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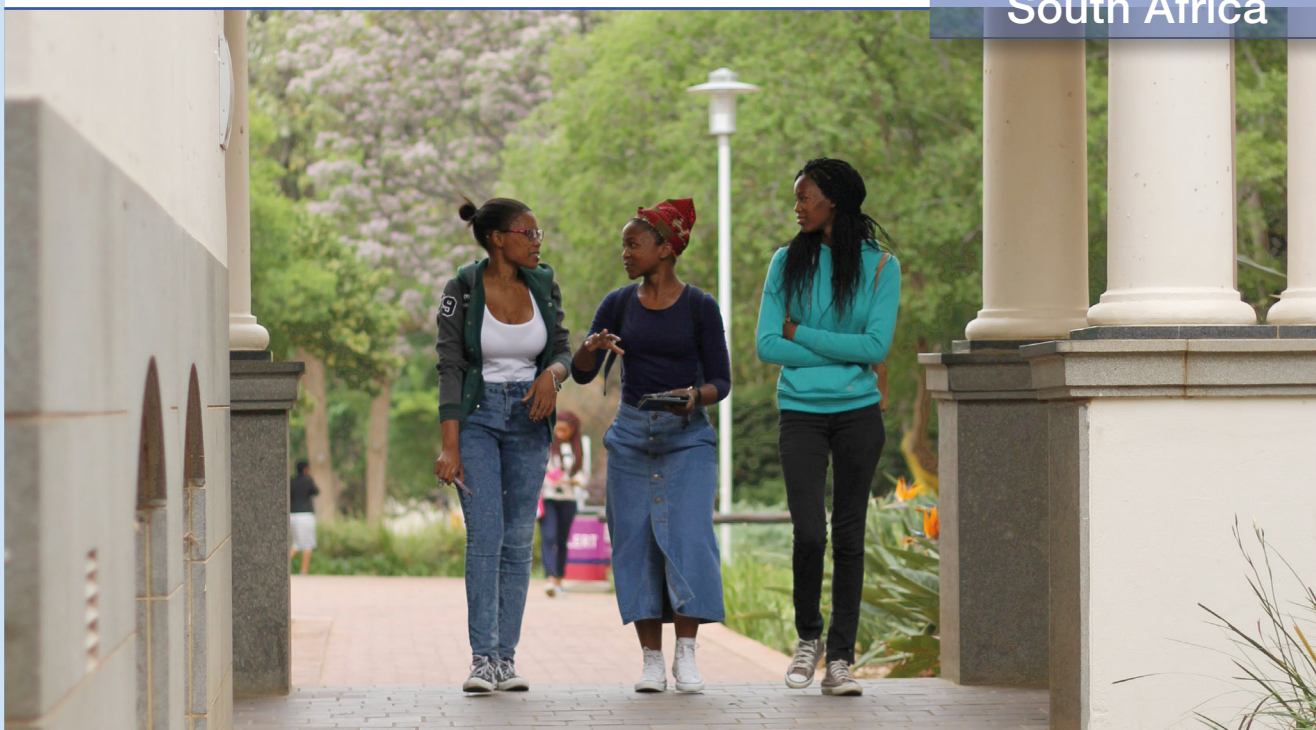
International Institute
for Educational Planning

Case Study

Integrating Internal Quality Assurance at a Time of Transformation University of the Free State, South Africa

Lis Lange and
Lise Kriel

South Africa



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Published by:
International Institute for Educational Planning
7–9 rue Eugène Delacroix, 75116 Paris, France
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www.iiep.unesco.org

Cover photo: © Eugene Seegers for the University of the Free State
iiep/web/doc/2016/07

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Contents

List of figures and tables	4
Acknowledgements	5
Abbreviations	6
Introduction	7
1. South Africa's public higher education system	9
1.1 South African public higher education on the eve of democracy	9
1.2 Undoing the apartheid legacy: Frameworks and tools	10
1.3 External quality assurance in South Africa: 2001–2014	13
2. About the UFS	19
2.1 History	19
2.2 UFS in context	19
2.3 Vision, mission, and strategy	20
2.4 UFS academic programme offer	21
2.5 The UFS student body	23
2.6 UFS staff profile	23
3. The UFS internal quality assurance system	28
3.1 Development of IQA	28
3.2 IQA structure	30
3.3 IQA policies and documents	31
3.4 Tools of IQA	32
4. Findings of the empirical study	36
4.1 Research methodology	36
4.2 Respondent statistics	37
4.3 Awareness and involvement	43
4.4 The effects of the internal quality assurance system	45
4.5 Conditioning factors	49
4.6 Overall effectiveness of the IQA system	51
5. Conclusion	53
5.1 Summary	53
5.2 Lessons learned from the case study	54
Appendix: Survey results	56
Bibliography	62

List of figures and tables

Figures

Figure 2.1	UFS Strategic Plan 2015 to 2020	22
Figure 3.1	Organigram of the Planning Unit, 2006	29
Figure 3.2	Organigram of the Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning, 2011	29
Figure 3.3	Organigram of the Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning, 2015	30
Figure 4.1	Most important attributes of quality according to staff and students	44

Tables

Table 1.1	Higher Education Quality Committee criteria for institutional audits	16
Table 2.1	UFS students (headcounts) by gender and race, 2008 and 2014	24
Table 2.2	UFS students (headcount enrolments) by faculty and qualification level, 2008 and 2014	24
Table 2.3	UFS staff members (headcounts) by faculty, 2008 and 2014	26
Table 2.4	UFS staff members (headcounts) by gender and race, 2008 and 2014	27
Table 3.1	Instruments, processes, and structures of internal quality assurance at the UFS	35
Table 4.1	Survey sample – academic staff by disciplinary field	37
Table 4.2	Survey sample – academic staff by leadership position	38
Table 4.3	Survey sample – academic staff by academic position/rank	38
Table 4.4	Survey sample – academic staff by length of service (years working at the UFS)	39
Table 4.5	Survey sample – academic staff by highest educational qualification	39
Table 4.6	Survey sample – administrative staff by administrative field	40
Table 4.7	Survey sample – administrative staff by leadership position	41
Table 4.8	Survey sample – administrative staff by administrative position/rank	41
Table 4.9	Survey sample – administrative staff by length of service (years working at the UFS)	42
Table 4.10	Survey sample – administrative staff by highest educational qualification	42
Table 4.11	Interview participants	43
Table A.1	Awareness of institutional documents specifically for IQA	56
Table A.2	Involvement, feedback, and use of IQA instruments and procedures (averages)	57
Table A.3	Effects on teaching and learning, employability, and administrative processes (averages)	58
Table A.4	Internal conditioning factors – importance and presence (averages)	59
Table A.5	Perceptions of IQA – Overall purpose of IQA (percentage of respondents)	59
Table A.6	Perceptions of IQA – Workload versus benefits of IQA (percentage of respondents)	60
Table A.7	Perceptions of IQA – Improved effectiveness, management decisions and evidence base (percentage of respondents)	61

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to express their sincere gratitude to all the students and staff members at the University of the Free State who gave of their time to participate in the collection of data for this monograph.

Lis Lange and Lise Kriel

This case study was edited by Michaela Martin (Programme Specialist, IIEP) and Jihyun Lee (Consultant, IIEP).

Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
AP	admission points
APDC	Academic Planning and Development Committee of Senate
AsgiSA	Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative – South Africa
BMEL	business and management, economics, and law
CHE	Council on Higher Education South Africa
CHET	Centre for Higher Education Transformation
CTL	Centre for Teaching and Learning
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DIRAP	Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning
EMS	economic and management sciences
EQA	external quality assurance
FNS	formal and natural sciences
FSGDS	Free State Growth and Development Strategy
FTE	full-time equivalent
HEIs	higher education institutions
HEMIS	higher education management information system
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
HSS	humanities and social sciences
IAC	Institutional Audits Committee
IQA	internal quality assurance
JIPSA	Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition
LHS	life and health sciences
NAS	natural and agricultural sciences
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PQM	programmes and qualifications mix
PRENG	Process Re-engineering Project
RPL	recognition of prior learning
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SAPSE	South African post-secondary education
SET	science, engineering, and technology
UFS	University of the Free State
WP	Education White Paper 3: A programme for the transformation of higher education

Introduction

Quality assurance mechanisms have been introduced into many higher education systems since the early 1980s, beginning in industrialized countries and then moving into the developing world as higher education policy became increasingly globalized (Singh and Lange, 2007). One major consequence of the creation of external quality assurance (EQA) bodies has been the introduction of internal quality assurance (IQA) processes at institutional level. Both EQA and IQA can be regarded as steering instruments, with the optimum balance between necessary accountability and the autonomy of individual higher education institutions (HEIs) still to be found.

In South Africa, following the collapse of apartheid EQA was one of the steering instruments used by the new democratic government to bring about the transformation and integration of the higher education sector. A national system of quality assurance was launched in 2001 and implemented in 2004. South Africa's HEIs responded in different ways to the requirements of EQA, depending on their expectations, histories, and resources. The University of the Free State (UFS), the focus of this study, embraced EQA and its consequences fairly early, and has used it as a tool for internal transformation.

UFS was a traditional Afrikaans-speaking university until 1994 when it adopted a system of dual-medium English and Afrikaans institution. Having previously been open only to whites, the university admitted its first black students in the early 1990s, becoming a majority black university by the end of the decade. As part of a national merger policy, two historically black universities were integrated into the university, creating two new campuses in 2003 and 2004. Today, UFS is a comprehensive university¹ with three major campuses across which some 31,000 students were enrolled in 2014. Most of its academic courses are in professional subjects. Its strategic objectives are geared equally to the enhancement of academic quality and to the increase of equity and diversity at the university for both students and staff.

IQA has evolved at UFS as part of the university's own transformation process. As early as the late 1980s, initial steps were being taken to develop self-evaluation at the university in line with requirements for strategic planning and institutional development. Later, IQA evolved as a response to national EQA requirements and led to the creation of a dedicated structure and policy at the university, while faculties continued to develop their own IQA processes independent of the institutional approach. Since 2014, the university has developed an integrative institutional approach to quality which promotes the generation of knowledge for internal improvement purposes. Central to this approach is a shared understanding of the strategic, pedagogic, and political importance of knowledge of and for transformation. This knowledge is expected to feed into the improvement of the core elements of teaching and learning. As a consequence, IQA at UFS has been integrated into academic planning, rather than forming a stand-alone function.

This case study of internal quality assurance at UFS was conducted within the framework of an international research project conducted by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP). The project focused on institutional IQA policies, structures, processes, and instruments and on how these are perceived and used by different stakeholders in higher education institutions. The potential of IQA to improve graduate employability through the establishment of linkages between academic programmes and the labour market was another important consideration. The overall objective of the project was to provide evidence-based policy advice to higher education leaders on innovative and cost-effective solutions for IQA systems in universities. The aim of this case

1. See *Section 1.1* for an explanation of the types of South African HEI.

study is, therefore, first, to describe the IQA system at UFS, with specific reference to IQA structures, processes, and instruments. Second, the study aims to determine levels of staff awareness of and involvement in the university's IQA instruments and processes. The effects of these instruments and processes are also investigated in terms of teaching and learning, graduate employability, and management. Finally, the study identifies the external and internal conditioning factors that influence the effectiveness of the IQA system at UFS.

The case study aims to examine the perceptions of different stakeholders with regard to these questions. The stakeholders included academic and administrative staff, students, and personnel in leadership positions at the university. The perceptions of academic and administrative staff were explored using two online survey questionnaires. Individual interviews were conducted with senior academic personnel in leadership positions and focus group discussions were held with student representatives. Data from these different sources were then triangulated to generate information about the different levels of awareness and understanding of UFS's IQA system. More importantly, stakeholders' perceptions provided insight as to the extent to which this awareness and understanding is internalized at different organizational levels, from senior management to support services located in academic departments. Among other things, this highlighted the critical importance of communication in the effective institutionalization of an IQA system. Additionally, research literature on South African higher education and institutional documents at UFS were examined to provide the national and institutional contexts.

The case study is organised in five chapters. Following this short introduction, *Chapter 1* describes the South African public higher education system and the process of EQA development within this system. *Chapter 2* provides some institutional context, surveying UFS's history, current strategic orientation, academic programme offerings, and student and staff profiles. The development of IQA at UFS, from the late 1980s to the present day, is reviewed in *Chapter 3*. This chapter provides the backdrop against which the original research data are interpreted. *Chapter 4* presents the findings of the empirical study. It consists of an overview of the data collection methods and the demographic profile of participants, followed by a discussion of the research results. The discussion is organized around the following themes: (i) awareness of and involvement in IQA instruments and processes; (ii) their effects on teaching and learning, graduate employability, and managerial effectiveness; (iii) internal and external conditioning factors of the university's IQA system; and (iv) the overall effectiveness of the system. The case study concludes, in *Chapter 5*, with a macro- and micro-level analysis of the research findings and their implications for other HEIs, within and beyond the national context.

1. South Africa's public higher education system

This chapter describes South Africa's higher education landscape on the eve of 1994, followed by an account of the next 20 years of development, focusing on policy, the instruments or tools designed to implement policy, and the governance structures responsible for policy implementation at system level. The nature, purpose, and organization of EQA in South Africa is examined, from its introduction in 2001 to the present day. The chapter ends with a reflection on the effects of EQA on IQA at system level.

1.1 South African public higher education on the eve of democracy

At the time of the country's first democratic elections in 1994, South Africa's public higher education system comprised 36 higher education institutions (HEIs). Their categorizations, funding systems, and relationships to the state had been determined by the apartheid regime (Bunting, 2004c). The 1983 constitution introduced the notion of 'own affairs' and allowed the 'Coloured' and Indian populations to assume responsibility for the education of 'their own', via the House of Representatives and the House of Delegates, respectively. White people's education was overseen by the House of Assembly. This 'division of labour' recognized education as a domain in which different races and cultures had a right to some level of self-determination. Nevertheless, the apartheid regime continued to regard the education of black people² as a matter that concerned society more generally. African education was controlled by the national Department of Education and Training. This politico-administrative institution continued the work initiated by the 1959 Extension of University Education Act, which designated each HEI the preserve of a particular racial/ethnic/linguistic group. While racial segregation was the predominant driver of differentiation between institutions, difference also was reinforced through specific funding models and designated budgets, as well as through the range of qualifications and fields institutions were allowed to offer. Administrative, financial, and curricular differences combined with geographic location to create a highly fragmented, differentiated, and segregated conglomerate of institutions which constituted not one system of higher education but several. By 1994, the South African system comprised:

- Ten historically white universities, of which six used Afrikaans as the language of instruction and four English.
- Four universities for blacks, one university for 'coloured' people, and one for the Indian population.
- Six white technikons³, some with English as the medium of instruction, some with Afrikaans.
- Three technikons for black people, one for the 'coloured' population, and one for Indian people.

The four universities for black people were based in the government-created independent homelands or 'Bantustans'. In addition, there was a distance university and a distance technikon serving all students in both Afrikaans and English.

2. In South African nomenclature the term 'black people' is used as a blanket term including African, Coloured, and Indian people (South African Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998). The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) uses the racial descriptors African, Coloured, White, and Indian/Asian for planning, monitoring, and funding purposes (DHET, 2016).

3. In South Africa, technikons were non-university institutions offering vocational education at post-secondary level. During the restructuring of the South African higher education system from 2002 to 2005 these institutions were either merged with existing universities, which then became comprehensive universities, or were redefined as universities of technology.

In 1994, some 525,000 students were enrolled in higher education in South Africa. Almost half (47 per cent) were white, 40 per cent black, 7 per cent Indian, and 6 per cent coloured. The inequity of the system is clear from the participation rates of each group. In 1993, the average participation rate in higher education in South Africa was 17 per cent. The participation rate for the black population was 9 per cent, compared to 13 per cent for the 'coloured' population, 40 per cent for the Indian population, and 70 per cent for the white population (Bunting, 2004b). Another issue concerned the distribution of enrolments across fields of study, with an overwhelming preponderance of students in the humanities. As Bunting put it:

In the changing political context, a view developed among policy-makers that the development needs of the South African economy would be best served by graduates in science, engineering and technology, and by diplomates obtaining vocational qualifications from technikons. A system which had 69 per cent of its enrolments and 79 per cent of its graduates in the university sector was regarded as 'development-unfriendly' particularly because the major fields of study of more than 50 per cent of these university enrolments and graduates were in the humanities (Bunting, 2004b: 98).

The policy-makers responsible for the development of higher education policy in South Africa during the post-apartheid period were confronted with multiple problems: How to bring about equity of participation across different population groups? How to ensure that a new higher education dispensation supported the development imperatives of the country, including both social justice and global competitiveness? How to balance the enormous inequalities between historically white and historically black institutions, in terms of financial, infrastructural, and human resources? And how to ensure the higher education system played its part in undoing the legacy of apartheid, not only in the sector but in the country as a whole?

