INTERACTION BETWEEN INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE: AN INSTITUTIONAL CASE STUDY

by

Alice Sefora Mkuzangwe

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Supervisor: Professor M. Fourie-Malherbe

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DECLARATION

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Alice Sefora Mkuzangwe

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ABSTRACT

Quality and quality assurance present serious and noteworthy challenges for higher education institutions and governments across the world. Not only is quality viewed as an elusive concept with varied interpretations, but quality assurance involves multiple stakeholders and role-players whose roles in the setting and regulation of standards are varied and require in-depth understanding.

The current study explored the range and nature of interactions and engagements between internal institutional quality systems of the university concerned, University X, the relevant professional body, the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) and the Council on Higher Education (CHE) with respect to internal and external quality assurance. The interactions and relationships were explored at program level through the internal and external instruments of program reviews and accreditation, using one program, the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), as exemplar.

An exploratory qualitative design was adopted in which a combination of document analysis procedures and in-depth individual interviews (n=9) were conducted to develop deep understanding of both internal and external quality assurance.

The findings of the study revealed that national policies of the CHE and the policies of the institution, University X, are in alignment, but observed that there is misalignment between the CHE and professional bodies in general. Furthermore, findings revealed that there was fragmentation within University X at policy implementation levels and that the different units responsible for quality assurance operate in silos. Quality assurance should be viewed as a system of interconnectedness between various stakeholders and role-players, in other words, an all-encompassing process to promote collaboration towards higher levels of quality in higher education.

KEY WORDS

OPSOMMING

Gehalte en gehalteversekering bied ernstige en noemenswaardige uitdagings vir hoër onderwysinstellings en regerings regoor die wêreld. Nie alleen word gehalte as 'n ontwykende begrip met 'n verskeidenheid van interpretasies gesien nie, maar gehalteversekering betrek meervoudige belanghebbers en rolspelers wie se rolle in die daarstel en regulering van standaarde wisselend is en in-diepte begrip vereis.

Die huidige studie het die omvang en aard ondersoek van interaksies en verbintenisse tussen interne institusionele gehaltestelsels van die betrokke universiteit, Universiteit X, die toepaslike professionele liggaam, die Suid-Afrikaanse Raad vir Maatskaplike Diensberoepe (SARMD) en die Raad op Hoër Onderwys (RHO) met betrekking tot interne en eksterne gehalteversekering. Die interaksies en verhoudings is op programvlak ondersoek deur die interne en eksterne instrumente van programoorsig en -akkreditasie, deur een program, die Baccalaureus in Maatskaplike Werk, as voorbeeld te neem.

'n Verkennende kwalitatiewe ontwerp is gebruik waarin 'n kombinasie van dokumentanalise en in-diepte individuele onderhoude (n=9) gebruik is om 'n grondige begrip van sowel interne as eksterne gehalteversekering te ontwikkel.

Die bevindinge van die studie toon dat nasionale beleid van die RHO en die beleide van die instelling, Universiteit X, belyn is, maar het ook bevind dat daar oor die algemeen 'n gebrek aan belyning is tussen die RHO en professionele liggame. Verder wys die bevindinge dat daar fragmentasie binne Universiteit X is op die beleidsimplementeringsvlak en dat die verskillende eenhede wat vir gehalteversekering verantwoordelik is in silos funksioneer. Gehalteversekering behoort as 'n sisteem van onderlinge verbindinge tussen verskillende belanghebbers en rolspelers gesien te word, met ander woorde, 'n allesinsluitende proses om samewerking te bevorder in die belang van hoër vlakke van gehalte in hoër onderwys.

SLEUTELTERME

Gehalte, akkreditasie, hoër onderwys, professionele liggame, beleid, wetgewing

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my two children Mpho and Entle, your love, understanding enthusiasm and energy makes my life worthwhile!

