product.

- The quality improvement approach will surely result in a collegial model for quality instead of the generally rejected inspectorate model where the emphasis is on 'them' (the institutions) and 'us' (the auditors). The advantage of the collegial model is that the two parties are seen as partners, assisting each other in reaching a common goal. In the inspectorate model the emphasis is more on what has been done than on assisting institutions to reach the goals set out in their mission and vision statements.

Given these approaches, the Quality Promotion Unit (QPU) of the South African Universities' Vice-Chancellors' Association (SAUVCA) (previously the Committee of University Principals) was founded in 1995 with three distinct objectives:

- to assist higher education institutions in establishing internal quality assurance systems by means of self-evaluation;
- to undertake external quality audits, initially with a view to improvement and later for accountability purposes, and
- to prepare the system for future programme assessments for the purposes of accreditation (QPU Manual 1997).

A major objective of an institutional audit is to audit the quality of the management process, rather than quality *per se*. One may refer to this as a Strategic Quality Management (SQM) process. A typical question relating to quality *per se* would be: What are your pass rates? During an induction workshop of the QPU the following examples of SQM questions were given: Do you have records of your pass rates? Do you make use of these records in your planning? Have you formed an opinion with regard to your pass rates?

In addition to the main focus on procedures, structures and mechanisms for quality, auditors should also try to achieve the following:

- The identification and investigation of issues of national and institutional concern or interest in order to inform national and institutional planning and policy-making for quality assurance.
- The identification and codification of good practice in quality management in higher education.

## Lategan/Frameworks for institutional audits

- The creation and support of developments which inform and challenge current practice and stimulate change where necessary.

An institutional audit should not only be to the advantage of a particular institution, but should also contribute towards the establishing of a culture for quality audits. In this regard the following tasks could be considered by the quality assurance agency:

- Liaison and collaborative work with the quality assurance network agencies and professional bodies in quality assurance processes at the levels of both institutional audit and programme accreditation.
- Analysing and reporting on the meetings, seminars and workshops organised by the quality assurance agencies.
- Designing, managing and carrying out development projects on quality assurance at higher education institutions, eg, exploring the issues faced by academics at programme/ department/faculty levels in relation to quality management and assurance; developing practical ways for sharing good practice in this area, and identifying ways in which academic managers at institutions may be given better support in managing quality.
- Producing guidelines and codes of practice to assist in the maintenance and development of quality and standards as well as of self-evaluation processes at all levels of the institution (institutional, programme, faculty and departmental).

### 4. Categories for institutional audits

The following eight categories are suggested for an audit trail. The applicability of a category is identified in the ensuing discussion.

#### 4.1 The notion of quality

An institution's understanding of higher education influences its view of quality. Nevertheless, although quality should be understood in terms of the aim, mission and vision of an institution, this does not exclude a (single) set of national criteria for quality assurance. The uniqueness of each institution and programme should be emphasised. One can therefore state that no review, whether internal or external, can be successful if the notion of quality is not identified.

Taking the various notions of quality into account (cf section 1), it is important to realise that institutions' perceptions of quality can differ.

Regardless of the choice of notion, the question of whether the institution is doing things right (the definition of fitness for purpose) will tend to recur. An objective review is imperative, because the assessment of fitness for purpose is susceptible to subjective internal institutional judgement, without an external review of the nature of the purposes of an institution. To balance this approach, one therefore needs to add the notion of fitness of purpose. Fitness for purpose, as has been indicated, asks whether existing objectives are achieved, while asks fitness of purpose whether the right objectives have been chosen. The notion of fitness for purpose has to do with institutional objectives, while the notion of fitness of purpose very often has to do with national objectives and policy requirements.

With regard to the notion of quality it is important to note that the jargon spoken during such audits can also be misleading. People with a higher education background might use the 'correct' jargon, as opposed to academics who might not be acquainted with the jargon used in the discourse of quality. Consequently, the answers given by such academics may not make as much of an impression on the auditors as they would have if they had been phrased in the appropriate jargon. Auditors should be on the lookout for this and try to decode the language used by various types of interviewees. This may be illustrated by the case of a catering service which provided its evidence by saying that it regularly surveys the satisfaction of the customers with its product, but was not able to link this to quality. Here, an understanding of quality as value for money or quality in terms of ISO 9000 (ie, services-orientated) would have been more than sufficient to typify the service's contribution towards quality. The same could be said about a protection services unit which claimed that it has minimised criminality on its campus. The staff of the unit believed that it provided quality services, but its lack of understanding of quality as implying zero defect or quality as relating to customer satisfaction prevented the unit from placing itself on the quality map.