The next section deals with the manner in which these problems were conceptualized in policy and prioritized over 20 years of democratic government, with a specific focus on quality assurance.

1.2 Undoing the apartheid legacy: Frameworks and tools

This section is based on research on the governance, leadership, and management of South African higher education, undertaken for South Africa's Council on Higher Education (CHE) in 2014 (Lange and Luescher-Mamashela, 2016). Although this period of undoing the apartheid legacy was developed in reference to the previous research, the focus of analysis has been shifted to align with the purposes of this study.

Political consensus and democratization: 1994-2000

Given the nature of higher education under apartheid, it is hardly surprising that the first period of post-apartheid policy-making was focused on equity, access, redress, and democratization. At this point in time, all four goals were fundamentally associated with changes to the demographic profile of political and social actors in higher education. Consequent reform resulted in changes in the composition of the student body, especially at historically white institutions; the redirection of resources to previously disadvantaged institutions (black universities and technikons) and to disadvantaged students; and the development of a system of institutional governance that included previously marginalized stakeholders such as students and workers.

As Muller, Maassen, and Cloete (2006) have noted, policy in this period laid down principles, values, and goals, in line with the framework of the new government. There was broad political agreement that South African higher education lacked the capacity

to meet the needs of a society in social, political, and economic transition, and that new principles and values needed to be formulated for the new system.

In 1997, the education White Paper, *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*, identified eight principles to guide the process of reconstruction and development in the higher education sector: equity and redress; democratization; development; quality; effectiveness and efficiency; institutional autonomy; academic freedom; and accountability. As far as quality was concerned, the White Paper proposed a standard definition:

Maintaining and applying academic and educational standards, both in the sense of specific expectations and requirements that should be complied with, and in the sense of ideals of excellence that should be aimed at. These expectations and ideals may differ from context to context, partly depending on the specific purposes pursued. Applying the principle of quality entails evaluating services and products against set standards, with a view to improvement, renewal or progress (White Paper 3, 1997: 1.21).

The White Paper viewed quality assurance as an important steering mechanism, alongside planning and funding, in the transformation of higher education. This understanding of quality assurance informed the development of the national agency for quality assurance, launched in 2001.

This period was also notable for the lack of policy detail and modelling as to the effects of the proposed changes (Lange and Luescher-Mamashela, 2016). Data were not readily available at either institutional or system level, and were often not available in the level of detail required. As a result, the National Commission of Higher Education (1996) and the White Paper introduced a set of tools to measure and monitor the progress of the higher education system towards key policy goals: a new funding formula, a new management information system, arrangements for planning and reporting to government, and a national system of quality assurance.

In the meantime, the new government took the first steps in creating a single, coordinated higher education system, one of the explicit objectives of the White Paper, by sanctioning the Higher Education Act No. 101 in 1997. It included the operation of all public higher education institutions in the subsidy system of pre-1994 South Africa; the development of a national qualifications framework on which all higher education institutions' qualifications and programmes had to be registered; and the development of the higher education branch of the Department of Education to deal with higher education and harmonize the internal governance of all HEIs.

Managing tools and implementation: 2001-2008

There is broad consensus in the literature (Badat, 2009; Cloete *et al.*, 2004; CHE, 2004) that developments in this period effectively shaped the South African higher education system that we know today. Following a period of limited state involvement between 1994 and 2000 (Badat, 2009), these years marked the beginning of increased intervention and the implementation of a number of steering instruments, including quality assurance.

The period began with a government-led process of restructuring the higher education system through merger, incorporation, and re-designation of institutions. This reduced the system to 23 institutions of three types: traditional universities, universities of technology, and comprehensive universities.

While the merger process kept the involved institutions busy until 2005, and left the others free to position themselves in the system, there was growing concern in government about how to optimize the contribution of higher education to the production of the skills needed for South Africa's development. This perspective was influenced by the notion

that good-quality education prepared students to be part of the 'knowledge economy'. A number of government plans were introduced with a specific focus on human capital development and the development of a knowledge economy. The Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative – South Africa (AsgiSA) aimed to halve poverty by 2014, while the Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) sought to identify the type of skills required by the country's economic sector. President Mbeki, during his first term in office, created a working group comprising all higher education institutions, the Ministry of Education, and ministers from the economic cluster. It was agreed that financial incentives would be provided by government for HEIs that met targets for the production of graduates in specific fields.

The government argued that greater intervention was necessary because of the failure of higher education institutions to make sustainable changes themselves. Institutions had been required to adopt three-year rolling plans to align their performance with government demands for reconstruction and development. However, by 1998, it had become clear that many institutions did not have sufficient capacity to develop three-year rolling plans based on broad guidelines. Furthermore, there was not sufficient impetus for change among institutions to make central steering redundant. Government was also concerned that letting market forces determine the future of all HEIs would undermine the principle and goal of equity and other values supporting the transformation of the sector. This was clearly manifested in the different ways in which white and black institutions fared financially during the period of non-intervention (Bunting, 2004a).

In 2001, the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) was developed to serve as the fundamental policy framework for this period. This plan translated the goals of the White Paper into system targets and argued for a radical restructuring of the system. Contrary to the views of some analysts (Cloete *et al.*, 2004), the National Plan did not constitute a shift away from the goals of access, equity, and redress to those of efficiency and effectiveness. The government saw enhanced effectiveness and efficiency as the only sure way to make access, equity, and redress a reality (Lange and Luescher-Mamashela, 2016).

The new funding framework was to replace the old South African post-secondary education (SAPSE) formula and related systems for planning and quality assurance. The development and implementation of the framework proved a lengthy process, prompting the development of different institutional approaches. Some white universities tried to increase reserves, entered into public-private partnerships, and made inroads into distance education. Black universities experienced either a significant decrease in enrolment or an overall crisis as a result of a lack of infrastructure and human resources, as well as growing debt (Bunting, 2004a; Barnes, 2005; Nkomo, Schwartz, and Maja, 2006). This kind of structural situation, compounded by both the notion and the reality of historical disadvantage among institutions, was something that the quality agency had to grapple with in developing a national system of quality assurance.

Throughout this period, there was heightened demand for accountability. A number of factors created a degree of disquiet among institutions about the rise of managerialism and state interference in institutional autonomy. These included the new funding formula with its greater focus on outputs, the enrolment plans to be negotiated between HEIs and the Department of Education, the need for government approval of the mix of programmes and qualifications offered by each institution, and the implementation of a national quality assurance system. It was a challenge for each HEI to balance institutional accountability with a more managerial approach. This preoccupation was particularly felt by academics and managers within higher education institutions (CHE, 2008a; Friedman and Edigheji, 2006).

Another important feature of this period was the progressive development of knowledge and data collection concerning the higher education system. This was as a result of the

full implementation of the higher education management information system (HEMIS), operated by government and used by institutions in order to fulfil their reporting obligations. The main purpose of HEMIS was to support the implementation of a sophisticated funding formula. In addition to its original purpose, HEMIS provided policy-makers and managers with detailed information on enrolment, graduation, and success rates, according to race and gender as well as level and field of study. It also provided information about staff demography and numbers as well as their qualifications and post levels. The availability of this sort of information facilitated greater understanding of the higher education system among stakeholders at both government and institutional levels. Moreover, with the increasing availability of quantitative data and research on higher education conducted by a variety of academic research units, non-governmental organizations, and the CHE itself, a strong knowledge base was established to inform the government's management of the higher education system.

Creating the post-secondary system: 2009–2014

The backdrop for this period was one of government change and radical remodelling of ministerial portfolios. The Ministry of Education was split into the Ministry of Basic Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Training. Particularly important in relation to the latter was the creation of a new post-secondary system, made up of a college and a university sector. Responsibilities in relation to skills development, previously held by the Department of Labour, were reassigned to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) under the Ministry of Higher Education and Training.⁴ A new quality council was created focused on trades and occupations.

The policy focus of the last five years has been framed by the National Planning Commission's identification of unresolved structural problems and their possible solutions. In particular, it was acknowledged that the number of young people not in either employment or education had reached alarming proportions. Consequently, the revitalization and expansion of the technical and vocational education and training sector, as well as the establishment of articulation pathways between colleges and universities, became the overarching policy preoccupation of the Ministry of Higher Education and Training in the fourth African National Congress (ANC) government.

A new White Paper on post-school education and training was published in 2013, upholding the goals of access (expansion), equity, and development which had formed the basis of higher education policy since 1995. Notwithstanding these similarities, the document had a much clearer focus on the need for a responsive post-school system attuned with the needs of the world of work through a more direct and productive relationship between employers and post-secondary education providers (DHET, 2013). Alongside the new policy came a stronger framework for institutional reporting and accountability. HEIs were required to submit their annual performance plans as well as their mid-term and year-end reporting against their strategic aims.

1.3 External quality assurance in South Africa: 2001–2014

As indicated earlier, quality assurance was regarded as one of three key steering instruments, together with funding and planning, to support the transformation of the apartheid legacy in higher education. From this perspective, quality assurance was supposed not only to ensure that the core functions of higher education – teaching and learning, research, and community engagement – were of a comparable standard across the sector, but also to undo the legacy of apartheid and expand higher education's

4. In the South African government system a Ministry refers to the office of the minister (including her/his immediate subordinates, e.g. chief of staff, spokesperson, parliamentary liaison, secretary). Each minister is responsible for one or more national government departments. The minister is the political head of her/his department(s).

effects on broader society. In this sense, from the moment of its conceptualization, quality assurance was regarded more as a political than as a technical tool. As the 2008 self-evaluation of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) put it: ‘Right from the beginning, the issues of quality were thus linked with broader socio-political reform objectives within higher education and beyond’ (HEQC, 2008: 5).

HEQC was created by the 1997 Higher Education Act as a permanent committee of the CHE focused on quality, a statutory body with a role in monitoring higher education and advising the relevant minister. HEQC was officially launched in May 2001, when its first board and executive director were appointed and its founding document was published. Between 2001 and 2004, HEQC was engaged in programme accreditation and the development of a national quality assurance system based on the functions described by the 1997 Higher Education Act. HEQC’s three main functions were:

- Auditing the quality of IQA mechanisms in higher education institutions.
- The accreditation of new programmes at higher education institutions.
- The promotion of quality in higher education.

To these three functions the HEQC board added capacity development, with the aim of helping both public and private providers of higher education prepare for quality assurance.

The complexity of HEQC’s task is clear from the national context in which the Ministry of Education released its National Plan for Education and the deployment of the two other steering mechanisms (funding and planning) in relation to public HEIs. The *de facto* differentiation within the South African higher education system also makes it difficult for HEQC to intervene in South African HEIs. The differentiations are made between historically advantaged and disadvantaged institutions, between research-intensive and teaching universities, between Afrikaans and English-medium institutions, and, more broadly, between black and white universities. Moreover, HEQC had to address national objectives, local needs, and historical experience, while developing a quality assurance system based on international trends and practices. This meant dealing with tensions between local needs and globalized approaches to quality assurance, as well as between development and accountability.

HEQC was aware of these tensions from the outset, and actively addressed them through research and a critical approach to quality assurance. The founding document, published in January 2001, flagged up the importance of ‘the development of an analytical and self-reflective approach to quality assurance premised on continuous self-assessment’, not only within the higher education institutions which it evaluates, but also within HEQC itself. A critical analytical approach to quality assurance and a clear sense of the role that quality assurance can play in the transformation of higher education were probably the most distinctive characteristics of the conceptualization of HEQC.

HEQC explicitly committed itself to advancing the related purposes and goals of the White Paper (HEQC, 2004a: 6) and defined transformation as an emancipatory socio-political change process as well as an individual change process. Thus, it argued, the *fitness for purpose* of higher education institutions, i.e. what institutions do in relation to the three core functions, was a ‘site’ of transformation for the achievement of quality in higher education:

The HEQC will develop a quality assurance framework that includes an explicit focus on the quality of teaching and learning activities, research and community service in order to deepen and extend the process of higher education transformation (Founding document: 9).

Given the very different capabilities and resources available to each institution, depending on its history and location, it was necessary for HEQC to postulate quality in terms of

minimum equivalent standards across the higher education system, as a necessary condition for eventual substantive equality of opportunity for all citizens. By 2004, HEQC had developed frameworks and criteria for programme accreditation and institutional audits, as well as a full programme of capacity development for both public and private institutions, and started rolling out these systems.

Accreditation of programmes

The accreditation of new programmes was aimed not only at protecting students from unscrupulous providers but also at reassuring the public about the quality of programmes and graduates. As indicated in the HEQC self-evaluation, all of this took place against the backdrop of an unprecedented growth in private higher education and a relatively unfettered entrepreneurial drive among some public providers (HEQC, 2008: 9). The accreditation of new programmes had two steps: a candidacy phase focused on proposals to offer new programmes and the accreditation phase that took place once the first cohort of students had graduated. It was thought that this method would ensure that the programmes met minimum standards in relation to requisite educational inputs, processes, and outputs over a period of three to five years.

HEQC adopted a different approach to existing programmes, using national reviews. National reviews are a special type of accreditation for existing programmes in a particular discipline and at a particular level of the national qualifications framework. This methodology helped to establish a national benchmark in particular qualifications. The first such exercise was conducted in relation to the master's in business administration qualification. This resulted in the closing down of providers and the de-accreditation of programmes offered by private and public providers which did not comply with the agreed criteria for accreditation.

Institutional audits

According to the HEQC audit framework, the primary purpose of its institutional audits was 'to facilitate systematic and continuous quality development and improvement in higher education and enhance institutional capacity to plan, act and report on quality-related objectives and achievements' (HEQC, 2004b: 5). Its audits sought to assess institutions' internal capacity for quality assurance, understood as the elements of institutional planning and action that address issues of quality. Quality assurance was viewed as having a number of internal components:

- Quality assurance – the policies, systems, strategies, and resources used by the institution to satisfy itself that its quality requirements and standards are being met.
- Quality support – the policies, systems, strategies, and resources used by the institution to support and sustain existing levels of quality.
- Quality development and enhancement – the policies, systems, strategies, and resources used by the institution to develop and enhance quality.
- Quality monitoring of academic activities – the policies, systems, strategies, and resources used by the institution to monitor, evaluate, and act on quality issues (HEQC, 2004b: 1).

Within this approach, an institution needed to demonstrate that its quality assurance system supported the discharge of its core functions in meeting the mission, goals, and objectives of the institution, while at the same time responding to internal and external stakeholders' expectations.

The HEQC audit system had the following objectives:

- Encourage and support higher education providers to maintaining a culture of continuous improvement by means of institutional quality processes that build on HEQC requirements and those set by institutions.

- Validate the self-evaluation reports of institutions on their quality arrangements for teaching and learning, research, and community engagement.
- Enable higher education institutions to develop reliable indicators that will assure institutional stakeholders and HEQC that their policies, systems, strategies, and resources for assuring and enhancing quality in teaching and learning, research, and community engagement are effective.
- Provide information and evidence that will enable higher education institutions and HEQC to identify areas of strength and excellence as well as areas in need of focused attention for planned improvement in the short, medium, and long terms.
- Enable HEQC to obtain baseline information in the targeted areas through the use of a common set of audit criteria for all institutions. (HEQC, 2004b: 6).

Table 1.1 Higher Education Quality Committee criteria for institutional audits

AREA	CRITERION
Institutional mission; links between planning, resource allocation, and quality assurance	1: The institution has a clearly stated mission and purpose with goals and priorities which are responsive to its local, national, and international context and which address transformational issues. There are effective strategies in place for the realization and monitoring of these goals and priorities. Human, financial, and infrastructural resources are available to give effect to these goals and priorities.
	2: Objectives and mechanisms for quality assurance are integrated into institutional planning. Financial planning ensures adequate resource allocation for the development, improvement, and monitoring of quality in the core activities of teaching and learning, research, and community engagement.
Teaching and learning	3: The arrangements for the quality assurance of, and support for, teaching and learning enhance quality and allow for its continuous monitoring.
	4: Academic support services (library and learning materials, computer support services, etc.) adequately support teaching and learning needs and help give effect to teaching and learning objectives.
	5: The institution has effective systems in place for the quality assurance of short courses, exported and partnership programmes, and programmes offered at tuition centres and satellite campuses.
	6: Clear and efficient arrangements ensure the integrity of learner records and certification processes. Monitoring responsibility is clearly allocated and acted upon.
Programme development, management, and review	7: The administration of academic programmes is conducted within the framework of an effective programme management system. Responsibility and lines of accountability are clearly allocated. Management information systems are used to record and disseminate information about the programme, as well as to facilitate review and improvement.
	8: Clear and efficient systems and procedures are in place for the design and approval of new programmes, courses, and modules. The requirements are consistently applied and regularly monitored.
	9: Recruitment, selection, and development and support policies and procedures facilitate the availability of suitably qualified and experienced academic and administrative staff to deliver the programme. Staff capacity is regularly reviewed in relation to programme needs.
	10: Clear and effective systems are in place (including internal and external peer review) to evaluate programmes on a regular basis. Review findings are disseminated appropriately and utilized for staff development, curriculum improvement, and improving student access and success rates.