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ACRONYMS

BSW	Bachelor of Social Work
CHE	Council on Higher Education (RSA)
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
EQA	External Quality Assurance
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
PQM	Programme and Qualification Mix
QA	Quality Assurance
QAS	Quality Assurance System
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
ODeL	Open, Distance and E-learning
SACSSP	South African Council for Social Service Professions
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority

CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1   BACKGROUND

The rise of managerialist cultures in higher education institutions and accountability regimes has given prominence to demands for responsiveness to the needs of external stakeholders such as regulators, government, and society (CHE, 2017). Accountability demands emphasise quality as output, and this emphasis leads higher education institutions to regard quality as a value proposition, primarily driven by external regulation. Cheng (2016) argues that society, through government regulation, cares about quality, and because of this external exertion, higher education institutions are increasingly under pressure to publicly demonstrate their educational quality. The issues of quality and quality assurance have become central themes for higher education, in particular, issues associated with the quality of academic programmes, standards, graduate outcomes and society's value output for their investments in higher education. Kayombo (2015) further suggests that effective quality assurance systems transcend beyond institutions themselves; these themes are also found in international strategies for higher education on the African continent. Governments across the world measure their investment in higher education institutions through fiscus contributions in terms of the development of high-level skills, that can contribute to the various sectors of their economies (Akpan, 2015).

Harvey and Green (1993) locate quality as a relative concept and posit that there are two senses in which quality is relative; quality as relative to the user of the term and quality as relative to the circumstances in which it is invoked. The narrative on quality employed by external stakeholders, such as employers and society, centres quality as a value output; hence, many university mission statements employ a number of value propositions in terms of the institutional purpose such as their teaching and degree offering, all measured by some matrix of quality standards (Tsinidou, Gerogiannis & Fitsilis, 2010).

Ansah, Swanzy and Nudzor (2017) identify that quality has multiple facets which demand alignment of different views, and this positions quality as a subjective

phenomenon with varying opinions from internal and external stakeholders. Quality assurance activities within higher education institutions should involve all key role-players, ranging from institutional leadership, academic and administrative staff, students, external authorities and society at large, and within this, the definition of quality should be informed by the institutional context shaped by the institutional quality culture. In addition, there is a need for external regulation that recognises the full spectrum of quality mechanisms which are employed in an integrated approach to quality assurance to support students as key primary role-players s at each stage of their academic life cycle.

Conflicting relationships, or at least, tensions exist between internal and external quality assurance systems (Paintsil, 2016), and the propensity of this relationship is to exacerbate tension and conflict rather than bring about accord and alignment between quality assurance governance structures. Green (1994) and Naidoo (2009) identify that quality assurance is characterised by either tensions, consensus or indifference, and that quality assurance is in a constant state of flux. As quality assurance occupies not only national but continental and international spaces, the tensions in the relationships, if not adequately managed or harmonious, can have negative effects on the comparability of academic standards and national qualification frameworks which facilitate mobility of students, informational and intellectual resources across countries.

A quality assurance system should recognise the need for an institution to accept responsibility for its own quality management processes, and this represents the difference between quality assurance and inspection or evaluation of quality (Sallis, 2014). Quality assurance should be viewed as a total, holistic process concerned with ensuring the integrity of outcomes, and should place the responsibility for quality within the institution itself. By that account, it should be expressed through the institution's relationship with its internal and external stakeholders, such as students and society at large. At the same time, external quality assurance regimes should recognise the autonomy of institutions and seek to enhance institutional capacity to operate in a responsive way. It remains an institution's responsibility to assure the quality of its programme offerings and the knowledge they produce.

There are many generic models for developing and designing institutionally based quality assurance systems that assist institutions to respond to the demands imposed

by external quality regulators, governments and society. Billing (2004) highlights that generic models for quality assurance provide a starting point for institutions from which to map quality expectations; variations in institutional quality assurance systems are determined by institutional contexts and practicalities. Quality blueprints are informed by the national context of the higher education sector of that specific country. Billing (2004) further notes that these generic models are informed and shaped by the size of the higher education sector in a country, the rigidity or flexibility of the legal expression of quality assurance, or the absence of enshrinement in law, and the stage of development from state control to self-regulation of the sector.

In South Africa, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) is the statutory external body assigned to oversee quality assurance activities of the higher education sector. The CHE discharges its quality mandate through a permanent sub-committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The CHE (2017) emphasises that external quality assurance offers a means of ensuring that higher education institutions have systems in place to maintain or improve the quality of their activities and educational provision.