## 4.2 Policy implementation

No quality exercise (be it a self-evaluation report, an audit trail, or any other example) can succeed unless it takes into account the latest policy developments regarding quality (in particular) and higher education policies (in general). The impression is very often created that institutions participate in the quality movement simply because other institutions are doing so. Here the idea of competition and the fear of ranking might be motivating factors. Institutions do take policy developments into account, but it can not be clearly demonstrated that quality initiatives on campuses are always in line with national policy developments. For example, during a particular audit, nothing was reported on the impetus or progress of three-year rolling plans, programme assessment, cost units, profit units, etc. Despite the fact that institutions understand the need for transformation as well as the impact that massification will have on them, they still lack experience in terms of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the South African Qualifications Authorities Act (SAQA) and its related bodies. This is proof that not all institutions are ready for institutional audits and programme assessment by an official quality assurance agency such as the Higher Education Act prescribes.

## 4.3 Evaluation mechanisms

The need for improvement from the point of view of students could require a regular audit of the institutional strategic quality management plan. Each audit should be regarded as unique in that the institution is evaluated in relation to its interpretation of the notion of quality and specifically in relation to its stated mission, goals and objectives. Any comparisons should be made with the institution's own present standards rather than externally determined standards. The audit visit should be seen as a peer evaluation rather than an inspection and the audit report should focus on accountability and improvement. The panel should evaluate the quality assurance systems and procedures in place rather than judging the quality of the product.

An appropriate framework for an audit report could consist of three categories:

- *The objective(s) of the audit*

Unless the objective(s) of the audit are clearly identified, interviewees find it extremely difficult to prepare appropriate documents and to voice their views during the audit. Often interviewees will inform the audit panel of what they are doing without being able to reflect on the influence of their actions on the quality of the institution. Thus quality is often equated with quantitative information instead of with reflections on impact, development, change, and so forth.

- *The institution in context*

As has already been argued, South African higher education institutions differ in their nature, resources and performance. Each institution should therefore be evaluated in its particular context. Unless this assumption is honoured, the ideal of quality as improvement and the focus on mechanisms, structures and procedures for quality, rather than quality products, are almost impossible to achieve.

- *The quality management system of the institution*

In this section three important distinctions should be made, namely between informal quality structures and mechanisms, formal quality structures and mechanisms, and the institution's own approach to quality.

Auditors very often make the mistake of ignoring the informal quality structures of an institution. Within the learning community, extra-curricular activities make an enormous contribution towards the quality (as both product and process) of an institution. Examples here are residences cafeterias, study groups, study venues, senior students advising first-year students, and so on. This aspect of quality should not be ignored in an institutional audit.

Typical examples of formal quality structures and mechanisms are communication, governance, teaching, learning, research, community service, staff, students, and so on. Examples of an institution's approach to quality are a commitment to improvement; the

identification of functions, areas and issues; elements of good practice in the institution, and so forth.

#### 4.4 Academic development, teaching and learning

The paradigm shift from teaching to learning can not be isolated from the ongoing commitment of institutions to the academic development of students. Currently numerous new modes of delivery such as resource-based learning, video tutorials, telematic instruction, and so on are being introduced. Many of these new modes will undoubtedly assist students in becoming active partners in learning both inside and outside the classroom.

Although these new modes of delivery can contribute towards the success rates of students, the necessary mechanisms and procedures to ensure the quality of these new modes and that they do, in fact, contribute towards the quality of student learning are not always available.

#### 4.5 Institutional strategic management

The plea that institutions (especially universities) should abandon their ivory tower image requires them not only to pay more attention to the needs of the student body and the community, but also to be much more responsive towards the national policy environment. All strategic management should be directed towards meeting these needs.