AREA	CRITERION
Student assessment and success rates	11: The institution has an assessment policy and clear and effective procedures for its implementation. The policy and its procedures ensure academic and professional standards in the design, approval, implementation, and review of assessment strategies for programmes and modules, and for the qualifications awarded by the institution.
	12: The institution has effective procedures that facilitate the quality of the internal and external moderation of its assessment procedures and results, in order to ensure their reliability, as well as the integrity of the qualifications it awards.
	13: The principles, procedures, and practices of assessment are explicit, fair, and consistently applied throughout the institution. Security arrangements for recording and documenting assessment data are in place to ensure the credibility of outcomes.
	14: The institution has a policy for recognition of prior learning (RPL), and effective procedures for recognizing prior learning and assessing current competence.
Research	15: Effective arrangements are in place for the quality assurance, development, and monitoring of research functions and postgraduate education.
	16: Research functions and processes are supported and developed in a way that assures and enhances quality, and increases research participation, research productivity, and research resources.
	17: Efficient arrangements are in place for the quality assurance, development, and monitoring of postgraduate education.
Community engagement	18: Quality-related arrangements for community engagement are formalized and integrated with those for teaching and learning, where appropriate, and are adequately resourced and monitored.
Benchmarking, user surveys, and impact studies	19: The institution engages in benchmarking, where appropriate, and draws on user surveys and impact studies in the planning and setting of priorities for quality development and enhancement.

Source: HEQC, 2004c: 6–20.

The audit framework restated the HEQC approach to quality, indicating that, while due consideration would be given to mission differentiation and operational diversity, audits would focus on the degree to which institutions managed the quality of their core functions in a way that addressed transformational challenges for the development of individuals and the requirements of socio-economic development. Audits would consider the relationships between quality, fitness for purpose, and fitness of purpose, and the manner in which the institution's mission and activities took account of national priorities and needs in providing quality education (HEQC, 2004b: 5). These understandings were expressed in 19 audit criteria which addressed two broad areas: a) the mission of the institution; and links between planning, resource allocation, and quality assurance, and b) teaching and learning, research, and community engagement. *Table 1.1* provides an overview of the criteria used by the HEQC panels. These criteria (the meaning and content of which were spelled out in 2004) functioned as evaluative tools to be used by the institution for the purposes of self-evaluation and by the panel and the quality assurance agency in carrying out the external evaluation.

HEQC used a standard audit methodology for institutional evaluations. It included a self-evaluation exercise conducted by the institution and a site visit by an audit panel. The panel had responsibility for validating the self-evaluation through interactions with a broad range of individuals, including senior management, students, academic staff, administrative staff, unions, employers of graduates, and research and community partners. The outcome of the site visit was an audit report with recommendations for improvement and commendations on good practice, on the basis of which higher education institutions were expected to produce an improvement plan. The improvement plan was analysed and commented on by HEQC's Institutional Audits Committee (IAC).

The HEQC secretariat engaged institutions on their improvement plans on the basis of comments provided by the IAC, and the institutions were expected to produce a mid-term report after three years of implementing the improvement plan. As a follow-up step, HEQC provided the opportunity for ongoing interaction with the HEI on quality-related issues. The first HEQC audit cycle took place between 2004 and 2011 and included 23 public universities and 11 private providers.

The changes introduced by the Higher Education Act meant that CHE was reconstituted as the Quality Council for Higher Education in 2009. While HEQC still conducts accreditation and national reviews, it no longer conducts audits and has developed a new approach to the promotion of quality at institutional level which is concentrated only on teaching and learning and is much more enhancement-oriented. HEQC's current Quality Enhancement Project concentrates on seven areas: teaching, curriculum, assessment, learning resources, student enrolment management, academic student support and development, and non-academic support and development. Its methodology is a combination of self-evaluation and the sharing of these assessments among institutions in order to identify and promote good practice.

The effects of external quality assurance

According to Lange and Singh (2013: 147–168), one fundamental effect of the HEQC audits was the development of IQA policies at institutional level. The request for evidence made institutions realize that it was necessary to codify staff's tacit knowledge into policies and frameworks and to include university senates in the approval of quality assurance policies. This seems to have created greater transparency in institutional practices and improved communication among staff.

Another effect was an increased focus on institutional data. Audits were supported by institutional profiles developed by CHE's Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate, which provided quantitative data in an analytical form. This, together with the training of institutions and audit panels, made institutions aware of the importance of data for decision-making. Institutional audits also led to an increased role for the quality assurance manager or the quality assurance office, depending on institutional configuration. This was accompanied with significant additional responsibility for the deputy vice-chancellor in charge of academic affairs and, therefore, in most cases, quality assurance.

The audit reports and their specific recommendations led to the creation of structures with oversight of quality processes. Examples include the establishment of research ethics committees and the creation of institutional committees for teaching and learning. Another effect was the introduction of a new element in the postgraduate examination policy and the creation of a process for the appeal of examination marks. Some institutions also modified their teaching and learning strategies and approaches to include benchmarking after receiving the audit report. Others introduced changes in the allocation of resources – financial and human – while others still created academic support services such as planning offices and centres dedicated to the improvement of teaching and learning.

Last but not least, in the post-audit phase, institutions used HEQC quality criteria as part of their internal quality processes in the evaluation of programmes and departments. In most cases, this had mixed effects, which depended greatly on the quality of institutional leadership and the availability of human resources in the academic and support departments. While there may be doubts as to the impact of EQA in the improvement of quality itself, what is undeniable is that it had considerable impact in the development of IQA processes, policies, and infrastructure at the level of higher education institutions. Much of the experience of the implementation of EQA nationally was incorporated into the most recent development of IQA at UFS, as will be shown in *Chapter 2*.

2. About the UFS

This chapter offers some background on the University of the Free State. It describes its transformation over the past 20 years, from a historically white Afrikaans-speaking university to a dual Afrikaans- and English-speaking university. As part of the national merger policy, the university integrated two campuses from historically black universities and today has a majority of black students. The chapter discusses the strategic orientation of the university, the present student and staff profiles, and the main features of its academic offer.

2.1 History

The University of the Orange Free State was established in the 1950s. It catered exclusively for white students and was aligned with the apartheid regime. The most significant development in the 1990s, under the new democratic dispensation, was the growth in African student numbers and the adoption of a new university statute in 1999. The university changed its language policy in the early 1990s, offering classes in both English and Afrikaans, rather than just Afrikaans. This allowed for a large influx of African students who chose to study in English at the university. Like most historically white Afrikaans-medium universities in South Africa, the demographic profile of UFS has changed dramatically since 1990. From being a predominantly white institution in the early 1990s, UFS has become a majority black university.

In February 2001, the institution was renamed the University of the Free State. The South African higher education system was being comprehensively restructured and the QwaQwa Campus of the then University of the North and the Bloemfontein campus of Vista University (now the South Campus) were incorporated into UFS in January 2003 and January 2004, respectively. UFS currently operates across three campuses: Bloemfontein, QwaQwa in the Eastern Free State, and the South Campus in the Mangaung municipality outside Bloemfontein. The expansion of the university has further increased student enrolment, including among international students, a large number of whom are currently enrolled in UFS. While the majority of the university's students come from the Free State province and the central region, a growing number of students come from outside the province.

2.2 UFS in context

This section looks at UFS in terms of both national and local contexts, in order to provide a broader perspective on the institution's position and profile.

The Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET)⁵ categorizes UFS as a 'medium knowledge production' university. The benchmarks developed by CHET are often used to compare South African institutions and understand differentiation in the higher education system. The benchmarking of universities is based on three-year average performance across three clusters of indicators, relating to: academic staff input, student output, and high-level knowledge output. Each indicator is based on a four-point scale, with 'one' indicating that a university is well below the performance target and 'four' implying the university has met or exceeded the performance target. Over the period from 2008 to 2010, UFS achieved a performance ratio of four for academic staff input indicators. Its performance was rated lower for undergraduate and master's student output, and was particularly low for high-level knowledge output (which includes doctoral graduation

5. <http://www.chet.org.za/data/sahe-open-data>
http://www.chet.org.za/files/resources/Differentiation_Notes_to_Key_Stats_Calendar_CHET_September2012.pdf

rate, ratio of doctoral graduates to permanent academics, and ratio of publication output to permanent academics). As a result, UFS was classified as a ‘medium knowledge production’ university, a term reserved for institutions that are neither research-intensive nor exclusively focused on undergraduate teaching and learning.

In 2012, the Free State Growth and Development Strategy (FSGDS) identified a number of skill gaps in the province. About 50 per cent of pupils in the Free State leave secondary school before matriculating and only 35 per cent of those who do attain Grade 12 continue on to tertiary education. The consequently low skill levels, observed by both the FSGDS and the OECD,⁶ have been translated into a relatively (compared to other provinces) high (and growing) unemployment rate.⁷ The science and technology base in the Free State also remains significantly low and this is likely to be a contributing factor to the problem of structural unemployment in the province. As the OECD argues, ‘without adequate investment in skills, people languish on the margins of society; technological progress does not translate into economic growth and countries [and regions] can no longer compete in an increasingly knowledge-based global society’ (OECD, 2012: 10). This poses a direct challenge for UFS in terms of the way in which it presents itself to the broader Free State community.

2.3 Vision, mission, and strategy

The UFS vision is to be ‘a university recognized across the world for excellence in academic achievement and in human reconciliation’.

The mission of UFS is:

- Setting the highest standards for undergraduate and postgraduate education.
- Recruiting the best and most diverse students and professors into the university.
- Advancing excellence in research, teaching, and public service.
- Demonstrating in everyday practice the value of human togetherness and solidarity across social and historical divides.
- Advancing social justice by creating multiple opportunities for disadvantaged students to access the university.
- Promoting innovation, distinctiveness, and leadership in both academic and human pursuits.
- Establishing transparent opportunities for lifelong learning for academic and administrative staff.

Plans for the realization of the university’s mission and vision are set out in its strategic plans for the periods from 2012 to 2016 and from 2015 to 2020. The first strategic plan reflected the change in institutional focus and the appointment of a new vice-chancellor in 2009 as result of a racist incident.⁸ At the heart of the plan are three strategic foci that intersect, both conceptually and operationally: the academic project, the human project, and the support services foundation. The academic project has to do with the intellectual identity and reputation of the university, and, in particular, the need to develop a much more defined identity for UFS as a research-oriented institution. The human project constitutes a direct response to entrenched racist and intolerant behaviour at the university and the obstacles faced by the institution in changing its staff profile. The support services foundation focuses on the efficiency and effectiveness of services supporting the academic and human projects.

6. <http://www.oecd.org/edu/imhe/50008631.pdf>

7. Statistics South Africa, Labour Force Survey, Q3 2012

8. In 2008 a racist incident took place at one of the male residences in the Bloemfontein campus that went viral, destabilized the university management, and resulted in the resignation of the vice-chancellor. A new vice-chancellor was appointed in 2009 who had to contend with a university that was in crisis as social institution and that simultaneously needed to improve in key areas of academic provision.

Under these themes, the university developed a series of initiatives. Under the academic project, UFS identified the following areas of work: performance of students, performance of academics, academic distinction, and campus academic culture. Under the human project, it identified confronting prejudice, the culture of inclusion, equity openness and access, and community service and engagement as its most important areas of work. Finally, under the support services foundation, the university identified administrative efficiency and the operational changes needed to sustain the success of the academic and human projects as its core areas of work. The interface between these three areas of work has informed UFS's understanding of the academic enterprise as a whole. While the different aspects of the strategy have been implemented concurrently, the first two years of implementation have been particularly focused on the human project.

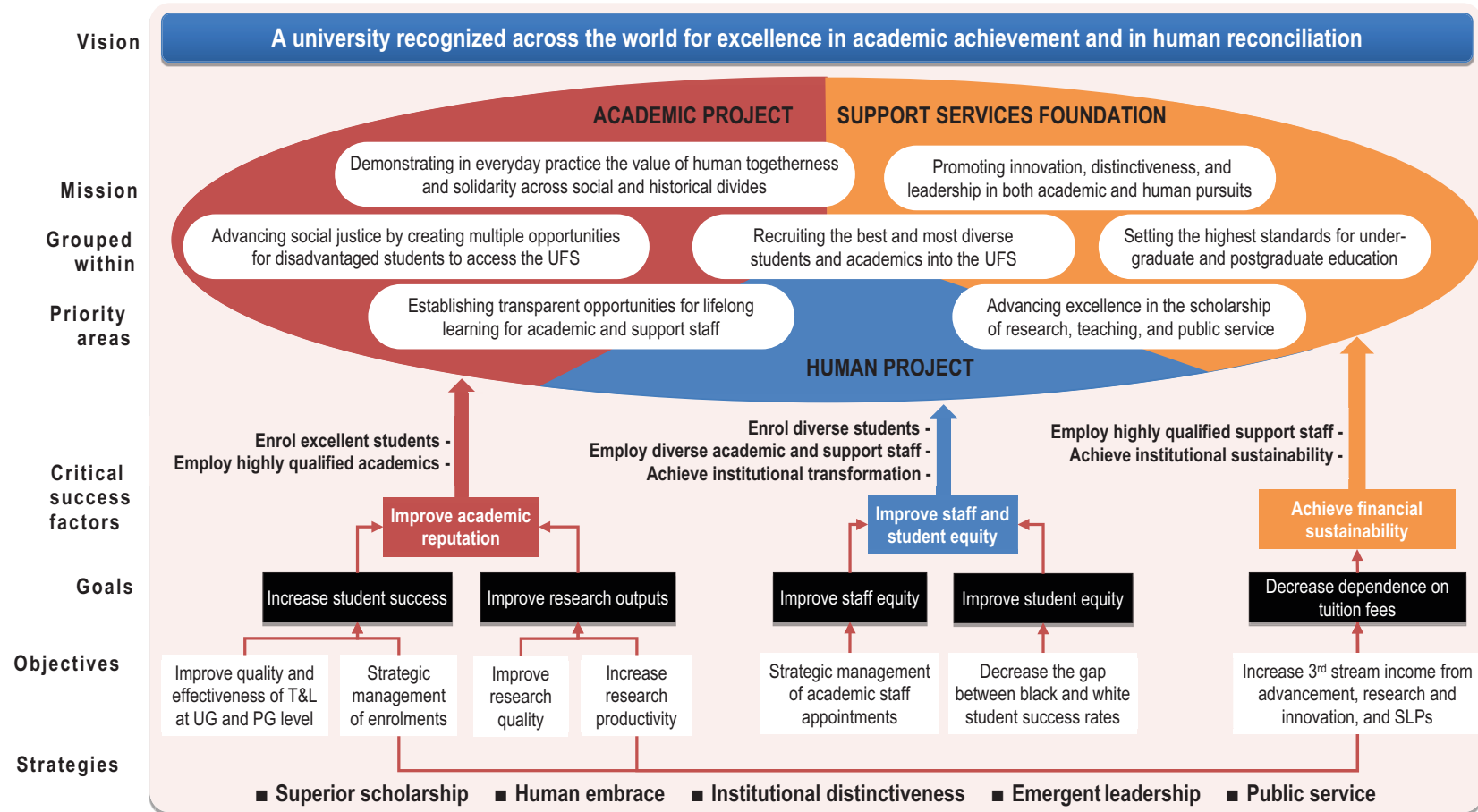
2013 and 2014 saw a turning point in the implementation of the first strategic plan. Foundational work on the three projects had brought about successful outcomes, particularly in terms of the human project. At the academic level, UFS had been increasing the admission points for university programmes since 2010. Combined with a series of other interventions, such as restructuring of the curriculum, increasing academic advice, introducing supplementary instruction, and providing direct support to staff, this had a generally positive impact on UFS's success rates. Success rates are an indication of how well students do as they progress in their studies and can be seen as a proxy for the quality of teaching and learning. UFS's success rate had been significantly improved at undergraduate level, reaching 77.4 per cent in 2013 and 79 per cent in 2014. This brought the institution closer to the national average of 80 per cent. A targeted reward system also resulted in a steady increase in the quality of research, in terms of the publication of scholarly articles in internationally indexed journals – 58.2 per cent of UFS publications in 2012 were published in such journals (UFS, 2015: 3–4). UFS performance was also improved in relation to the key performance indicators approved by its council. Thus, the UFS strategic plan 2012–2016 helped to realise the university's mission for academic excellence, further providing the foundation of developing a new strategy for 2015–2020 as shown in *Figure 2.1* (UFS, 2015: 11).

The current strategic plan for the period from 2015 to 2020 has three fundamental goals: improving UFS's academic reputation, improving equity and the diversity of staff and students, and achieving financial sustainability. Under each of these goals there are a number of objectives that provide direction to the strategy. In order to improve the university's academic reputation, UFS aims to improve student success and research outputs. Under the goal of improving equity and diversity, it is focusing on improving equity among staff and students. To achieve financial sustainability it is focusing on reducing its financial dependence on student fees.