The focus of this study is on quality assurance mechanisms of universities, and how they interact with external quality assurance regulation through government policies and professional bodies' standards and requirements. The study critically considers: (i) internal institutional policies and external quality assurance, (ii) the purposes of the programme accreditation processes as a quality assurance instrument in the context of programme reviews and (iii) the experience of the case institution in terms of the accreditation of the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and the national review processes of the CHE and HEQC outcomes.

For the purposes of this study, Materu's (2007) definition of quality as fitness for purpose is adopted, defining quality as meeting or conforming to generally accepted standards as specified by the institution, quality assurance bodies, academic and professional communities.

The internal institutional quality assurance mechanisms and external quality assurance through government policy interact with and influence one another constantly; this relationship determines interactions within the institution and the

nature of engagement with external regulatory initiatives. External quality assurance often has purposes that go beyond protecting the standard of qualifications or programmes offered by universities while they strive for excellence in the production of knowledge for the public good. Rowlands (2012) argues that external quality assurance bodies often tacitly or even overtly act as agents of control, empowerment and transformation, and simultaneously as agents of the state, though not necessarily all to the same extent.

This study explores these interactions between external and internal quality systems and aims to analyse the levels of impact on each system and the relationships between role-players as informed by their own specific contexts.

1.2   STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

How institutions interact with governments on issues of quality in education has significantly changed. El-Khawas (2001) identifies that the relationship between universities and the state has been altered and morphed towards a formalised state role in quality assurance. Traditionally, academic institutions took responsibility for the quality of their programmes. Today, many countries have formal agencies for ensuring or assuring quality. These quality assurance agencies have a dominant role in most QA models globally and at times assume previously traditional roles of universities (Van Vught & Neave, 1991). Quality assurance agencies often rely on government funding for their operations. In most countries these agencies are dependent on government for their legitimacy, funding and operational resources (El-Khawas, 2001). Government thus has a primary role in decisions on quality assurance. Higher education institutions on the other hand are seen as an integral part of quality improvement and thus also as a core element of evidence-based gathering and implementation sites for quality assurance in education (Damian, Grifoll & Rigbers, 2016). Higher education institutions traditionally have for many years established their own internal quality assurance systems, but with a growing interest from government and society in the quality of education being produced, government now demands more accountability from institutions. Damian, Grifoll and Rigbers (2016) highlight that the introduction of accountability regimes and regulatory frameworks in quality

assurance led to an enormous imbalance in power between external quality assurance activities carried out by the subsidised agencies and internal quality assurance activities carried out by higher education institutions themselves, and this imbalance is coupled with at times unrealistic political expectations. Quality assurance is multi-layered with many intersections in which responsibility is shared between governments, institutions and external quality assurance. These intersections require constant monitoring and management since they are driven by relationships between the different role-players and each have their own expectations of quality. There exist many studies on quality assurance functions and processes but few studies that have directly explored the relationships in QA.

The context of this study is in open and distance education and issues of quality are particularly complex in distance education. Gaskell and Mills (2014) highlight that distance education institutions are often required to overcome negative perceptions about the overall quality of their programmes and qualifications. The challenges frequently cited with reference to these institutions can be seen to undermine the credibility and effectiveness of open, distance and e-learning (ODeL) such as the quality of teaching, learning and quality assurance processes and student outcomes, and taint the perceptions of students, staff and employers.

Distance education is continuously confronted with quality issues particularly in terms of provision of programmes. Gaskell and Mills (2014) identify that ODeL institutions tend to admit students with lower entry qualifications than those required for conventional universities and this results in perceptions of ODeL institutions being second rate. Quality is then associated not only with the quality of teaching and learning but also with the student who enters the institution (Gaskell & Mills, 2014).

In South Africa some higher education institutions, including ODeL institutions, have been cited as having ineffective internal quality assurance instruments for the purposes of assuring quality (CHE, 2017). In addition, they have shown varying alignment of their programme offering with the institutional vision and mission, in terms of appropriateness, credibility and integrity, inter alia with reference to the HEQC programme evaluation criteria as an external quality assurance instrument. Institutional policies are guided by external quality requirements or regulations to

facilitate programme parity, articulation and comparability of programmes among institutions and this study aims to explore to what extent the alignment of institutional policies align with external regulatory policies of government and the CHE.