Four major issues in institutional strategic management, namely planning, governance, funding and access are known to exert a major influence on quality and its assurance. Factors both internal and external to the higher education institutions affect these issues which, in turn, influence the quality of the institutions. External factors, in particular, need to be taken into account. One can predict that the issue of quality will become increasingly important as the nature and purpose of higher education shift to reflect the demands of a rapidly changing world economy. The issue becomes even more complex when one takes into account that the student body of higher education institutions in South Africa is changing from a mono-cultural to a multicultural one. This does not only exert pressure on

the access and admissions policies institutions but also raises questions about the standard of qualifications offered.

#### 4.6 Student satisfaction

Students are, among others, important clients of higher education institutions. Their satisfaction — usually determined by issues ranging from the quality of the teaching or learning, curricula and, research, to employment opportunities — reflects on the institution's mechanisms, structures and procedures for quality. After all, students should be quality products of any higher education institution. It could therefore be argued that the satisfaction of students is an important performance indicator in a quality audit.

#### 4.7 Cost-effectiveness and financial satisfaction

The financial implications of quality may be assessed from two viewpoints. The first is that quality should not cost 'extra' because it should be part of the normal activities of an institution, which are teaching, learning and community service. Appropriate and effective delivery of teaching, learning and community service implies quality and good practice. Quality is therefore not an add-on activity and therefore should not have additional financial implications.

The second viewpoint takes the opposite line. Supporters of this viewpoint will argue that, due to the diversity of institutions, resulting in various degrees of quality, additional mechanisms, structures and procedures need to be introduced to ensure quality in the core activities of institutions. These additional activities inevitably have financial implications which can not always be afforded by institutions due to other important commitments.

Since the first viewpoint should be the principle but the second viewpoint is generally the practice, institutional audits should also look into the cost of mechanisms, structures and procedures and judge whether they are cost-effective and sufficient to promote a learning society of high quality.

#### 4.8 External influences on institutional performances

Many external influences on the quality of an institution may be enumerated (cf Lategan 1997a; 1998). In this paper only one external influence will be discussed. Institutions are often blamed for driving their programmes at a purely pragmatic level. This results in a product of quality which is, however, not always desirable from the point of view of academic standards. The view is very often expressed that the market prescribes to the institutions of higher learning what kind of programmes should be offered and what kind of graduate or diplomate should be prepared (read 'produced' or 'trained') for the job market. This situation is open to criticism. For the market to prescribe to a university what kind of student it should produce is at odds with the nature of university training, which should be directed towards theoretical disclosure. University training should address the social, cultural and economic needs of its environment without surrendering its primary teaching goals, academic expertise and intellectual creativity to the objective of training student in skills for performing specific tasks and applying algorithmic problem-solving techniques. Technikon, however, will find this situation much more acceptable. Of its very nature, technikon education is directed towards market-related training. Instruction is structured in such a way as to afford students as much insight as possible into the of occupation concerned.

On the other hand, one can also appreciate the impact of the job market on the quality of higher education. For too long too many institutions have had the image of an ivory tower. Such institutions educate students only for unemployment. In this regard one should also appreciate the role played by professional bodies in assessing professional programmes, which also reflect the quality of an institution.

#### 5. Operational guidelines for institutional audits in South African higher education

I would like to suggest a number of operational guidelines for institutional audits. These guidelines are based on three audits reviewed by an audit team (reported in Lategan 1997b; Lategan



1997c). These guidelines were also discussed at various stakeholders' meetings and revised accordingly. The research methodology employed here is action research as described by Zuber-Skerrit (1991). According to her explanation, one revises a concept after it has been discussed by participatory groups and also reconsiders the applicability of the concept to a particular situation. In addition to her model, the notion of participatory research has been added here. By participatory research Muller (1996: 111) means a style of research that sets itself sharply against other forms of research. He therefore advocates a "participatory policy research", arguing that "participatory" is distinct from "representative". The core of this research paradigm is a research process and a resulting theory, both of which are expressions and elaborations of progressive popular feelings rather than abstract frameworks imposed by intellectuals on the complexity of lived experience.