2.4 UFS academic programme offer

During 2014, the number of programmes offered by the university was reduced from 470 to 233 as a result of a curricular review process in which UFS has been involved since 2012. Both the structure and content of its undergraduate curriculum were reviewed in terms of the extent to which the curriculum structure and content aligned with the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF). One of the objectives of the alignment and review of programmes was to reduce the cluttered menu of academic offerings at the university. The HEQSF also provided a legislative basis for articulation across different types and levels of programme offerings. While the review of the structure was essentially completed during 2013 and 2014, the review of curricular content is still underway.

Figure 2.1 UFS Strategic Plan 2015 to 2020



Source: UFS, 2015: 11.

The university's programmes and qualifications mix (PQM) was approved in 2014. The current PQM includes 42 new qualifications. In recent years, the largest growth in UFS enrolment has been in professional qualifications. Higher education in South Africa is organized around three main qualification tracks or knowledge domains (HEQC, 2011), described as vocational/technical, general/academic, and professional. Vocational qualifications are predominantly focused on the development of skills applied in a specific context, while general formative qualifications are based on a large conceptual base, requiring advanced theoretical knowledge. Professional programmes advance the conceptual (theoretical) knowledge that underpins a profession, while simultaneously providing for the development of specific competencies that enable the application of theoretical knowledge in practice (contextual). At UFS, the vast majority of offerings in the field of education, as well as in business and management, are classed as professional programmes. Furthermore, more than two-thirds (70.6 per cent in 2012) of graduates in the humanities (faculties of humanities, law, and theology) completed professional qualifications. In the field of science, engineering, and technology (faculties of natural and agricultural sciences and health sciences), there is an almost 50/50 split between formative and professional degrees. This indicates the increase of academic programme offerings in professional-track qualifications at UFS.

2.5 The UFS student body

Since the early 1990s, UFS has experienced a dramatic change in the size and profile of its student body, with black students now constituting the majority. This trend has been maintained since 2000, although the pace of change has slowed recently. In 2008, black students accounted for 60.7 per cent of the total student body and white students 39.3 per cent. In 2014, black students accounted for 72 per cent of the student body and white students 28 per cent (see *Table 2.1*). With respect to gender, there has been a much larger growth in the enrolment of female students compared to male students at UFS, a trend seen at many other universities around the country.

As *Table 2.2* shows, UFS currently has more than 31,400 students enrolled across seven faculties. These faculties, in decreasing order of enrolments, are education, humanities, natural and agricultural sciences (NAS), economic and management science (EMS), law, health sciences, and theology. The majority of enrolments are at undergraduate level (75 per cent), with postgraduate enrolments constituting around 22 per cent, and doctoral enrolments 2 per cent. In terms of fields of study, the majority of UFS enrolments (over 53 per cent) are in the humanistic disciplines (education, law, humanities, and theology), 30.6 per cent in science, engineering, and technology (SET), and 15.6 per cent in commerce.

2.6 UFS staff profile

In contrast to student trends, staffing trends at UFS have remained relatively stable over time, despite some growth. The total number of full-time equivalent (FTE) non-academic or administrative staff increased by 18.3 per cent between 2008 and 2012, while there was an increase of only 7.7 per cent in academic staff FTE numbers. In relation to the qualifications of academic staff, most faculties improved their share of staff with a doctoral degree, with the proportion of staff holding doctorates reaching 46 per cent overall.

Table 2.1 UFS students (headcounts) by gender and race, 2008 and 2014

Year	2008					
Race	Black		White		Grand total	
Gender	headcount	% of grand total	headcount	% of grand total	headcount	% of grand total
Female	10 154	38.77%	4 859	18.55%	15 013	57.32%
Male	6 784	25.90%	4 393	16.77%	11 177	42.68%
Total	16 938	64.67%	9 252	35.33%	26 190	100.00%

Year	2014					
Race	Black		White		Grand total	
Gender	headcount	% of grand total	headcount	% of grand total	headcount	% of grand total
Female	14 228	45.85%	4 981	16.05%	19 209	61.90%
Male	7 812	25.17%	4 011	12.93%	11 823	38.10%
Total	22 040	71.02%	8 992	28.98%	31 032	100.00%

Source: UFS, 2014.

Table 2.2 UFS students (headcount enrolments) by faculty and qualification level, 2008 and 2014

Year	2008							
Qualification level	Postgraduate		Undergraduate		Occasional		Grand total	
Faculty	head-count	% of grand total	head-count	% of grand total	head-count	% of grand total	head-count	% of grand total
Economic and Management Sciences	886	3.38%	4 020	15.35%	867	3.31%	5 773	22.04%
Education	1 513	5.78%	4 099	15.65%	23	0.09%	5 635	21.52%
Health Sciences	977	3.73%	1 416	5.41%	15	0.06%	2 408	9.19%
Law	1 347	5.14%	895	3.42%	4	0.02%	2 246	8.58%
Natural and Agricultural Sciences	1 536	5.86%	2 941	11.23%	285	1.09%	4 762	18.18%
The Humanities	765	2.92%	3 340	12.75%	946	3.61%	5 051	19.29%
Theology	178	0.68%	115	0.44%	1	0.00%	294	1.12%
Other	21	0.08%		0.00%		0.00%	21	0.08%
Total	7 223	27.58%	16 826	64.25%	2 141	8.17%	26 190	100.00%

Year	2014							
Qualification level	Postgraduate		Undergraduate		Occasional		Grand total	
Faculty	head-count	% of grand total	head-count	% of grand total	head-count	% of grand total	head-count	% of grand total
Economic and Management Sciences	960	3.09%	3 330	10.73%	215	0.69%	4 505	14.52%
Education	862	2.78%	6 521	21.01%	52	0.17%	7 435	23.96%
Health Sciences	1 073	3.46%	1 494	4.81%	46	0.15%	2 613	8.42%
Law	1 289	4.15%	2 288	7.37%	1	0.00%	3 578	11.53%
Natural and Agricultural Sciences	1 763	5.68%	3 840	12.37%	312	1.01%	5 915	19.06%
The Humanities	699	2.25%	5 201	16.76%	833	2.68%	6 733	21.70%
Theology	166	0.53%	83	0.27%	4	0.01%	253	0.82%
Other	0	0.00%		0.00%		0.00%	0	0.00%
Total	6 812	21.95%	22 757	73.33%	1 463	4.71%	31 032	100.00%

Source: UFS, 2014.

In terms of race (see *Table 2.4*), only 23.4 per cent of the academic staff complement at UFS was black – a 1 per cent increase from 2013 to 2014. UFS improved the racial mix of academic staff profiles in 2014, when black academics constituted 24.1 per cent of new academic staff places (compared to 22.4 per cent in 2013) and 12 per cent of new department heads (compared to none in 2013). There has been also an increase in female representation among academics at UFS. Currently, women, and particularly white women, are well represented in the UFS academic workforce, although they are usually appointed at or below senior lecturer level. Black women academics are still the most unrepresented group among all faculty staff.

Table 2.3 UFS staff members (headcounts) by faculty, 2008 and 2014

Year	2008					
Staff category	Administrative		Academic		Grand Total	
Faculty	headcount	% of grand total	headcount	% of grand total	headcount	% of grand total
Economic and Management Sciences	143	3.48%	203	4.92%	346	8.40%
Education	77	1.87%	83	2.00%	160	3.87%
Health Sciences	150	3.64%	386	9.37%	536	13.01%
Law	50	1.21%	48	1.17%	98	2.38%
Natural and Agricultural Sciences	350	8.49%	466	11.33%	816	19.82%
The Humanities	203	4.93%	532	12.92%	735	17.85%
Theology	18	0.44%	38	0.92%	56	1.36%
Other	1 275	30.98%	96	2.33%	1 371	33.31%
Total	2 266	55.04%	1 851	44.96%	4 117	100.00%

Year	2014					
Staff category	Administrative		Academic		Grand Total	
Faculty	headcount	% of grand total	headcount	% of grand total	headcount	% of grand total
Economic and Management Sciences	84	1.90%	125	2.82%	209	4.72%
Education	33	0.74%	69	1.56%	102	2.30%
Health Sciences	129	2.92%	392	8.85%	521	11.77%
Law	23	0.52%	41	0.93%	64	1.45%
Natural and Agricultural Sciences	345	7.79%	345	7.80%	690	15.59%
The Humanities	151	3.41%	411	9.29%	562	12.69%
Theology	9	0.20%	87	1.96%	96	2.16%
Other	1 759	39.75%	423	9.56%	2 183	49.31%
Total	2 533	57.23%	1 893	42.77%	4 426	100.00%

Source: UFS, 2014

Table 2.4 UFS staff members (headcounts) by gender and race, 2008 and 2014

Year	2008					
Race	Black		White		Grand Total	
Gender	headcount	% of grand total	headcount	% of grand total	headcount	% of grand total
Female	735	17.85%	1 443	35.05%	2 178	52.90%
Male	848	20.60%	1 089	26.45%	1 937	47.05%
Unknown	2	0.05%		0.00%	2	0.05%
Total	1 585	38.50%	2 532	61.50%	4 117	100.00%

Year	2014					
Race	Black		White		Grand Total	
Gender	headcount	% of grand total	headcount	% of grand total	headcount	% of grand total
Female	875	19.77%	1 595	36.04%	2 470	55.81%
Male	836	18.89%	1 120	25.31%	1 956	44.19%
Unknown						
Total	1 711	38.66%	2 715	61.34%	4 426	100.00%

Source: UFS, 2014.

3. The UFS internal quality assurance system

The chapter describes the evolution of the internal quality assurance system at the University of the Free State. From the early use of self-evaluation to inform strategic planning, IQA at the university has undergone several stages of development which are directly linked both to the requirements of external quality assurance and to internal transformation processes. Since 2014, the university has been committed to a new approach to quality and IQA which promotes the generation of knowledge for internal improvement purposes. The university has a new quality policy, but also new IQA processes and instruments, most of which have developed over time, often at faculty level.

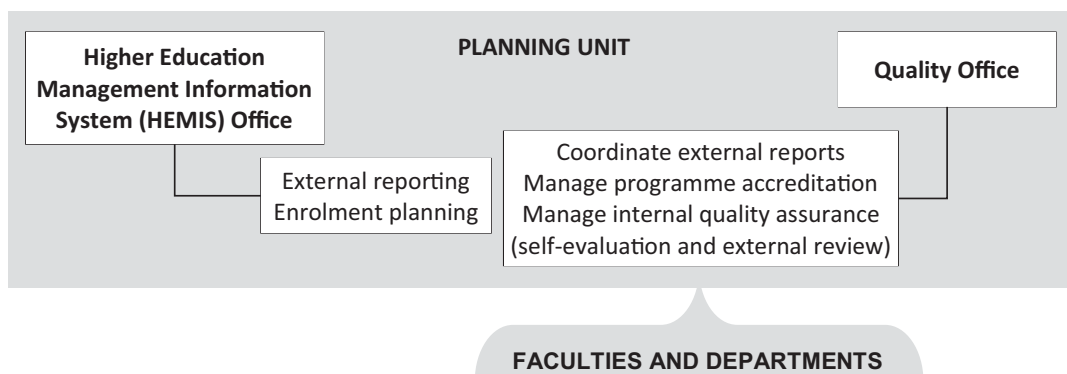
3.1 Development of IQA

Before quality assurance was formally part of South Africa's higher education policy, UFS, then the University of the Orange Free State, tried to introduce a form of quality assurance (Strydom and Holtzhausen, 2001: 55–57). The process of setting up this institutional quality assurance at UFS involved two stages. The preparatory phase, from 1989 to 1992, was mostly focused on self-evaluation and linking quality assurance to strategic planning. According to Strydom and Holtzhausen, at this time there was also considerable effort within the university to keep up with international developments in quality assurance and establish a culture of strategic management. This phase was abandoned through a combination of lack of leadership and internal tensions (Strydom and Holtzhausen, 2001: 83). The second phase, from 1993 to 1995, took place in the context of heightened political struggle, as South Africa's democratic transition unfolded. This was a period of progressive inertia caused by poor leadership, lack of management acumen at faculty level, and problems arising from the decentralization of academic planning and management. Furthermore, staff did not have experience in gathering and using data on inputs, processes, and outcomes at departmental level sufficient to support an exercise of this magnitude (Strydom and Holtzhausen, 2001: 83–86).

More than 10 years into the democratic dispensation, at the time of UFS's first institutional quality audit by HEQC in 2006, a formalized, centrally located quality assurance system was established at the university, together with most of the policies related to quality assurance. At this time, the policies represented a peculiar combination of centralization and devolution. In addition to its quality assurance policy,⁹ UFS had a Quality Assurance Committee and a Quality Office responsible for evaluations, audits, and investigation of any institutional process as well as of the core functions (UFS, 2006). *Figure 3.1* shows the functions of the Quality Office within an organigram of the Planning Unit as it was at the time of the HEQC audit in 2006. The Vice-Rector for Academic Planning, supported by the Planning Unit, was responsible for coordinating and refining the development of the quality assurance system. However, faculties were not part of a system of formal accountability, neither vertically to the Vice-Rector for Academic Planning nor horizontally to the Quality Office. Therefore, there was no way of ensuring consistency of quality assurance practice across the faculties, a feature also remarked on in the audit report. The HEQC audit panel pointed out the lack of monitoring systems to follow up on the impact of policies and support the identification and management of academic risks (CHE, 2008b).

9. Like most other universities, UFS used self-evaluation followed by an external peer review as the primary mechanism for assuring quality across departments, functions, and programmes.

Figure 3.1 Organigram of the Planning Unit, 2006



The development of a new conceptualization of quality assurance at UFS after 2011 took as its point of departure the content of the HEQC audit report for UFS, the outcomes of the audit reports of other higher education institutions available on the CHE website, research commissioned by HEQC on the state of the three core functions based on the documentation generated by the audit process, the draft proposal for a second cycle of quality assurance at national level circulated by HEQC in 2010, and an analysis of UFS internal policies and the process and outcomes of programme and departmental reviews at the time.

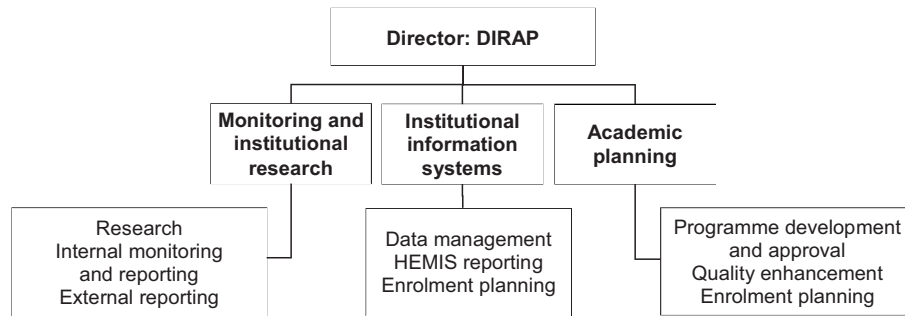
By 2011, the quality assurance function at UFS was located within the newly created Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning (DIRAP), which had replaced the Planning Unit. As shown in Figure 3.2, DIRAP included teaching and learning, programme development and approval, student development and support, institutional research, institutional information for internal and external reporting, and quality assurance among its areas of focus. Despite an integrated notion of planning and institutional research reflected in the structure of DIRAP, in practice each unit functioned as a silo rather than as part of an integrated tool for change. In this first design, quality assurance existed as an independent function more or less disconnected in practice from both the academic core and the strategy of the university. Moreover, this kind of approach to quality assurance put the onus of engagement on the faculties, with little or no institutional input or direction.

Figure 3.2 Organigram of the Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning, 2011



In 2012, DIRAP underwent restructuring. The main driver for this second restructuring was the integration of the different foci into a single institutional drive for transformation. In 2015, three functions were therefore incorporated into DIRAP – monitoring and institutional research, academic planning, and institutional information systems. Figure 3.3 shows the current DIRAP structure and function.

Figure 3.3 Organigram of the Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning, 2015



The functions related to student development and success were redefined and moved out of DIRAP with the creation of the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL). Responsibility for coordinating the quality assurance function resided within the Academic Planning unit of DIRAP, but the function itself gradually became devolved across the institution as a constitutive part of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of all academic processes.

3.2 IQA structure

Table 3.1 provides an overview of the current IQA system at UFS. The table categorizes each element of the system in terms of: (a) focus, i.e. quality assurance in general, as well as quality assurance of teaching and learning, management, and employability, in particular; and (b) type, i.e. policies and related documents, instruments and process, services, and structures.