1.3   CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The concept of quality assurance can be interpreted as an uncomfortable mix of improvement, accountability, enhancement and compliance. There are contradictions in its purposes, and its interpretations are informed by the relations among actors and role-players. Role-players' interpretations of quality assurance are informed by their contexts. The research questions of this study highlight the contradictions and nuances between various purposes of quality assurance and external QA regulation, and relationships of control, enhancement and improvement contextualised within a higher education institution. Issues related to the degree of self-governance or self-regulation (autonomy), government regulation and internal institutional efficiencies are explored in an attempt to provide answers to this complex phenomenon of quality assurance (Strydom & Van der Westhuizen, 2001). The research questions aim to interpret the experiences of internal role-players located in their context to gain better insight into the responses of these individuals to their interactions with external measures for programme accreditation. The following section discusses the research approach and design. The interpretivist paradigm is adopted for this study and a qualitative research approach is applied to answer the research questions.

Given the broad scope of quality assurance, generalisation across South African higher education will be avoided, and particular attention will be paid to the accreditation aspects of a professional degree, the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and institutional quality processes that inform this aspect of quality monitoring and improvement. External imperatives and decisions that impact programme accreditation within the South African context, particularly as far as legislation is concerned, will also be included in the investigation.

The study also considers the role of professional bodies from an international perspective, compared to the requirements of professional bodies in South Africa as

instituted by the National Qualifications Act 67 of 2008 and individual Acts governing specific statutory professional bodies.

The accreditation processes of the BSW of a public South African university will be used as an example to interpret the national requirements of the HEQC, professional body requirements of the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP), institutional policy requirements, and institutional responses to the accreditation requirements of professional learning programmes. The BSW is a professional degree programme. Professional degrees by their nature are designed in consultation with professional bodies which is recognised as a requirement for professional registration to practice. The programmes have a strong vocational and career orientation that aims to prepare students to deliver quality service within their practice. Professional bodies and the CHE provide minimum standards for the development of curricula, and higher education institutions develop learning programmes guided by these standards and requirements. Quality management in institutions aims to provide confidence that quality requirements of such programmes are fulfilled in relation to delivery, educational processes and services.

1.4   PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to explore how one South African university, through its internal quality instruments, interacts with and responds to the external quality assurance requirements that are obligatory and set by external monitoring and quality assurance agencies.

To achieve the aim, the study was carried out in an ODeL institution where the learning is delivered remotely to students and designed to be flexible and convenient in terms of space, time and cost. Peters (2003) identifies open learning as access to universities by all who are able to study by removing traditional education barriers; designing learning programmes which are open for unforeseen developments in the advancement of individual ability in a variety of settings that are devoid of bureaucratic constraints. At traditional distance education institutions, e-learning was more recently introduced as a method of delivering distance learning. Butcher (2009) refers to e-

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learning as educational applications of technology, and internet techniques to facilitate learning regardless of whether they are used in an internet or intranet environment or simply used within a local or wide area computer network. Bateman, Brooks and McCalla (2006) describe e-learning or online courses as web-based delivery of text-based courses with computer-mediated enhancements (placed on a web site) for students.

The research considered how the institutional positioning of the University's internal quality systems met the requirements for the accreditation of programmes as a form of quality assurance as prescribed by the Council of Higher Education (CHE) through its permanent sub-committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and the relevant professional body, the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP).

The study further sought to examine the relations between internal institutional and external quality assurance, what the nature of the interaction is and the mechanics that drive the processes of both.

The focus of the study was on the accreditation aspect of quality assurance, in particular programme accreditation and how the institution employed its instruments of programme accreditation in an ODeL environment. A professional degree, the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) was used to investigate the interaction between the institution, national quality council (the CHE) and the professional body (SACSSP). A professional programme is a co-ordinated set of study elements that leads to a recognised professional qualification. The CHE (2004) defines a professional programme as a programme that has to meet the licensure and other professional and work-based requirements of statutory professional councils.

