The Impact of Audit Quality Concerns on Institutional Culture(s)

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Introduction

The need to offer high quality programmes has become something of a survival challenge for many universities both nationally and internationally. In most countries there are regulatory mechanisms and statutory bodies to assure such quality of provision by universities and other higher education institutions. In spite of the self-interest and the benefits thereof, some universities continue to struggle with establishing an institutional culture that puts a premium on quality teaching and learning. The purpose of the paper is to investigate how concerns with quality (raised through Institutional Audit processes) in South African universities have helped to (re)shape institutional cultures especially with respect to teaching and learning.
Purpose of this paper

The paper focuses on the following research questions:

• How have quality concerns, raised internally and externally by established quality statutory structures, shaped shifts in institutional cultures?

• To what extent are these shifts a reflection of the purpose of the audit/review processes?

• How have these concerns addressed structural inequalities in the system?

(Paper is still work in progress)
Legislative and Policy Frameworks

1. 1997 White Paper
2. Higher Education Quality Committee’s QA Approach:
   a. National Programme Reviews
   b. Programme Accreditation
   c. Institutional Audits
Quality Assurance in SA (Historical Context)

• Institutional Autonomy
• Academic Freedom
  Versus
• Public Funding
• Accountability
• National Development Priorities/Goal
In South Africa, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) is responsible for quality assurance and promotion in higher education. Further, there are various professional bodies tasked with the statutory mandate of setting, maintaining and enforcing standards for various academic programmes. This research draws its data from the CHE Institutional Audit of a University of Technology in SA; the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP), Professional Bodies’ and Institutional Quality Review processes. The research focuses on the recommendations that deal directly with teaching and learning concerns raised through these processes. These concerns raised through national and institutional processes will be comprehensively analysed to determine their impact on institutional culture(s) and how these impact or have impacted institutional efficiency, (CHE, 2014).
Research methodology

Qualitative research methods were used to collect and analyse data on perspectives regarding the relations between quality concerns and institutional structures and practices at a South African University. Findings from the analysis of the Higher Education Quality Committee’s (HEQC) Audits, the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP), Professional Bodies’ Audits and Internal Programme Reviews on quality issues where these relate to teaching and learning are presented.
Quality has come a long way in the global context. Harvey and Williamson (2010) wrote an incisive review in the Quality in Higher Education Journal to reflect on the history and occurrence of quality in global higher education. The purpose of the review was to reflect on the origins of quality in higher education, its development and influences on the sector. The review spans the globe in significant ways and covers almost all the world research published in the journal since its inception.

It all began with the laborious attempts to define quality, the role of external quality assurance processes and understanding improvement and accountability. The review also focuses on the role and purpose of external audits and accreditation processes. It then deftly analyses the quality assurance systems across the globe and their impact on the bigger picture. In Harvey and Williamson’s view “For quality to become part of the lived experience of all stakeholders in higher education, it needs to become a fundamental part of what is done in the sector. A genuine culture of quality is necessary. However, there is always a tension between quality as ritual and quality as it is owned by its stakeholders”.
SA QA in context....

• **Institutional Audits**: The first period of quality assurance in South Africa spans the period between 2004 -2011. During this period, systems, policies and structures were established to promote, assure and manage quality in the higher education sector.

• **Quality Enhancement Project (QEP)**: The focus of the QEP is on undergraduate teaching and learning. Project is inductive and iterative.

• Essentially, the QEP is focussed on Student Success.
Institutional Audit Concerns

Recommendations:

1. The HEQC recommends that the University ensures that the Senate fulfils its mandate as the highest academic structure of the University.

2. The HEQC recommends that the University ensure the development of academic policies in areas where they do not exist, and there is consistent implementation and monitoring of existing academic policies and processes to maintain academic standards.

3. The HEQC recommends that the University ensure the proper functioning of the University through implementing measures to ensure that staff and institutional structures are held accountable for decisions and actions they take in respect to the academic project. In particular, this refers to academic staff attending to their lecturing duties.
Audit Concerns

4. The HEQC recommends that The University develop shared understandings of ‘quality’ among staff & establish monitoring mechanisms to ensure that the quality system is consistently implemented across the University.

5. The HEQC recommends that The University take steps to provide academic leaders with training & mentoring opportunities that will enhance their leadership skills relevant to the University-of-technology context.

6. The HEQC recommends that The University monitor the effective functioning of programme advisory boards in all faculties by drawing on a range of key employers to provide information on the required skills & training requirements needed by graduates.
Audit Concerns

7. The HEQC recommends that The University engage in an institutional debate on the necessary scholarship of teaching & learning beyond the provision of a supportive teaching & learning environment, consider the effectiveness of its pedagogical approaches in educating students from disadvantaged backgrounds, & identify graduate attributes & ways for students to attain them.

8. The HEQC recommends that The University review its prioritisation of infrastructure needs to match its teaching & learning focus, including the campus & residential environments that support educational quality.

9. The HEQC recommends that The University develop & implement strategies & procedures to deal with high teaching loads which includes the appointment of qualified, capable & accountable academic staff.
What next?

1. Improvement Plans
2. Progress Reports
3. Status Quo
4. Any Institutional Culture Shift?
Why focus on teaching concerns?

1. QEP Focus areas:
   • Enhancing university teachers
   • Enhancing student support
   • Enhancing the learning environment
   • Enhancing programme enrolment

The central concern of the QEP is Student Success
Importance of quality teaching

I am bringing up these points here to justify my focus on teaching and learning concerns. As far as the audit concerns are concerned they have had major impact on institutional culture as far as the valuing of teaching is concerned, (the research is ongoing).

We come from a culture that values research more than it values teaching. The truth of the matter is that student success depends more on quality teaching than anything else.
Quality teaching

“Not only because good teachers make one’s student days challenging, motivating and rewarding; but because quality higher education teaching is absolutely crucial in enabling our higher education institutions to produce the critically-thinking, creative, adaptable graduates who will shape our future. And yet, while it should be the centre of gravity of higher education, the quality of teaching in our universities and colleges is often overlooked and undervalued”. (Androulla VaSSiliou European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism, Youth and Sport, 2013)
Emerging themes from data

1. Governance
2. **Highlights importance of university teaching**
3. Lingering structural inequalities
4. Professional Development
5. Policy development, implementation and monitoring
6. Teaching loads
7. Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
8. Accountability
9. Shared understanding of quality assurance in HE
Culture shift (From observations)

- Professionalization of teaching
- Institutionalisation of SoTL
- Institutionalisation of professional development
- Increased funding for teaching development
- Teaching and Learning Development Centre
Indicators of teaching improvement

1. Scholarly conversations on teaching
2. Annual Teaching and Learning Colloquium
3. Increased publications on teaching and learning
4. Enrolment of staff in formal teacher training programmes
5. Recognition of teaching excellence
6. Increased funding of teaching and learning projects
7. Participation in national projects advancing scholarly teaching and SoTL
8. Promotion of good, quality teaching
National Interventions

1. Quality Enhancement Project
2. Teaching Development Grant
3. National Recognition of Teaching Excellence
4. University Teaching Fellows
5. Possible Development of National Framework on quality university teaching