The current IQA structure involves both institutional and faculty levels. At institutional level, the following IQA structures are in place: the Academic Planning and Development Committee of the Senate (APDC), the Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning (DIRAP), the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), the Postgraduate School, the Higher Degrees Committee, and the careers development office. APDC is responsible for enrolment and academic planning, strategic direction, programme approval, quality assurance and enhancement, and policy development. DIRAP is in charge of overall academic planning, institutional research, and information management, thus coordinating quality assurance matters in an integrated manner. CTL is focused on the development of the teaching and learning core function. The centre offers a variety of courses/seminars/workshops dedicated to improving the teaching capacity of academic staff through training. Over and above this, it also offers a direct service to improve curriculum design at module level. The career development office is located within the UFS Student Affairs division. The office provides services and resources designed to assist students to develop employability skills for the world of work through, for example, workshops, a resource centre, and annual career fairs. It also provides services to employers to advertise, interview, and recruit UFS students.

At faculty level, the following structures are in place: faculty boards, teaching and learning committees, teaching and learning managers, and faculty management committees. A faculty board is made up of heads of department and other permanent senior teaching staff. This board is responsible for the approval of new academic programmes or changes to existing curricula before these changes are submitted to the APDC via the Academic Planning Unit of DIRAP. The faculty board aims to provide a space in which the dean and other faculty representatives, who are members of the APDC, report on the status of programmes and the implementation of new national or institutional policies. Faculty boards are also the site for discussion of the outcomes of external reviews of

programmes. Teaching and learning committees are located in most faculties, discussing specific issues about the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning. The members of this committee include programme directors and the faculty teaching and learning manager. The teaching and learning manager is appointed because of his/her knowledge of teaching and learning and ability to work with the faculty to improve the quality of teaching. The position is usually located in the office of the dean and serves as an important link between lecturers, department heads, faculty management, relevant support units, including CTL and DIRAP, and institutional management on issues of teaching and learning. Faculty management committees include the dean and heads of department as well as the faculty manager and are responsible for the financial, academic, and human resources management of the faculty.

3.3 IQA policies and documents

UFS IQA documents include policies as well as frameworks and guidelines. Together, these documents set out lines of responsibility and authority and provide guidelines to support the IQA system at the university. Such documents were found to be well developed within the academic domain.

The current UFS Quality Enhancement Framework was developed by DIRAP and approved by the senate in March 2014. The framework represents the second stage in the engagement with quality at UFS and works to change notions of quality assurance away from answering questions against set criteria towards asking questions of existing practice at the university. It begins by recognizing the important role that EQA, as implemented by HEQC, has played in the South African higher education system by providing common practices, guiding HEIs in designing explicit systems and procedures, and giving institutions an opportunity to reflect on how understandings of quality can respond to specific institutional missions and national challenges. Yet, the document argues, quality assurance systems are not a sufficient condition for the development of quality in the core functions of a university. The framework argues for the importance of aligning any quality system with the broader strategic direction of UFS and with the detailed strategies within its core functions. Thus, the point of departure for the document is that quality is a university responsibility that can only truly be addressed internally by academics. The implementation of the framework therefore relies on the following six principles: (i) academic freedom, (ii) faculty leadership, (iii) accountability, (iv) student engagement, (v) evidence, and (vi) impact.

The main purpose of UFS's Quality Enhancement Framework is to encourage departments to examine their implicit or explicit understandings of teaching and learning and research in order to identify what works, what does not work, and why. In the area of teaching and learning, this knowledge should help the institution to improve its curriculum and teaching practices, and, therefore, the student experience of learning in academic programmes. The framework looks at quantitative evidence (e.g. student marks) and policies (e.g. faculty rules) as entry points to interrogate teaching and learning practices. In practical terms, the new framework focuses on what enables good teaching in different departments of the university, and on the obstacles that hinder good practice. Similarly, in the area of research, the approach aims to make explicit the extent to which research and scholarship are part of a department's culture, how this culture expresses itself in activities and practices, and what outcomes it produces in terms of both quantity and quality (productivity). Such an approach involves a move from a compliance orientation to an enhancement focus by creating opportunities to think and rethink *why* a particular practice or approach produces certain results, and where the academic staff is the agent of change.

A number of other policy and guideline documents support the UFS IQA system. These include:

- The institutional admission policy, focused equally on academic excellence and human development. Admission procedures must ensure that diversity in the student body is sustained and expanded, within the profile and enrolment targets agreed with the DHET. The policy is based on flexible access and redress, and is supported by mechanisms to ensure improved student success.
- The admission policy is operationalized in institutional and faculty yearbooks/rulebooks. These documents are produced annually and present the academic rules and regulations of the university and of each faculty. They also indicate the level of scholastic achievement required to be admitted to UFS and its specific academic programmes through the admission point (AP) score. The AP score is calculated on the basis of school-leaving examination results. The current admissions policy was changed in 2009 to increase the AP score required for admission in most degree programmes. Furthermore, the faculty yearbooks/rulebooks provide a guide to the content, organization, and duration of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered in each faculty.
- The assessment policy specifies minimum requirements – for example, frequency and format of assessment, process of assessment, and management of assessment results – and stresses moderation as an important tool to maintain quality standards in assessment. The policy provides for implementation through faculty assessment rules and regulations. UFS is currently discussing a new undergraduate and honours policy.
- The academic appointment and promotions policy is considered to be a critical element in attracting, retaining, developing, and rewarding scholars of outstanding quality who perform in ways that establish a reputation for excellence at UFS. The 2011 policy set far more demanding promotion standards for academic staff at UFS, applicable (in a move away from past arrangements) to academic progression across faculties, schools, and academic departments. The policy emphasizes peer review as the primary process for assessment and quality control in the scholarly community.

3.4 Tools of IQA

The IQA tools at UFS are applied at both institutional and faculty level. The instruments applied at institutional level are used across the entire university, while those at faculty level are used specifically for the purpose of teaching and learning, employability, and management. A description of each tool applied at institutional level is provided below.

Until 2011, IQA at UFS took the primary form of departmental (programme) or unit reviews. The UFS guidelines for departmental evaluation proposed a broad scope of analysis that included teaching and learning, research, and community engagement, as well as the administrative and support functions provided by and to the department under review. The review process included internal self-evaluation and external peer evaluation that served as the basis for the development of a quality improvement plan.¹⁰ These guidelines were presented to faculties or units as a way of organizing periodic reflective practice across the full range of departmental or unit activities, but each faculty or unit was responsible for determining how best to implement its review. The current process of departmental (programme) and support service unit review includes much stronger participation at institutional level, with the process coordinated by DIRAP.

10. This approach, with clear influences from the initial institutional audit processes of HEQC, managed to review more than 100 departments, schools, centres, and units within an approximately five-year cycle, which is a considerable achievement.

Academic programmes follow a structured process of internal programme approval before being included in the UFS academic offering. Faculties take responsibility for the development of new programmes, with the Academic Planning unit of DIRAP providing technical and administrative support throughout the process. These programmes are approved at faculty board level before being submitted to the APDC for final approval and for accreditation with the Council on Higher Education.

The university's performance management system is based on unit and personal performance target agreements. Unit performance target agreements aim to ensure that unit targets are met by heads of academic departments, faculties, and support units, all of which are reviewed at least biannually. These agreements are usually made between, for example, an academic department head and the faculty dean, between a faculty dean and the vice-rector for academic affairs, or between the senior director of human resources and the vice-rector for operations. Personal performance target agreements, on the other hand, are conducted between employee and line manager, and involve systematic performance appraisal, and a personal development plan. For administrative staff, this system is supplemented by competency profiles that are specific to a post, not a person, but provide a guideline for setting personal performance targets. More recently, UFS has begun implementing a workload model for academic staff members, which serves a similar purpose as the competency profile.

DIRAP is responsible for performance indicator monitoring at three levels: statutory, council, and internal. All public universities are required to prepare annual performance plans that are submitted to DHET. These plans include performance targets for a number of key performance indicators, the institutional enrolment plan, and financial projections and risks. UFS monitors these performance indicators and submits mid-year and annual reports on these to DHET. In addition, the institution monitors and prepares quarterly reports on a much-expanded set of indicators for the UFS council. These indicators include those submitted to DHET, as well as indicators that provide information about the university's performance in relation to its peers. Source data for the latter are available nationally through the South African Higher Education Data Analyser indicator dashboard. Finally, an internal indicator dashboard – the UFS Higher Education Data Analyser – provides a selection of indicators in a user-friendly format, as well as the capacity for disaggregation of these indicators to faculty and department and programme level. This dashboard may be accessed by all internal staff members.

A different set of IQA tools are applied at faculty/unit level. These are described below.

DIRAP in 2012 embarked on an institutional curriculum review alongside the national process of aligning the level of programmes and qualifications in higher education with those of the HEQSF. The purpose of this review was to assess the alignment of curriculum with the mission and strategic aspirations of UFS as well as the quality of the university's academic offerings relative to benchmarked national and international standards. The process of curricular review is conducted centrally with peer review teams reporting directly to DIRAP and the vice-rector for academic affairs. Moreover, the outcomes of the reviews are presented in an aggregated manner to the APDC as a way of helping the institution take ownership of the findings and the areas for improvement identified in the review reports.

In 2013, course evaluations were conducted in some UFS faculties, departments, and programmes, but not in others. Different instruments were used and the data generated were not in a format that could easily be used institutionally to improve understanding of teaching and learning. The university realized that this understanding is a critical component of teaching and learning quality enhancement at all levels. DIRAP and CTL therefore prepared an institutional course evaluation instrument focused on students' experiences of various teaching and learning issues within the context of a course. A highly

collaborative, consultative process resulted in the current survey-based course evaluation system at UFS, which is managed by DIRAP. Faculties and departments have the freedom to select an evaluation cycle – for example, each course is evaluated every three years – and DIRAP provides the administrative support for the evaluations. Evaluations can be completed through either online or paper-based survey questionnaires. The process is coordinated at faculty level by the teaching and learning managers. Results are made available to the teaching and learning managers, who provide feedback to faculty management, department heads, and individual lecturers.

Student engagement surveys are based on the idea that students learn better the more engaged they are with the course material. In 2009, CHE supported a pilot study on student engagement – the South African Survey of Student Engagement (SASSE) – initiated by UFS's Centre for Teaching and Learning. The pilot was extended in 2010 to include lecturers in order to complement and compare the students' perspectives on student engagement with those of their teachers. The pilot surveys reached 23,042 respondents from 11 HEIs. CTL continues to administer and distribute findings from these student engagement surveys to students and lecturers across the country. The survey results provide rich data on the student experience, both in terms of how students approach their studies and how institutions support students to engage in meaningful learning activities, including lecturers' expectations of, and approach to, student learning.

UFS has established neither a set of shared graduate attributes across disciplines, nor any formal system of assessment of graduate attributes (student competencies) at institutional or faculty level. However, as with course evaluations prior to 2014, some faculties, departments, and, especially, professional programmes assess the competencies that they believe their graduates should possess in order to succeed in the specific work domain for which they prepare their students. As might be expected, these competencies vary greatly and are rarely analogous across disciplines.

Academic staff development programmes are offered by both CTL and the Postgraduate School in order to improve staff knowledge and skills in particular areas, among them academic writing, research methodology, course and programme design, assessment practices, and teaching skills. Research and postgraduate supervision skills development has become the responsibility of the Postgraduate School, while CTL is responsible for competencies related to undergraduate teaching and learning. Some programmes are formal and recurring (e.g. annual academic staff orientation programmes), while others are offered on an *ad hoc* basis, as and when the need arises. These programmes not only serve to improve academic competencies, but also provide valuable insight into skills gaps and the real needs of academic staff members.

Service-level agreements apply to support services such as information and communication technology services and establish the nature and level of service expected by the university in relation to that particular service.

With the exception of the institution-wide curriculum review driven by the need for transformation of knowledge and pedagogy, UFS has not introduced new tools of quality assurance. What it has done is to integrate all institutional knowledge – generated through existing quality assurance instruments and processes, management information systems, and institutional research – into analytical reports that look critically at the possible reasons for success and failure in different areas of performance. These reports are presented and discussed by the senate as well as at senior management level and inform a variety of interventions at faculty and central management level, depending on the case.

Table 3.1 Instruments, processes, and structures of internal quality assurance at the UFS

Focus Type	Whole university	Teaching and learning	Employability	Management
Policy/ document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality Enhancement Framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admission policy Assessment policy Faculty yearbooks/ rulebooks 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic appointment and promotions policy
Instrument/ process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Departmental (programme) or unit review Self-evaluation* External peer review* Internal programme approval* Unit performance target agreements* Personal performance target agreements* Performance indicator monitoring* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum review Course evaluations via student survey* Student engagement surveys (by students)* Student engagement surveys (by lecturers)* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment of graduate attributes (student competencies)* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service-level agreements*
Service		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic staff development* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Careers fair Departmental careers website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process re-engineering project (PRENG)
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic Planning and Development Committee of the Senate¹ (APDC)* Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning² (DIRAP)* Centre for Teaching and Learning³ (CTL)* Postgraduate School Higher Degrees Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty boards⁴ Teaching and learning committees Teaching and learning managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Career development office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty management committees

¹ Internal programme approval body

² Internal programme approval unit and QA function

³ Academic staff development unit

⁴ Internal programme approval body

*Note: Included in survey

4. Findings of the empirical study

This chapter describes the research methodology the UFS research team applied when conducting the study of its IQA system. It includes the limitations of the research and a description of the respondents to the research. Findings are presented in relation to the awareness of different university stakeholders in IQA and the extent of their involvement in it, the effects of the IQA tools on teaching and learning, employability, and management effectiveness, the factors that condition the effective functioning of IQA, and stakeholder perceptions of the overall effectiveness of IQA at the university.

4.1 Research methodology

This case study investigates different stakeholders' perceptions of the university's IQA system through both quantitative and qualitative methods. The perceptions of academic and administrative staff were collected through online surveys, while interviews and focus group discussions were employed to capture in greater depth the perceptions of other stakeholders at the university, such as students and personnel in leadership positions.

Two separate online survey questionnaires were administered via email to 1,270 administrative staff, of whom 389 responded (21 per cent), and to 917 academics, 225 (14.7 per cent) of whom responded. For both groups the response rates tapered off as the survey progressed – from 30.6 per cent to 21.3 per cent for administrative staff and from 24.6 per cent to 20.3 per cent for academics. Hard copies of the questionnaire were made available on request.

Twenty-three participants were involved in interviews and focus group discussions, based on IIEP interview and focus group guidelines. Individual interviews were conducted with three deans, 10 department heads, and five teaching and learning managers. Student perceptions were explored through focus group discussions with five students from the student representative bodies at the university. The interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed for the analysis.

Limitations

The findings from the two quantitative surveys must be interpreted with caution. When interpreting the results from this survey, some terms (words, concepts) proved to be open to interpretation. Furthermore, the reasons for respondents selecting the 'I do not know' answer option (e.g. if the respondent is unsure, neutral, or does not have an opinion on the topic, or finds the question not to be applicable) were not known to the researchers. In addition, only those IQA instruments regarded as important and pervasive by those interviewed (see *Table 4.1*) were included in the survey by the researchers. The existence of these instruments, or in many cases the fact that these instruments were considered by staff members to be applied for the purposes of IQA, was only revealed during the qualitative data collection process. This suggests that there are various interpretations of what IQA is at UFS, and what processes and instruments belong to it.

Furthermore, the survey sample population is not representative of academic and administrative staff at UFS. Only 28 per cent of the total UFS staff participated in the surveys. The disaggregated data does not represent the UFS staff population in terms of hierarchical levels (e.g. academic position or staff rank) and disciplines, which affects the comparability of participant groups. In this regard, life and health sciences, and humanities and social sciences are under-represented while education is over-represented. In terms of hierarchical levels, the following categories are over-represented: directors and

professors, chief officers and lecturers, and senior officers and junior lecturers. Deputy directors and associate professors, and assistant directors and senior lecturers are under-represented. This means that caution must be exercised in terms of the interpretation of between-group comparisons of the results of specific survey questions.

4.2 Respondent statistics

This section provides general descriptions of the respondents to the online surveys, and the participants in the interviews and focus group discussions.

Table 4.1 Survey sample – academic staff by disciplinary field

Disciplinary field	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Life and health sciences (LHS)	48	21.33%
Life and health (e.g. medicine, psychology, nursing, occupational therapy)	48	21.33%
Formal and natural sciences (FNS)	62	27.56%
Formal sciences (e.g. mathematics and applied mathematics, mathematical statistics and actuarial science, computer science and informatics)	11	4.89%
Natural sciences (e.g. zoology and entomology, chemistry, geography, plant sciences)	51	22.67%
Humanities and social sciences (HSS)	59	26.22%
Humanities (e.g. philosophy, theology, languages, fine art)	48	21.33%
Social sciences (e.g. political studies, communication science, social work)	11	4.89%
Education	26	11.56%
Education (e.g. comparative education and education management, psychology of education, early childhood development, higher education studies)	26	11.56%
Business and management, economics and law (BMEL)	27	12.00%
Business and management (e.g. public administration and management, accounting, industrial psychology)	14	6.22%
Economics	3	1.33%
Law	10	4.44%
Engineering*	0	0.00%
Engineering (e.g. engineering science, agricultural engineering, chemical engineering, engineering thermodynamics)	0	0.00%
Other	3	1.33%
Architecture	1	0.44%
Urban and regional planning	2	0.89%
GRAND TOTAL (total academic staff sample)	225	100.00%
Total number of academic staff at UFS (total population)	1,532	
Sample as percentage of population	14.69%	

*Note: UFS recently started offering limited engineering subjects as part of a general BSc degree. The absence of survey respondents in this group may be due to academics involved in engineering subjects self-identifying with FNS rather than engineering, or not responding to the survey at all (given the very small number of academics at the UFS who specialise in this disciplinary field).