Seyfried and Pohlenz (2018) assert that quality mechanisms such as external programme accreditation and internal institutional QA mechanisms must align, and these mechanisms are supposed to draw on certain sets of quality standards and benchmarks for institutions for purposes of programme comparability to better assess the standards of their programmes against other quality instruments and facilitate better recognition of their degree offering.

The research objectives were outlined to:

a) Determine the range and nature of institutional policies on quality assurance with regards to their alignment to national policy and the CHE's Framework for Programme Accreditation.

b) Critically assess where and how the interaction of role-players involved in internal and external quality assurance takes place in terms of policy, procedures and implementation.

c) Evaluate the impact as experienced by the institution of the accreditation and de-accreditation of the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) in terms of the national review process of the CHE and HEQC outcomes.

d) Develop a relationship management framework to support quality assurance processes within institutions.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question for the study was how one South African university, through its internal quality instruments, interacts with and responds to the external quality assurance requirements. Programme accreditation as a form of judgment is associated with a grading of the quality of the programme (Harvey & Newton, 2004). The programme accreditation process hence focuses on assuring the public that academic programmes are of an acceptable standard. The following research questions arose from the main research question in terms of the internal processes and external purpose of the accreditation of programmes.

a) What is the range and nature of institutional policies on quality assurance with regards to their alignment to national policy and the CHE's Framework for Programme Accreditation?

b) What are the interactions of role-players involved in internal and external quality assurance and how do they interact in terms of policy, procedures and implementation?

c) What is the impact as experienced by the institution of the accreditation and de-accreditation of the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) in terms of the national review process of the CHE and HEQC outcomes?

d) Is there a relationship management framework within the institution to support quality assurance processes both internally or externally?

1.6   RESEARCH PARADIGM AND METHODOLOGY

Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Holloway (2004) define a paradigm as a belief system encompassing ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions shared by a scientific community. Hence, every researcher works within a particular paradigm when engaging in research activities, and his/her ontology and epistemology will underpin the methodology decided upon. This means that his/her paradigm, including ontology and epistemology, has key influencing roles in determining what methodology the researcher will adopt. Engaging these terms is important to better understand and adequately position the research methodology and methods that were applied in the study.

Ontology is the study of being and ontological assumptions are concerned with what constitutes reality and with what is (Scotland, 2012). Scotland (2012) contends that researchers need to take a position regarding their perceptions of how things are and how things really work.

Epistemology is concerned with the nature and forms of knowledge (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). Epistemological assumptions are concerned with how knowledge can be created, acquired and communicated, and what it means to know (Scotland, 2012). Guba and Lincoln (1994) posit that epistemology relates to the nature of the relationship between the would-be knower and what can be known.

A research inquiry can be defined in terms of multiple interacting factors, context, events, and processes that shape it and are part of it. A researcher can establish probable inferences about the patterns and webs of these interactions shaping the context in any given case (Russon, 2008). Russon (2008) further highlights that the best method for assessing these patterns and webs is the study that deals with them holistically in their natural contexts and that the aim of inquiry is to develop a holistic body of knowledge. Denzin (1983) notes this interaction in arguing that knowledge is

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best encapsulated in a series of working hypotheses that describe the individual case through the interactions with the environment inherent in a particular context grounded in a particular paradigm.

1.6.1 Paradigm

De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2005) define a paradigm as a pattern containing a set of legitimated assumptions and a design for collecting and interpreting data. A research paradigm is thus a framework, viewpoint or worldview based on people's philosophies and assumptions about the social world and the nature of knowledge and how the researcher views and interprets material about reality and guides the consequent action to be taken. The research paradigm can be summarised as a way of looking at natural phenomena that encompasses a set of philosophical assumptions that guides one's approach to inquiry (Polit & Beck, 2008). Burns and Groove (2009) concur and defines a research paradigm as a particular way of viewing a phenomenon in the world. Two major research paradigms and their specific focuses are, by way of contrast, discussed below.