The suggested guidelines are:

- 5.1 In line with the main purpose of the Unit for Quality Promotion (UQP), the most important task of the UQP and the audit team (especially the chairperson) should be to assist a university in preparing the best possible audit portfolio as derived from its self-evaluation system.
- 5.2 Another important point of departure is that an audit is aimed at evaluating the mechanisms, structures and procedures employed in order to ensure quality at an institution and not the quality *per se* of the various areas of the institution's functioning.
- 5.3 It is crucial to select the chairperson and the audit panel as early as possible in order to implement 5.1 and to provide sufficient time for them to scrutinise the manual of the quality assurance agency as well as other relevant literature in preparation for the audit visit.
- 5.4 It is important that the members of the audit panel should be well acquainted with the documents submitted for the institutional audit as well as with the broader policy framework for quality assurance in South Africa. Here personal viewpoints should, as far as possible, be avoided. Auditors should be careful not to advocate their own paradigm (or definition of

## Lategan/Frameworks for institutional audits

quality) without critically analysing the quality assurance paradigms discussed in the manual for quality assurance and the views on quality expressed by the particular institution.

- 5.5 The panel members should have a professional approach to the audit. Very often an informal manner can contribute towards the creation of a 'buddy system' which will not facilitate the professional approach needed in quality assurance.
- 5.6 During the audit the audit portfolio should receive preference as the main discussion document. The audit panel has to judge how far the guidelines of the quality assurance unit can be adhered to. Additional available documentation can be helpful, but can equally well lead to vague disorderly commentary and discussion, thus wasting valuable time and opportunities.
- 5.7 Quality audits should support institutions in their strategic planning initiatives as well as in their endeavours to affirm diversity within the higher education spectrum.
- 5.8 Institutions should be evaluated on their present state of quality assurance and not on what they plan to be, even in the near future. In this respect it is also important to make a distinction between short- and long-term planning.
- 5.9 The specific quality assurance issues that are discussed during an audit should, as far as possible, be evaluated within the broader institutional context, which implies a holistic approach.
- 5.10 In determining their questioning procedures, the audit panel should pay careful attention to their choice of introductory questions, as well as to the follow-up questions which are important from the point of view of an audit trail.
- 5.11 The time factor should not be ignored. Panel members should abide by the time allocated per interview. They should judge the situation carefully and strike a balance among the major issues. The interviewees from a particular institution should provide answers to questions and be given the opportunity to provide additional information to support their case. But the panel should ensure that the information provided is not so overwhelming that it dominates the discussion or strays from the point. They should be particularly alert to extensive theo-

rising and any information introduced in order to avoid the specific quality assurance issue under discussion.

- 5.12 The groups interviewed by the auditors should not be larger than six to eight people, since it is very difficult to interview a large group of people. Here the danger of window-dressing is also a reality. Groups should consist of people who can make a contribution to the discussion and not simply represent as many interests as possible.
- 5.13 The students interviewed by the auditors should preferably not all be members of the Student Representative Council (SRC), due to the fact that these students might have all the information and therefore provide all the 'correct' answers. What is needed, rather, is that students from all walks of student life should air their views on quality in, among other things, teaching and learning; support services; academic development; course design and curriculum development, and so on. It is important to obtain a cross-section of the views of all students in order to determine whether universities are really in a position to provide their students (read 'customers') with a quality education.
- 5.14 It is not in the interests of an audit process for the auditors to interview the same person or people over and over again in different capacities.
- 5.15 The panel should be aware that typical quality assurance terminology may not be familiar to interviewees and may need clarification.
- 5.16 The manual used for the institutional audits should be reviewed regularly. Care should be taken to make the manual user-friendly (eg, in terms of repetition of ideas, layout, chapters, lack of appendices, etc). The manual should also be designed in such a manner that each and every South African higher education institution, regardless of its stage of development and readiness in terms of quality assurance, can use it effectively.
- 5.17 The summative evaluative discussion of the audit panel and the possible meeting with the Vice-Chancellor of the institution and/or his/her representatives must be carefully planned, as

these can create unnecessary conflict, expectations, or misunderstandings which might be detrimental to instead of supportive of the process.

- 5.18 Reports should be presented as promptly as possible. For many obvious reasons, such reports should be drafted and finalised no later than one month after the audit.

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