Survey questionnaires

Academic staff

Table 4.1 indicates the disciplinary fields of academic staff who took part in the online survey. The academic respondents are fairly well distributed across three departments: life and health sciences (LHS) at 21.3 per cent, formal and natural sciences (FNS) at 27.56 per cent, and humanities and social sciences (HSS) at 26.22 per cent. These are followed by the departments of business and management, economics and law (BMEL) and education, with 12 per cent and 11.56 per cent, respectively.

According to Table 4.2, the majority of academic respondents were non-managers, accounting for 59.11 per cent. However, more than a third of the respondents still claimed to be managers (35.11 per cent). The most common level of manager positions was in middle management (28 per cent).

Table 4.2 Survey sample – academic staff by leadership position

Leadership position	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Managers	79	35.11%
Senior management (dean or vice-dean of a faculty)	1	0.44%
Middle management (head or deputy head of academic department)	63	28.00%
Junior management (head or deputy head of academic programme)	11	4.89%
Other (teaching and learning managers)	4	1.78%
Non-managers (not in a leadership position)	133	59.11%
Prefer not to answer	13	5.78%
GRAND TOTAL	225	100.00%

Table 4.3 illustrates the academic position of academic respondents. The dominant academic positions among respondents were in the upper and middle ranks, which accounted for 48.44 per cent and 32.89 per cent, respectively, of the total. Almost one in five (18.67 per cent) occupied a lower academic rank.

Table 4.3 Survey sample – academic staff by academic position/rank

Academic position/rank	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Upper ranks	109	48.44%
Senior professor	4	1.78%
(Full) professor	25	11.11%
Associate professor	21	9.33%
Senior lecturer	59	26.22%
Middle ranks	74	32.89%
Lecturer	74	32.89%
Lower ranks	42	18.67%
Junior lecturer	26	11.56%
Other academic staff member	16	7.11%
GRAND TOTAL	225	100.00%

Table 4.4 shows the distribution of academic respondents in terms of length of service. Those who had worked for between five and 10 years were the largest group with 28.89 per cent. Around a quarter had worked there for less than five years (26.22 per cent) and a similar proportion for between 11 and 20 years (24.44 per cent). One in five (20.44 per cent) had more than 20 years' experience.

Table 4.4 Survey sample – academic staff by length of service (years working at the UFS)

Years working at UFS	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Less than 5 years	59	26.22%
5 to 10 years	65	28.89%
11 to 20 years	55	24.44%
More than 20 years	46	20.44%
GRAND TOTAL	225	100.00%

According to Table 4.5, more than half (56.44 per cent) of all academic respondents cited a doctorate (or equivalent) degree as their highest qualification. The next most dominant highest qualification was master's degree (36 per cent). Only 7.11 per cent said an honours or four-year bachelor's degree was their highest qualification.

Table 4.5 Survey sample – academic staff by highest educational qualification

Highest educational qualification	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Secondary school diploma (or equivalent)	0	0.00%
Vocational training (or equivalent)	0	0.00%
Three-year bachelor's degree (or equivalent)	1	0.44%
Honours degree or four-year bachelor's degree (or equivalent)	16	7.11%
Master's degree (or equivalent)	81	36.00%
Doctorate (or equivalent)	127	56.44%
Other	0	0.00%
GRAND TOTAL	225	100.00%

Administrative staff

Table 4.6 indicates that most administrative staff respondents were engaged in either student support (33.59 per cent) or operational support (30.49 per cent). Those in academic support accounted for one in five of all administrative respondents (20.41 per cent). Although administrative staff in senior management positions took part in the survey, they accounted for only 6.72 per cent of total respondents.

Table 4.6 Survey sample – administrative staff by administrative field

Administrative field	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Operational support	118	30.49%
Facility management (including transport services)	22	5.68%
Financial management	33	8.53%
Human resource (administrative) management	14	3.62%
IT services	28	7.24%
Marketing/public relations (including strategic communication)	21	5.43%
Student support	130	33.59%
International relations	2	0.52%
Student services (e.g. registration, assessment, counselling, housing)	103	26.61%
Faculty administration	25	6.46%
Academic support	79	20.41%
Academic staff development	35	9.04%
Library	23	5.94%
Research administration	21	5.43%
Top management	26	6.72%
Institutional leadership (e.g. rectorate)	5	1.29%
Institutional research	12	3.10%
Quality assurance	3	0.78%
Strategic/academic planning	6	1.55%
Legal affairs	0	0.00%
Other	34	8.79%
GRAND TOTAL (total administrative staff sample)	387	100.00%

Table 4.7 indicates the leadership positions of administrative staff respondents. As with academic respondents, those in non-managerial positions accounted for more than half of the respondents (62.27 per cent). Among those who claimed to be managers (33.33 per cent), middle or junior levels of management were the most common, scoring 14.73 per cent and 15.50 per cent, respectively.

Table 4.7 Survey sample – administrative staff by leadership position

Leadership position	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Managers	129	33.33%
Senior management (head or deputy head of administrative department or member of rectorate)	12	3.10%
Middle management (head or deputy head of division within administrative department)	57	14.73%
Junior management (head or deputy head of unit within administrative division)	60	15.50%
Non-managers (not in a leadership position)	241	62.27%
Prefer not to answer	17	4.39%
GRAND TOTAL	387	100.00%

According to *Table 4.8*, respondents ranking themselves either lower (37.21 per cent) or middle rank (34.63 per cent) were fairly evenly distributed. Those in the upper ranks accounted for around a third of the participants (28.17 per cent).

Table 4.8 Survey sample – administrative staff by administrative position/rank

Administrative position/rank	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents	Job rank	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Upper ranks	109	28.17%	Senior director	2	0.52%
			Director	11	2.84%
			Deputy director	18	4.65%
			Assistant director	32	8.27%
			Chief officer	46	11.89%
Middle ranks	134	34.63%	Senior officer	63	16.28%
			Officer	71	18.35%
Lower ranks	144	37.21%	Senior assistant officer	66	17.05%
			Assistant officer	55	14.21%
			Other administrative staff member	23	5.94%
GRAND TOTAL	387	100.00%	GRAND TOTAL	387	100.00%

Table 4.9 shows that most administrative staff respondents had been with the university either for less than five years (34.37 per cent) or for between five and 10 years (32.56 per cent). Those who had worked for between 11 and 20 years accounted for 20.41 per cent. Only 12.66 per cent of administrative respondents had more than 20 years of experience at the university.

Table 4.9 Survey sample – administrative staff by length of service (years working at the UFS)

Years working at the UFS	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Less than 5 years	133	34.37%
5 to 10 years	126	32.56%
11 to 20 years	79	20.41%
More than 20 years	49	12.66%
GRAND TOTAL	387	100.00%

As Table 4.10 indicates, more than a third of administrative respondents specified an honours degree or four-year bachelor's degree as their highest qualification, with 31.01 per cent. The next most dominant highest qualification was a three-year bachelor's degree, accounting for 23 per cent of the total. Those who cited a secondary school diploma or master's degree accounted for 19.64 per cent and 14.47 per cent, respectively.

Table 4.10 Survey sample – administrative staff by highest educational qualification

Highest educational qualification	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Secondary school diploma (or equivalent)	76	19.64%
Vocational training (or equivalent)	31	8.01%
Three-year bachelor's degree (or equivalent)	89	23.00%
Honours degree or four-year bachelor's degree (or equivalent)	120	31.01%
Master's degree (or equivalent)	56	14.47%
Doctorate (or equivalent)	14	3.62%
Other	1	0.26%
GRAND TOTAL	387	100.00%

Interviews

As Table 4.11 indicates, 13 academics, five administrative staff members, and five student leaders participated in semi-structured individual two-hour interviews and one-hour focus group sessions. The academics included three deans and 10 department heads from the faculties of natural and agricultural sciences (NAS), economic and management sciences (EMS), and the humanities. The department heads represented the departments of physics; geography; microbial, biochemical, and food biotechnology; English; drama and theatre arts; sociology; psychology (clinical, counselling, and research); industrial psychology; public administration and management; and the UFS business school. Interviews were also conducted with the teaching and learning managers from these faculties, and the UFS vice-rectors for academic affairs and operations. A last focus group included five members of the UFS student representative council, with responsibility for academic affairs, student development and environmental affairs, student associations, accessibility and student support, and postgraduate affairs.

Table 4.11 Interview participants

Interviewed actor	Interview type
Rectorate members	
Vice-rector: academic	Individual interview
Vice-rector: operations	Individual interview
Faculty of the Humanities	
Dean: humanities	Individual interview
Teaching and learning manager: humanities	Individual interview
Head of department: English Head of department: psychology Head of department: sociology Head of department: drama and theatre arts	Focus group interview
Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences	
Dean: economic and management sciences	Individual interview
Teaching and learning manager: economic and management sciences	Individual interview
Head of department: UFS business school Head of department: industrial psychology Head of department: public administration and management	Focus group interview
Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences	
Dean: natural and agricultural sciences	Individual interview
Teaching and learning manager: natural and agricultural sciences	Individual interview
Head of department: physics Head of department: geography Head of department: microbial, biochemical, and food biotechnology	Focus group interview
Student Representative Council members	
Member for student development and environmental affairs Member for associations Member for accessibility and student support Member for postgraduate affairs Member for academic affairs at Qwaqwa Campus	Focus group interview

The interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed, and the text was analysed in terms of the key research themes (i.e. effects on teaching and learning, graduate employability, and management; and internal and external factors that play a role in the effectiveness of IQA) and the three lenses identified through the analysis of the survey (knowledge, understanding, and communication).

4.3 Awareness and involvement

This section presents the data regarding IQA awareness and involvement among university stakeholders at UFS. The perspectives of these stakeholders will be triangulated in reference to the findings from the academic and administrative staff surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions.

Defining 'quality' at the UFS

The interview and focus group guidelines suggested opening the discussion on IQA by inviting respondents to present what they thought were the most important attributes of 'quality'. Faculty staff and students identified the theme of **graduate employability** as a main focus, despite the fact that the university does not emphasize this aspect in its strategic profile. Associated with this definition was the belief that students should be equipped with the right graduate attributes. Participants made a number of suggestions as to what these attributes might be. These included:

- ... enable me to deal with all the socio-economic issues I come across ... (Student)
- ... to think out of the box and innovatively. (Student)
- ... a better understanding of society ... (Senior Management)
- ... able to bring a difference to the political landscape of the country. (Student)
- ... the capacity of students to think critically, independently, and to have a deeper understanding of the academic work with which they engage ... (Academic)

Figure 4.1 Most important attributes of quality according to staff and students



One group of interviewees also mentioned that producing good graduates meant producing the new generation of researchers and academics for the university. In other words, producing students who can and want to embark on a research career was an indicator of quality education.

The next most prevalent definition of quality concerned curriculum content, that is the 'delivery of quality content itself' (EMS). Reaching peer standards and having a good reputation were also mentioned often, as was good teaching. Other less prevalent definitions included the existence of an academic culture and of a culture of excellence, academic rigour, relevance and responsiveness, good assessment practices, and aligned institutional systems. Quality was also defined as 'the relationship we have with the students, particularly undergraduate students, in an environment where there is a big discrepancy in terms of student background' (EMS). As this indicates, all the definitions of quality suggested by the interviewees were either directly or indirectly associated with teaching and learning, graduate employability, and management practices.

Staff awareness of and involvement in IQA processes and tools

Staff awareness of and involvement in internal quality assurance processes and tools are major factors conditioning the effectiveness of IQA at a university. These issues were mainly explored using the findings of the academic and administrative staff survey questionnaires. Interview data will be referred to where relevant.

First of all, the survey questionnaires investigated the extent to which academic and administrative staff were aware of institutional documents relating to IQA (see *Table A.1*). It seemed that the majority of academic and administrative staff respondents were not aware of the existence of IQA documents at the university. Both academic and administrative staff respondents were less aware of the quality manual than of the quality policy. This is supported by the interview data. Only two interview participants indicated their awareness of institutional documents specifically for IQA, and one of them said that they (a) had not read the documents and (b) believed that they had ‘not yet filtered into the consciousness at faculty level sufficiently’. Some staff elaborated on this, saying that existing IQA policy documents were not readable because they were ‘too academic’ and that policy frameworks should be translated into more communicable formats. However, it is interesting to note that there were still some staff in the respective group indicating their familiarity with the quality policy and manual. This further suggests that the use of such institutional documents is limited to those responsible for IQA processes and instruments at the university.

In terms of staff perceptions of their involvement in IQA processes and instruments (see *Table A.2*), both academic and administrative staff indicated that they were rarely actively involved in the IQA processes and instruments used at university level. However, perceptions on the feedback, use, and usefulness of IQA processes and instruments were relatively higher among both staff groups. Both academic and administrative staff said that they received feedback most often from the individual performance target agreements. While perceptions of the use and usefulness of self-evaluation (which is a part of the departmental/programme review process) were highest among academic staff respondents, administrative staff regarded individual performance target agreements as the most widely used and most useful IQA instrument at the university.

Similar trends were observed in terms of IQA processes and instruments at faculty/unit level (see *Table A.2*). Overall, staff perceptions of involvement were lower than those concerning feedback, use, and usefulness. In particular, involvement in service-level agreements was markedly lower among administrative staff, compared to their perceptions of its feedback, use, and usefulness. There were also gaps in academic staff and student perceptions regarding student engagement surveys, with the exception of course evaluations. Academic staff respondents considered themselves to be highly involved in course evaluation, with the majority also rating it high in terms of feedback, use, and usefulness.

4.4 The effects of the internal quality assurance system

This section describes the effects of the university’s IQA system on (i) teaching and learning, (ii) graduate employability, and (iii) managerial effectiveness at UFS, from the perspective of university staff and student leaders. As the interviewees had relatively little to say on the topic of managerial effectiveness, the findings concerning the effects of IQA on management draw more heavily on the survey findings.

Teaching and learning

In the interviews, academics across the faculties identified curriculum review as an effective IQA tool for teaching and learning. This process implies a review of the structure of the curriculum (i.e., majors, module combination and progression, and the integrity of programmes), which is done through a nationally driven process of aligning the level of higher education programmes with those of the HEQSF. In addition to its intended effects on programme content, exit level outcomes, and overall structure (i.e. within-programme alignment), the interview data suggest a number of secondary positive effects of curriculum review. Interviewees noted that it has improved communication between faculties; facilitated better alignment between modules, between programmes,

and between academic departments; stimulated engagement with external stakeholders; and provided much-needed support to academics attempting to effect change and improvement in their departments.

I would say that the whole process of curriculum review is very useful for me because I came here with this vision that did not correspond with that the people in the department have had for 20/30 years and it was sort of a big struggle but it was good to have DIRAP behind me and so I think a lot of what happened is simply me driving it. (Humanities)

Academics' acknowledgement of the impact of curriculum review on programme change is mirrored in senior management's enthusiasm for this instrument. However, the deeper notion of IQA as a facilitating tool for academic staff to engage in internal critique of the curriculum, while articulated by top management, was not echoed in any of the interviews with faculty staff.

The survey data suggest that self-evaluation, which is a part of departmental (programme) review, had the greatest impact in terms of quality on the coherence of programmes, followed by the content coverage of courses and programmes. Similarly, the majority of academic staff respondents agreed that course evaluation contributes considerably to improved teaching performance. This is closely related to the higher perceptions of these instruments with respect to involvement, feedback, use, and usefulness. This corroborates the assumption that the level of stakeholder awareness and involvement conditions the impact of IQA processes and instruments.

However, the survey results suggest that course evaluation has a less positive effect on student assessment and learning conditions, with the least impact on content coverage of student programmes (see *Table A.3*). The interviewees were also less positive about the usefulness of course evaluation by students for improved teaching and learning, and this sentiment was expressed by staff members from all of the faculties.