1.6.1.1 Positivism

Positivism is an approach to social research contexts that seeks to apply the natural science model of research to investigations of social phenomena and explanations of the social world (De Vos et al., 2005). Further, positivism is considered to be a paradigm underlying the traditional scientific approach, which assumes that there is a fixed, orderly reality that can be objectively studied. This paradigm is often associated with quantitative studies (Polit & Beck 2008). A fundamental assumption of positivists is that there is a reality out there that can be studied and known (an assumption refers to a basic principle that is believed to true without proof or verification). The positivist paradigm suggests that it is possible and essential for the researcher to adopt a distant, detached, neutral and non-interactive position (De Vos et al., 2005); thus, the assumption about this paradigm is that the inquirer is independent from those being researched and findings are objective and not influenced by the researcher. Strict positivist thinking has, however, been challenged and undermined, and few researchers adhere to the tenets of pure positivism (Polit & Beck 2008). Positivism

cannot be used as the epistemological basis for this study because it relies on cause-and-effect relationships, which, in this study, are neither applicable nor appropriate.

1.6.1.2 Interpretivism

The interpretive paradigm is often likened to the phenomenological approach, an approach that aims to understand people or social interactions. This approach maintains that all human beings are engaged in the process of making sense of their worlds and continuously interpret, create, give meaning, define, justify and rationalise daily actions (Babbie & Mouton 2001). The interpretivist paradigm has its roots in the German intellectual traditions of hermeneutics and phenomenology (Blaikie, 2010). Phenomenology and hermeneutics contend that human meanings, values, beliefs and feelings are transmitted through artefacts of human creations, such as language, dress, patterns of action and written texts (Yanow, 2015). In this paradigm, the researcher often uses participant observation and field research, which are techniques where many hours and days are spent in direct contact with participants. Transcripts, conversations and video tapes may be studied in detail to gain a sense of subtle non-verbal communication or to understand the interaction in its real context (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003).

Phenomenology and hermeneutics are both interpretive in nature. To adequately position this research study, there needs to be an awareness and the recognition of the social location of the research activities. Therefore, the appropriate paradigm and methods were identified from the interaction between the context of the study and the conditions of the environment. This interaction provided a means by which the researcher could seek to resolve the contradictions and find answers to the research questions. The interpretivist paradigm provided a framework of thinking about this study and helped establish acceptable research methodologies for the study.

The research study found its location through a lens that emphasises that social reality is viewed and interpreted by the individual himself or herself according to the ideological positions s/he possesses (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). The study was shaped by the understanding that knowledge is personally experienced rather than acquired or imposed from outside. The interpretivist paradigm positions reality as

multi-layered and complex and as a single phenomenon having multiple interpretations (Cohen et al., 2013). The interpretivist paradigm essentially emphasises understanding and interpretation of phenomena and making meaning out of the process.

The interpretivist paradigm was identified as an appropriate paradigm for this study which encompasses the interpretive methodologies whose suppositions effected the ontological (how the environment is viewed) and epistemological grounding for this study. The paradigm stresses a subjectivist approach and attaches importance to a range of research techniques focusing on qualitative analysis.

In the context of this study, which includes policy analysis, hermeneutics and the phenomenological approach were deemed appropriate. The chosen research inquiry found its location within the interpretivism paradigm and employed a qualitative approach to the research.

The study was grounded in the interpretation of meaning and social construction of reality as experienced by the actors in quality assurance. Different meanings, interpretations and understandings of the concept of quality and quality assurance were anticipated from different stakeholders in higher education in terms of where and how they interact. This interaction of internal quality and external quality assurance created an awareness of the different meanings of quality and quality assurance as articulated in national policy and interpreted by stakeholders.

There are different stakeholders within universities as higher education institutions, such as employers, academics, students, and each stakeholder may interpret the implementation of quality assurance policy differently from the intent of the national legislation. Yanow (2015) contends that interpretations among role-players occur not only because role-players focus cognitively and rationally on different elements of a policy issue, but because the different role-players value different elements of a policy differently. These contending views of different role-players, internal or external to the institution, assisted and offered alternative views of what quality assurance for universities should be, rather than simply accepting the external view of regulators and external agencies such as professional bodies.