We also have the same concerns about having a student evaluating the course content and things like that. So we tend not to look as much on to that part. We see what they say, but we don't really act on that. We use that more to react on the method of things they experienced. (NAS)

Student engagement surveys (both by students and by lecturers) are perceived as less useful than other instruments. This is immediately apparent from analysis of the survey and interview data, which show (a) relatively low levels of involvement by survey respondents in student engagement surveys, and (b) no mention of this instrument in the interviews. The results concerning engagement surveys are interesting given that two of these types of surveys were administered across all UFS faculties on the Bloemfontein campus in 2013 and 2014, and a third at the humanities and NAS faculties on two campuses in 2014. Detailed reports on the survey results were made available to all stakeholders, which is also reflected in the survey data in the relatively ratings given to feedback from these instruments. Despite their small effects on teaching and learning, the survey data indicated that the student engagement surveys still had a positive impact on teaching performance. This further suggests the importance of raising academic staff awareness of the use and usefulness of student engagement surveys in relation to teaching performance.

There was a tendency in the survey responses to regard the more managerial IQA instruments – i.e. unit performance target agreement, individual performance target agreements, and monitoring of quantitative/statistical performance indicators – as less influential on teaching and learning, particularly in relation to learning conditions. These quantitative measures and methodologies are also in general regarded by the university community as not designed for the purpose of improving teaching and learning.

Graduate employability

Contrary to popular discourse, graduate unemployment is not a real challenge in South Africa (SAGEA, 2015; Makoni, 2014; Altbeker and Storme, 2013; Moleke, 2005). In fact, among South Africans with tertiary qualifications, only 3.6 per cent are not economically active, while 8.2 per cent were unemployed in 2015 (Statistics South Africa, 2015), indicating that the majority of South Africans with tertiary qualifications are in employment. Furthermore, most academic staff at UFS have spent their whole professional life at the institution, which prevents them from thinking about graduate employability from a competitive point of view. Considering both national and institutional contexts, UFS has not, up to now, articulated an explicit discourse on graduate employability related to the labour market. This explains the fact that UFS has established neither a set of shared graduate attributes across disciplines nor any tracking system for graduate employment.

Analysis of the interview data on staff perceptions of the relationship between IQA and employability clearly shows that there are a number of quite different approaches to employability across faculties and disciplines. In the humanities, staff members did not mention employability in the context of quality unless prompted. As one interviewee stated: 'I don't think that employability at this stage features at all'. Academic staff from EMS and NAS, however, considered employability to be a critical part of quality of education, evidenced by the fact that employability was mentioned very early in all the interviews with leaders from these faculties (including department heads). One participant, asked to define what it meant to have a high-quality education, mentioned 'the fact that the student needs to go out and do a job outside' (NAS). Another said:

It does not make any sense to think that the university does not pay enough attention to this because we train students to get employment after graduation. The content of the module must be up to standard and speak to the business fraternity. (EMS)

The discrepancy is also found between formative and professional degree programmes. In the humanities, most academics interviewed pointed up the different impact of professional programmes (such as psychology, criminology, journalism, or music) and formative (or generalist) programmes (such as English, philosophy, or anthropology) on employment and employers' expectations.

There isn't a career with that approach. There is a set of competencies that anthropology will teach you that you can then apply in certain areas but there isn't a career in anthropology ... (Humanities)

By contrast, professional programmes are obliged to train graduates in terms of a specified skill set and work experience – i.e. attributes. For example, most professional bodies require internships or some other form of work-integrated learning, which exposes prospective graduates to the demands of the workplace. Most EMS and NAS programmes are actively engaged in relevant professional councils, while formative degrees in the humanities are removed from the discourse of employability. What, for example, does an anthropology student do on graduation and where does he/she work?

Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that a relatively large share of respondents to the survey said that they did not know whether or not the specified IQA instruments had an impact on improving employability (see *Table A.3*), indicating that many UFS academic staff are unsure about the role of IQA in improving employability and the link between IQA and employability. According to the survey data, monitoring of performance indicators contributes the least to graduate employability. This was confirmed in the interviews, which recorded no mention of employability indicators of any kind. As one interviewee from the humanities said: 'Bottom line is we don't measure employability'.

It is interesting to note that assessment of graduate attributes (students' competences) was thought by academic survey respondents to considerably enhance graduate

employability. The survey data indicated a relatively higher involvement in student competency assessments among academic staff respondents (irrespective of discipline).¹¹ This contrasts with the interview data which showed a definite lack of clarity about graduate attributes across faculties. This lack of clarity is notable in the NAS interviews, which suggest that NAS staff members still make use of the term 'soft skills', implying that discipline-specific knowledge and skills are not an integral part of graduate attributes. The cross-referencing of the survey and interview results seems to confirm the lack of clarity about graduate attributes across faculties, which further challenges the validity of the survey results.

Some interviewees identified other institutional practices, either directly or indirectly related to IQA instruments and processes, which improved the employability of graduates. Interview participants mentioned the positive effect of curriculum review on the first-year common course (UFS101) that all students have to take in order to acquire specific skills and continuous assessment practices on employability. Some interviewees also noted that UFS organizes faculty-based employment fairs throughout the year to provide opportunities for students to interact with potential employers. It is, however, not clear from any of the interviews what impact these have in terms of employment or students' exposure to the range of jobs they could do.

Interview data highlighted some of the areas which need to be improved in terms of graduate employability. First of all, interviewees regarded interactions with the labour market as the most critical IQA mechanism for employability, including with employers, professional associations, and alumni. Currently, the level of engagement with the labour market varies depending on the faculty. EMS and NAS frequently consult all three groups in the process of programme development, while in the humanities this is limited to consultation with professional bodies only, where relevant (i.e. psychology). The unevenness of interaction with the labour market between faculties can also be explained by the lack of resources available to the institutional careers office and discipline-based career services, as indicated in the interviews. Furthermore, most interviewees indicated that UFS does not receive adequate feedback from its alumni about their experience in the world of work. There are exceptions though, including in fine arts and the UFS business school, where alumni who return as postgraduates are considered a valuable source of employability feedback, which has, in some instances, resulted in curriculum changes. What is known, however, is anecdotal at best and therefore does not compensate for the lack of a systematic measure of the success or otherwise of UFS's graduates.

Managerial effectiveness

Administrative staff were asked in the survey questionnaire about the impact of specified IQA instruments on management. The data indicate an overall positive effect on management (see *Table A.3*). In particular, individual performance target agreements were reported to have the greatest impact on all management areas presented in the questionnaire: administrative operations, evidence-based decision-making, service orientation, and strategic planning. This aligned with the higher perceptions of administrative staff respondents as to their involvement in these instruments and their feedback, use, and usefulness (see *Table A.2*). It is interesting to note that unit performance target agreements were perceived to have less impact on all areas of management than individual performance target agreements. This can be explained by the survey questionnaire finding that only a few administrative respondents had been involved in unit performance target agreements.

11. The assessment of student' competences through means other than tests, examinations, and specific, discipline-based learning outcomes of modules.

Some interviewees mentioned that performance indicator monitoring improved evidence-based decision-making through the provision of success rates. This is supported by the survey questionnaire finding that the monitoring of indicators contributed positively to evidence-based decision-making, along with individual performance target agreements. According to administrative staff respondents, this instrument had the greatest effect on strategic planning, compared with other IQA instruments and processes presented in the survey questionnaire. Furthermore, administrative staff respondents rated the feedback, use, and usefulness of this instrument more highly than did their academic counterparts, suggesting that it has more positive impacts on management than on either teaching and learning or graduate employability.

Most faculty staff members who were interviewed agreed that IQA had positive effects on management in their faculties as well as on the university in general. One interviewee from EMS noted that IQA ‘promotes participatory management style so that everybody understands the processes. Staff members from EMS and humanities specified how IQA data were being used to allocate resources. The NAS interviewees were less definite about resource allocation, but noted an indirect effect in that ‘the IQA measures put in place have helped to expose these loopholes’ in current resource allocation models.

Despite these benefits, some negative effects of IQA on management processes were also mentioned in the interviews with academic staff in leadership positions. These included, for example, concerns that IQA limits the decision-making autonomy of academic managers and that it increases their administrative workload (see *Section 5.1* for more on this). The sentiment was expressed in relation to the role of IQA in shifting academics’ time and focus away from academic work and towards administrative and managerial tasks.

4.5 Conditioning factors

This section presents the internal and external factors that are considered by different stakeholders to condition the effective functioning of the IQA system at UFS. Internal conditioning factors were investigated using data generated from survey questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions, while external conditioning factors were explored only through the qualitative interviews.

Internal factors

There is a prevalent perception of IQA as a form of managerialism, with the manager cast as a kind of ‘Big Brother’ who is robbing them of their autonomy and offending them through apparent distrust. Given the conceptual origins of quality assurance, its association with managerialism and neo-liberal regimes in higher education, and its possible association with individual performance targets and management, it is unsurprising that both university management and government are viewed with considerable suspicion when it comes to the full implementation of IQA regimes. This sentiment was articulated by one interviewee as follows:

If you think about how academics are brought up, they are brought up to have an inherent pride in what they are doing. So I think one of the elements of the system is the professional identity of an academic and for many of them these systems are offensive because then they imply that they don’t have the integrity. (Humanities)

Ironically, leadership support was perceived by academic staff respondents as the most important internal factor contributing to an effective IQA system. The survey findings indicate also that both academic and administrative staff perceived leadership support as highly present at the university. The interview data echo these results. Overall, the interviewees agreed that the shift in focus towards excellence and improved quality assurance would not have happened without the current rectorate (in particular the vice-chancellor and the deputy vice-chancellors for academic matters and research). For

example, a number of faculty staff members attributed their ability to effectively support and manage teaching and learning improvement directly to specific institutional support structures. These structures include the CTL, DIRAP, the Postgraduate School, the Higher Degrees Committee, and the APDC. However, there is less agreement with regards to faculty and departmental leadership, with interviewees from one faculty commending their leadership's support for IQA, while others recommended that their faculty leaders take more responsibility for IQA than they currently do.

Good data information systems and transparent information on IQA procedures were also considered by both staff groups to be highly important factors that condition the effective functioning of the IQA system (see *Table A.4*). According to the interview data, academic staff also associated data generated from the IQA system with the improvement of quality at UFS. This is explained by the accessibility and integrity of the university's management information system. However, some academic staff members strongly expressed their concern about the reliability of survey data from some of the IQA instruments at the university because they considered the response rates to be insufficient, or the data to be too subjective, or the lack of anonymity to be unethical.

But the problem is that it is extremely difficult to manage the process if there are discrepancies in the data. Because you actually need the support of the data and the outcomes of all these measures to support your actions; to make it easier for management to actually implement all of these QA measures. Also, the moment there are discrepancies, then it opens the door for people to not engage ... (EMS)

This aligns with administrative staff perceptions on the transparency of information on IQA procedures, which they thought of as important but not yet present at the university (see *Table A.4*). This suggests that there is still room for improvement in the university's data information system, particularly in terms of the validity and reliability of IQA instruments. This can be achieved through the provision of clear procedures for those who take part in IQA instruments and processes.

The survey results suggest that the active participation of all stakeholder groups – including staff members and students – in IQA procedures was perceived by both sets of staff respondents as an important conditioning factor for IQA, though it is not seen as being consistently present at UFS. The perception that the discourse of change and quality, together with its tools and methodologies, is top-down in nature, rather than rooted in departments and academics, represents a weakness of the system. Some interviewees indicated that although this may be the case, the lack of engagement by academics did not leave many alternatives to a top-down approach. Despite the lack of recognition among both staff groups of the importance of student support, it was still identified by administrative staff as the least present internal factor at the university. This indicates the unequal participation of stakeholders at the university in relation to IQA instruments and processes.

Financial incentives to staff members was also perceived as an important factor conditioning the effectiveness of the IQA system; one that is not sufficiently present at the university, according to academic staff respondents (see *Table A.4*). The survey data highlight some exceptions in this regard, noting that individuals sometimes have more internal motivations, such as 'a drive ... to change things although the system does not require such from them; ... they want to do it because it is part of their personal drive' (NAS). In addition to the provision of financial incentives, some staff members pointed out the importance of human resources, which reportedly affects IQA in terms of staff competencies and workload. All of those interviewed – including staff from all three faculties as well as the students – lamented the impact of IQA activities on their time. It is clear that staff members perceive a lack of human resources as having a negative impact on IQA, in terms of a need for additional staff members on the one hand, and a need to

develop the IQA competencies in existing staff. In particular, academic staff development programmes in CTL were mentioned as effective in developing their capacity for teaching and learning.

External factors

The main external factor that affects the university's internal quality assurance is the nation-wide quality regulatory system in higher education, which involves the Department of Higher Education and Training and the Council for Higher Education, which hosts the Higher Education Quality Committee. CHE, for example, is responsible for aligning all academic programmes in South African HEIs with the requirements of the national HEQSF and for implementing the Quality Enhancement Project in order to improve student success. The interview data revealed mixed opinions about the role and value of these external processes in relation to IQA at UFS. For some interviewees, they represent nothing more than an exercise in compliance. Negative comments concern frustration caused by lengthy bureaucratic processes, doubt about the competencies of those who engage with the regular reports submitted by institutions to government bodies, and a lack of a sense of ownership among some university staff members.

No [these external bodies have not been supportive]. I think we learn how to play the system and we report on what we want to report on but not necessarily what is going on. (NAS)

For others, they are the key driver for the development of the IQA system at UFS. These participants contended that there would be no IQA without these external bodies. Interestingly, some staff members agreed that external quality bodies allow sufficient autonomy for the university to manage its own quality assurance system and related remedial actions.

Besides this, there are a number of professional bodies in South Africa that have accreditation powers over professional programmes, including the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants, and the Health Professions Council of South Africa. Both statutory and non-statutory professional bodies are very important since many graduates must register with these councils in order to enter practice, which means that the qualification-granting institutions must comply with the requirements of the councils. Overall, the interviewees find these structures supportive of IQA, except when there exists a lack of alignment between the requirements of professional bodies and those of the national quality assurance bodies.

Finally, one staff member noted that partnerships with international universities also play a role in IQA, specifically in terms of international benchmarking.

4.6 Overall effectiveness of the IQA system

This section describes staff perceptions of the overall effectiveness of the IQA system at the University of Free State, mainly with reference to survey questionnaire data. Views as to the main paradigm of UFS's IQA system are first presented, followed by perceptions of workload and the benefits of the internal quality assurance system. The extent to which the IQA system is evidence-based and improves management decisions will also be discussed, together with staff evaluations of the overall effectiveness of the university's IQA system.

There is a dichotomy between academic and administrative staff perceptions of the overall IQA paradigm at UFS. A third of academic staff perceived compliance with external standards as the dominant paradigm of the university's IQA system, while a similar percentage of administrative staff indicated improvement (see *Table A.5*). Interestingly, the second dominant paradigm was identified as improvement by academic staff and

as compliance with external standards by administrative staff. This suggests that both compliance with external standards and improvement are perceived as important paradigms of the IQA system at UFS, despite their somewhat opposing nature.

Administrative staff considered their workload in relation to IQA instruments and processes to be higher than did academic staff, with more than a third of them viewing it as high (see *Table A.6*). However, the majority of academic staff still rated their workload as moderate to very high. This is closely associated with the benefits of IQA as perceived by academic and administrative staff respondents. When asked about the benefits of IQA, more than a third of respondents from both staff groups indicated that the benefits were high. Less than 10 per cent of academic and administrative staff chose either 'none at all' or 'low' to describe the benefits of IQA at the university. This indicates that both staff groups viewed their workload related to IQA and its benefits as relatively high at the university.

Appreciation of the overall effectiveness of the IQA system is higher among administrative staff than among academic staff (see *Table A.7*). This is also demonstrated in administrative staff's evaluation of the extent to which IQA contributes to improved management decisions, with a higher percentage of administrative staff indicating that they either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that IQA contributes to improved management decision-making. When it comes to the extent to which IQA procedures are based on evidence, administrative staff also had more positive perceptions of the IQA procedures, with almost half of them indicating the evidence-based nature of IQA. It is interesting to note that a similar proportion of academic staff to those opting to 'agree' chose 'undecided' when asked about improved management decisions and evidence-based procedures. It is evident that there are more mixed evaluations of the IQA system among academic staff respondents than among administrative staff. However, as these assessments were measured in relation to administrative fields (i.e., management decision and evidence-based procedures), it cannot be concluded that academic staff appreciated the effectiveness of the IQA system less than administrative staff.

5. Conclusion

The development of IQA at UFS began with an experimental phase of self-evaluation during the 1990s. The more formal implementation of internal quality assurance at UFS in the early 2000s was a response to the setting up of the national quality agency. The 2006 HEQC institutional audit of the university showed that, in many respects, IQA remained in the early stages of development and was often used to comply with external policies rather than as a tool for change at the university. The appointment of new university leadership in 2009 created the space to rethink IQA, its conceptualization, organization, and deployment, therefore finally establishing the IQA system that is now mainstreamed with academic processes. This chapter summarizes the key findings of the study in relation to the university's IQA system and provides a number of recommendations for both UFS and other HEIs, within and beyond South Africa.