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1.6.2 Methodology

A methodology consists of methods of data collection and analysis which are characterized either as qualitative or quantitative, or as mixed methods (Creswell, 2003). The research approach was segmented in two interrelated phases for data collection purposes. Phase one involved document analysis to contextualise the research phenomenon in the targeted research site and this involved analysing purposively selected strategic documents, reports and national legislative documents on quality assurance, frameworks and instruments. The review and analysis of internal institutional and external national policies as a starting point provided a better understanding of the national and institutional landscape.

The second phase included the use of individual interviews to collect data from a range of role-players. This simple interpretive qualitative study was regarded as appropriate for exploring the perceptions and evaluating the experiences of the individuals chosen to participate in the study. The interpretive approach was used as it places emphasis on people's subjective experiences and interpretations of the institutional and external environments. The research design followed a structure of sequential steps. Step one was the sampling of data sources from various documents, and the selection of research participants. Step two involved data collection. Document analysis and narrative interviews were used to gather opinions and perceptions of research participants. Data analysis was the last step. Each step is briefly discussed below.

1.6.2.1 Sampling

Purposeful sampling was applied for phase one of the process and involved gathering the selected strategic documents, institutional policies, accreditation reports and national legislative documents on quality assurance, frameworks and instruments. Document analysis was used as a method to garner information from three main sources:

a) National policies including policies relating to professional practice such the Engineering Act of South Africa and the Health Professions Act.

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b) CHE policies and reports.

c) Policies and reports of the institution concerned.

Purposive sampling of the documents was applied to identify the most relevant institutional and national legislative documents appropriate for the study. Document analysis as an analytical method was used to gain an understanding of the trends and patterns that emerged from the data (Ivankova, Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The analytical procedure entailed finding, selecting, appraising, making sense of, and synthesising data contained in documents (Labuschagne, 2003).

Phase two involved the selection of the research participants. Quota sampling was considered as a type of purposive sampling for the selection of participants. Quota sampling allows for decisions on participant selection while designing the study, such as how many people with which characteristics to include (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & McKibbon, 2015). The participants' roles, positions and level of involvement in institutional QA activities were considered to help decide whether they were appropriate for participation in the study.

The criteria followed for the selection of participants allowed the study to focus on individuals most appropriate and with the most likely experience, knowledge, or adequate insights in quality assurance.

1.6.2.2 Data collection

Qualitative data was collected from policy documentation and narrative interviews on the opinions and perceptions of research participants on issues of quality assurance. Qualitative methods are useful in exploratory research and often apply open-ended questions which allow for further probing, giving the participants the opportunity to respond in their own words about their experiences and opinions of their lived experiences. Hermeneutics as an approach was applied during phase one for document analysis to contextualise the study through the analysis of written text in policy documents, both internal and external to the institution.

Data collection in phase two included the involvement of employees within the institution and external members from the CHE and the professional body through the implementation of an interview protocol. Data collection required information on participants' work history and their current work roles in order to segregate the participants' roles into four main categories: Senior Management, Faculty Management, Academic Staff and Administrative Middle Management. The CHE and professional body participants were invited through a third party. The invitation to participate in the study was sent by a neutral person to mitigate the potential risk of conflict of interest or harm to voluntariness to assist with the recruitment of participants.

Phase two involved the design of an interview protocol used as an instrument to collect qualitative data from the research participants through interviews. The interviews were semi-structured and flexible to allow for open interactions with participants. The interviews were carefully structured to focus on participants that are directly involved in quality assurance both internal to the institution and externally to solicit their perceptions of the quality assurance mechanisms, relations and effectiveness of QA systems. This approach was viewed to be beneficial because most of the identified interviewees had a scientific background, although varied in terms of scope and level, and are involved in accreditation of programmes, thus they were able to provide a reasonable self-assessment against the questions outlined in the interview protocol.

The two qualitative data collection methods, document analysis and individual interviews, were deemed useful in such an exploratory research and the use of open-ended questions allowed for further probing, thus giving the participants the opportunity to respond in their own words about their experiences and opinions of their lived experiences. Data collection in phase two involved two main methods: note-taking and audio recordings. Data collection was primarily done via audio recording but as a back-up, handwritten notes were also taken and kept.