5.1 Summary

A major finding of the research is that there are various understandings of the main attributes of quality among university stakeholders, with graduate employability strongly associated with quality by students and staff, with the exception of those working or studying in the humanities. Both academic and administrative staff had a relatively low awareness of institutional quality documents, although more academic staff found quality policy useful for their work than did administrative staff. Both staff groups were less aware of the existence of a quality manual at the university than they were of the existence of a quality policy. When it came to the IQA instruments, both academic and administrative staff indicated that they were most involved in individual target agreements, with administrative staff reporting more positive perceptions of this instrument in terms of feedback, use, and usefulness. Academic staff identified self-evaluation at university level and course evaluation at faculty level as the most widely used and useful IQA instruments.

Overall, the IQA instruments were perceived as having a positive effect on teaching and learning, as well as on management. Effects on employability were not viewed as much present. According to academic staff survey respondents, course evaluation considerably improved teaching performance, while self-evaluation was considered the most effective at programme level. The overall coherence and content coverage of programmes were reported to have been significantly enhanced through self-evaluation. Alongside more management-related IQA instruments – unit performance target agreement, individual performance target agreements, and monitoring of performance indicators – student engagement surveys, both by students and by lecturers, were perceived as having less effect on teaching and learning than other instruments and processes at UFS. However, individual performance target agreements had the greatest effect on the overall management aspects: administrative operations, evidence-based decision-making, service orientation, and strategic planning. Other positive effects of IQA mentioned by interviewees related particularly to resource allocation and participatory management style. The lesser impact on graduate employability relates to the low graduate unemployment rate in South Africa and the varying approaches between academic faculties and disciplines at UFS. Furthermore, considering the lack of clarity concerning graduate attributes across faculties, the higher effects of student competency (graduate attribute) assessment perceived by academic respondents in the survey should be taken with caution. Interviewees, however, noted the positive effect of curriculum review on employability, with others commending the practices of employment fairs and the interactions with labour market in several faculties (i.e. NAS and EMS).

In terms of conditioning factors, nation-wide regulatory bodies and professional councils were considered important external factors that affect, in either a positive or negative way, the effective functioning of the university's IQA system. Some academic staff expressed in the interviews concerns about a reduced sense of ownership among university staff members owing to the interventions of such external bodies in quality assurance activities at the university. Despite the prevalence of scepticism as to university management's role in IQA instruments and processes, leadership support was perceived by academic staff as a highly important internal factor, followed by good data information systems. Many faculty staff referred to specific institutional support structures, such as CTL and DIRAP, in the interviews, noting that leadership support through such structures helped them to develop their capacity to support teaching and learning. It is interesting to note that many academic staff were, however, less positive about leadership support at faculty and department level. Active participation of all stakeholder groups was identified as another important, yet inconsistently present, factor at UFS. The provision of financial incentives and human resources was suggested in both surveys and interviews as a solution to encourage academic staff engagement in the IQA system and, therefore, improve the effectiveness of the IQA system at UFS.

The main paradigms of the university's IQA system identified by staff were compliance with external standards and improvement. Both academic and administrative staff agreed that their IQA workload was high, though they also rated the benefits of IQA highly. Interestingly, there were more mixed evaluations among academic staff as to the overall effectiveness of the IQA system than were found among administrative staff. In particular, as many academic staff respondents chose 'undecided' as 'agree' when asked whether IQA procedures were evidence-based. Similarly, some academic staff commended the IQA contribution to improved management decisions, while others were unsure about the extent to which IQA enhanced management decisions.

5.2 Lessons learned from the case study

Despite the distinctive context of South Africa in general, and of the University of Free State in particular, there are some lessons learned for the implementation of IQA in other universities, which can be derived from this research, as follows.

Strong integration of IQA system with academic planning. The IQA system at UFS has three main characteristics. First, from the point of view of its support structures, it is well integrated with institutional research and academic planning processes. This demonstrates that quality assurance is not an add-on to the core functions of the university but, on the contrary, is a constitutive part of planning, implementation, and evaluation of academic processes. Secondly, the IQA system coordinates decentralised (often isolated) quality assurance structures, activities and findings from across the institution. This is achieved through an institutional policy framework for quality enhancement; but also through the synthesis of data and information provided by tools such as student engagement surveys, course evaluations, programme reviews and quantitative indicators. This makes possible the third main characteristic of the UFS IQA system, namely that it facilitates evidence-based decision-making at faculty and institutional level by developing monitoring systems and generating of knowledge about the university – especially knowledge in relation to curriculum and pedagogy.

Awareness and understanding of IQA system among staff. The perceptions of stakeholders revealed different levels of awareness and understanding of UFS's IQA system and, more importantly, variations in the extent to which this awareness and understanding is internalized at different levels of the institution, from senior managements to support services based in academic departments. By awareness of IQA, the research refers to respondents' recognition of the presence of an instrument, e.g., does UFS have a QA policy? By understanding of IQA, it refers to respondents' ability to identify the purpose

of different instruments and their relative weight in terms of involvement, feedback, use and usefulness. Overall, both academic and administrative staff demonstrated a lack of awareness and a lack of understanding of current institutional policies relating to IQA as well as specific IQA instruments and processes. Although certain interviewees indicated that they were aware of institutional documents specifically for IQA, they did not show any real understanding of such documents as they had either not read them or found them too difficult to understand, describing them as ‘too academic’. This was also demonstrated in the survey respondents’ varying perceptions concerning levels of involvement and the feedback, use, and usefulness of IQA instruments and processes at the university. On average, staff members perceived themselves as relatively less involved in IQA instruments and processes. However, those who reported involvement showed relatively positive perceptions regarding the feedback, use, and usefulness of these instruments and processes. As the effectiveness of IQA largely depends on levels of involvement and perceived usefulness, more attention should be paid to facilitating awareness and understanding of the IQA system among staff.

Communication is key to the effective functioning of the university’s IQA system.

Qualitative responses from the interviews confirmed that communication about IQA remained inadequate, especially at faculty level, which hindered the effective functioning of the IQA system at UFS. By communication, the research means the extent to which management perspectives, as expressed in frameworks or guidelines, are disseminated, discussed, and internalized by respondents. Academic staff members in leadership positions indicated that they believed that an important aspect of communication was the ability to develop a shared discourse and responsibility over quality improvement between senior management and staff. However, it is also imperative that academic staff make efforts to engage actively in such discourse amongst themselves. Currently, there is widespread academic resistance to change at UFS. As indicated earlier, a large proportion of the academic workforce at UFS are close to retirement and are less interested in being innovative in their work. Also, the lack of consistency across and within faculties in levels of understanding and commitment to IQA had driven academic staff to doubt leadership support at faculty and department level. It is critical to ensure that there is appropriate *communication* at all levels, from the executive of the university to academic staff in the classroom, about the objectives of the UFS academic project, the role of IQA in relation to it, and the tools and policies supporting it.

Development of IQA system with a focus on employability. More attention should be paid to graduate employability in developing the IQA system. Despite the close association between employability and quality at the university, this aspect is neither articulated in the strategic plan of the university nor in the IQA instruments and processes. This has resulted in inconsistent approaches to employability and varying understandings of graduate attributes (student competencies) within the university community, as shown in the interview findings. In order to improve quality at the university, employability should be taken into account in the development of future strategic plans in order to bring into line the currently different approaches to employability and graduate attributes across faculties. This, furthermore, will result in positive effects from existing IQA instruments relating to employability, such as assessment of graduate attributes (student competencies). Moreover, as interaction with the labour market was highlighted by many interviewees as the most critical IQA mechanism for employability, additional IQA instruments and processes to promote such interaction should be further developed. The recent effort to introduce graduate tracer studies at UFS can be understood in this context, as well as being seen as an effort to improve quality of education through graduate employability at the university.

Appendix: Survey results

Table A.1 Awareness of institutional documents specifically for IQA

Does the UFS have institutional documents specifically for internal quality assurance (IQA), and do you consider it useful for your own work?

Respondent group	Response option	Quality policy/strategy	Quality manual/handbook
Academic staff	Yes, this document exists and is useful for my work	35.24% (74)	17.14% (36)
	Yes, but this document is not useful for my own work	9.05% (19)	3.81% (8)
	Yes, it exists but I do not have to deal with it	12.38% (26)	6.67% (14)
	No, the UFS does not have such a document	1.90% (4)	6.19% (13)
	I don't know	41.43% (87)	66.19% (139)
	TOTAL	100.00% (210)	100.00% (210)
Administrative staff	Yes, this document exists and is useful for my work	28.65% (100)	18.34% (64)
	Yes, but this document is not useful for my own work	6.88% (24)	4.58% (16)
	Yes, it exists but I do not have to deal with it	13.47% (47)	9.74% (34)
	No, the UFS does not have such a document	4.01% (14)	8.88% (31)
	I don't know	46.99% (164)	58.45% (204)
	TOTAL	100.00% (349)	100.00% (349)

Note: Number of respondents in brackets.

Table A.2 Involvement, feedback, and use of IQA instruments and procedures (averages)

In this section, you are requested to provide information on your personal involvement in the process of preparation, analysis, and improvement related to the different internal quality assurance (IQA) instruments and procedures mentioned hereafter.

IQA instrument		Self-evaluation	External review	Programme approval	Monitoring of indicators	Unit performance target agreements	Individual performance target agreements	Service level agreements	Student engagement surveys by students	Student engagement surveys by lecturers	Course evaluation	Academic staff development programmes	Assessment of students' competences
Respondent group and survey question													
Academic staff	Are you personally involved?	2.70	1.46	1.66	1.46	1.59	2.33		1.93	1.63	3.73	2.05	2.01
	Do you receive feedback?	3.71	3.55	3.32	2.93	3.21	3.74		3.54	3.52	4.28	3.05	3.45
	Do you use the information / data / results / findings?	3.73	3.30	3.32	3.05	3.19	3.53		3.41	3.32	4.14	3.08	3.56
	Do you find it useful?	3.81	3.45	3.32	3.07	3.09	3.41		3.28	3.34	3.92	3.50	3.85
Administrative staff	Are you personally involved?	2.41	1.25	1.32	1.63	1.24	2.09	1.55					
	Do you receive feedback?	3.25	3.14	3.15	3.36	3.21	3.63	3.22					
	Do you use the information / data / results / findings?	3.25	3.07	3.09	3.38	3.13	3.64	3.32					
	Do you find it useful?	3.37	3.19	3.43	3.47	3.02	3.71	3.46					

Note: Averages were calculated as follows: 1. A numerical value was attributed to response categories with, for instance, 5 = very much and 1 = not at all. 2. Averages were then calculated in the following way: (number of responses x 5) + (number of responses x 4) + (number of responses x 3) + (number of responses x 2) + (number of responses x 1) / the total number of responses.

Table A.3 Effects on teaching and learning, employability, and administrative processes (averages)

Does this instrument contribute to the improvement of the following aspects of teaching and learning or administrative processes?

IQA instrument		Self-evaluation	External review	Programme approval	Monitoring of indicators	Unit performance target agreements	Individual performance target agreements	Service level agreements	Student engagement surveys by students	Student engagement surveys by lecturers	Course evaluation	Academic staff development programmes	Assessment of students' competences
Respondent group and survey question													
Academic staff	Student assessment system	3.13	2.55	2.55	2.40	2.53	2.28		2.52	2.63	3.05	2.94	3.10
	Employability of graduates	2.38	2.14	2.05	1.69	1.87	1.81		1.94	1.94	1.82	1.91	2.53
	Learning conditions	2.95	2.52	2.45	2.33	2.30	2.20		2.66	2.49	2.77	2.61	2.85
	Content coverage of courses	3.42	2.86	2.85	2.40	2.49	2.33		2.56	2.69	3.02	2.68	3.07
	Overall coherence of a study programme	3.42	2.77	2.85	2.50	2.51	2.43		2.63	2.72	3.02	2.55	3.03
	Content coverage of study programmes	3.28	2.66	2.83	2.38	2.49	2.35		2.48	2.55	2.73	2.59	2.96
	Teaching performance	3.25	2.57	2.58	2.50	2.74	2.81		2.84	2.86	3.55	3.11	3.10
Administrative staff	Effectiveness of administrative operations	3.40	3.26	3.17	3.48	2.79	3.60	3.31					
	Evidence-based decision-making	3.39	3.26	3.04	3.45	2.94	3.49	3.04					
	Service orientation	3.39	3.26	3.02	3.53	2.98	3.60	3.20					
	Strategic planning	3.42	3.28	3.07	3.50	2.94	3.48	3.03					

Note: All figures are averages (see Table A.2 for explanation).

Table A.4 Internal conditioning factors – importance and presence (averages)

The following internal factors may play a role in the effectiveness of IQA activities, instruments and procedures. Please indicate (a) how important you think each factor is in general, and (b) to what extent you think each of the same factors is present at the UFS.

Internal conditioning factor		Leadership support	Financial incentives as a top-up of the salary for contribution of staff	Support by students	Visibility of measures deduced from IQA procedures	Good data information system	Transparent information on IQA procedures	Scientific evaluations of IQA procedures	Active participation of all stakeholders' groups
Academic staff	Importance	4.55	4.08	3.96	3.86	4.36	4.34	4.07	4.05
	Presence	2.84	1.77	2.44	2.20	2.47	2.33	2.10	2.22
Administrative staff	Importance	4.45	4.02	3.69	3.93	4.47	4.23	3.90	4.08
	Presence	2.55	2.03	1.81	2.04	2.62	2.08	1.89	1.97

Note: All figures are averages (see Table A.2 for explanation).

Table A.5 Perceptions of IQA – Overall purpose of IQA (percentage of respondents)

In your opinion, what is the overall purpose of IQA at the UFS?

Purpose	Accountability towards stakeholders	Compliance with external standards	Control	Enhanced organisational learning	Improvement	Other	TOTAL
Academic staff	11.29% (21)	33.33% (62)	10.22% (19)	18.28% (34)	24.73% (46)	2.15% (4)	100.00% (186)
Administrative staff	17.84% (48)	20.45% (55)	14.87% (40)	12.64% (34)	31.97% (86)	2.23% (6)	100.00% (268)

Note: Number of respondents in brackets.

Table A.6 Perceptions of IQA – Workload versus benefits of IQA (percentage of respondents)

How would you judge (a) your own workload with IQA tools and procedures and (b) the overall benefits of IQA for the UFS?

Respondent group and survey question		Response option	Very high	High	Moderate	Low	None at all	I don't know	TOTAL
		Academic staff	IQA workload	12.90% (24)	24.19% (45)	33.87% (63)	13.44% (25)	4.30% (8)	11.29% (21)
	IQA benefits	8.60% (16)	40.32% (75)	31.18% (58)	8.60% (16)	1.08% (2)	10.22% (19)	100.00% (186)	
Administrative staff	IQA workload	10.41% (28)	30.86% (83)	25.28% (68)	10.78% (29)	4.09% (11)	18.59% (50)	100.00% (269)	
	IQA benefits	17.47% (47)	36.43% (98)	18.96% (51)	6.69% (18)	2.23% (6)	18.22% (49)	100.00% (269)	

Note: Number of respondents in brackets.

Table A.7 Perceptions of IQA – Improved effectiveness, management decisions, and evidence base (percentage of respondents)

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements: (a) IQA contributes to overall improved effectiveness at the UFS. (b) IQA contributes to improved management decisions at the UFS. (c) IQA procedures at the UFS are based on evidence.

Response option		Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't know	TOTAL
		Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't know	TOTAL
Academic staff	IQA contributes to overall improved effectiveness	11.83% (22)	40.86% (76)	26.34% (49)	7.53% (14)	2.15% (4)	11.29% (21)	100.00% (186)
	IQA contributes to improved management decisions	11.29% (21)	37.63% (70)	30.11% (56)	7.53% (14)	1.61% (3)	11.83% (22)	100.00% (186)
	IQA procedures are based on evidence	6.45% (12)	32.26% (60)	32.26% (60)	6.99% (13)	2.69% (5)	19.35% (36)	100.00% (186)
Administrative staff	IQA contributes to overall improved effectiveness	30.48% (82)	39.03% (105)	11.90% (32)	5.58% (15)	1.86% (5)	11.15% (30)	100.00% (269)
	IQA contributes to improved management decisions	29.37% (79)	39.41% (106)	14.13% (38)	3.35% (9)	2.23% (6)	11.52% (31)	100.00% (269)
	IQA procedures are based on evidence	18.96% (51)	27.88% (75)	24.91% (67)	5.20% (14)	2.60% (7)	20.45% (55)	100.00% (269)

Note: Number of respondents in brackets.

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The case study

Among the instruments used by the new democratic government of South Africa to address issues of equity and redress which were a legacy of the apartheid regime, external quality assurance was used to transform and integrate the higher education sector. Within this context, the University of the Free State (UFS) diversified its student body. It developed internal quality assurance (IQA) as a tool for internal transformation and quality enhancement to respond to tensions from this demographic change, as well as to deal with other imperatives from national policies.

Conducted within the framework of an international research project implemented by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), this case study focuses on UFS's efforts to make quality assurance and quality an integral component of the University's core functions and to integrate IQA into its academic processes.

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