1.6.2.3 *Data analysis*

Qualitative research applies a diverse range of interpretative methods which aim to explore, understand and explain people's experiences using non-numeric data

(Mohajan, 2018). Maguire and Delahunt (2017) identify that data analysis is central to credible qualitative research and the description and interpretation of experiences and perceptions are key to uncovering meaning in particular circumstances and contexts. The documents analysed in the study related to the institutional policies, approval of programmes and quality assurance instruments of the institution, and the analysis sought to determine the nature and range of the policies and the alignment of the policies to the external quality related policies of the CHE and government.

The primary focus during the first phase of data collection was the relationship of institutional policies in relation to the compliance and alignment of the institution with legislation or regulatory frameworks for quality assurance. The anticipated outcomes and benefits of document analysis was a clearer understanding of the trends in practices of quality assurance, and potential tensions that may influence the relationships between internal quality systems and external quality regulation at policy level.

Textual analysis in interpreting policy data was used for phase one of the data analysis. Textual analysis is rooted in the hermeneutic tradition of textual interpretation, which stresses that interpretation of the text must always be taken from the reader's viewpoint (Burnard, 1996). Lockyer, Heathcote and Dawson (2013) state that textual analysis is a method of data analysis that closely examines either the content and meaning of the text or its structure and discourse. Textual analysis enabled the location of meanings and the interpretation of particular documents such as institutional reports from programme review committees. Simkungwe (2018) contends that policy in the field of practice is not just read and implemented but is subjected to interpretation before the implementer implements it. Furthermore, if conflicting interpretations result between the intent of policy as text and policy as practice, it should be treated in different ways of seeing or understanding that could be mediated through compromise and derive a new understanding between legislators and the implementers.

Drawing from the researcher's experience, as well as from the observations and findings of others who participated in the study, the literature, policies and the interview data collected were analysed and interpreted to identify meaning, patterns and

themes pertaining to accreditation of programmes, the possible influences of external quality assurance instruments and role-players, the implications of these for the institution, and identify some determinations on how the institution could safeguard the integrity of internal quality processes, as well as interactions with professional bodies. A matrix of correlation responses was developed manually to identify possible pairing of all variables; a manual approach was regarded as appropriate.

The second phase of document analysis involved the analysis of the data collected during the individual interviews of the research participants. A total of nine interviews (n=9) were held. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The goal of the thematic analysis was to identify themes and patterns in the data that are important or interesting and to use these themes to address the research question and aim or identify if they said something about the research sub-questions and objectives. This is much more than simply summarising the data; a good thematic analysis interprets and makes sense of the data.

Thematic analysis involved reading the interview transcripts about six times and recording emergent themes at each iteration. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis was followed:

Step 1: Become familiar with the data,

Step 2: Generate initial codes,

Step 3: Search for themes,

Step 4: Review themes,

Step 5: Define themes,

Step 6: Write-up

A matrix of relational responses was developed manually to identify possible pairing of all variables. Themes were identified and extracted to segment the main responses for reporting purposes. The themes were then grouped, compared and linked to four main categories identified in terms of participant categories of Senior Management, Faculty Management, Academic Staff and Administrative Middle Management.

1.6.3   Trustworthiness of the research

Promoting research rigour is important for research studies. Rigour can be described as the strength of the research design and the appropriateness of the method to answer the questions (Houghton, Casey, Shaw & Murphy, 2013). Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to the criteria for trustworthiness of qualitative research as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Schurink (2009) describes trustworthiness as a criterion to judge the quality of a research design and drawing from the criteria of trustworthiness the standards of credibility and confirmability were deemed the most appropriate to promote rigour of this study.

Trustworthiness refers to quality, authenticity, and truthfulness of findings of qualitative research. Trustworthiness relates to the degree of trust, or confidence, readers have in the results. Credibility deals with the question, "How congruent are the findings with reality? (Shenton, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that ensuring credibility is one of most important factors in establishing trustworthiness and this requires the researcher to spend sufficient time in the field or case study site to gain a full understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). For the purposes of the study the researcher spent a considerable amount of time collecting data - approximately three months - through interviews and engaging with participants. Since the researcher is also familiar with the context of the research site due to her employment within the institution, accessibility and engaging with the context of the institution over a number of years also enhanced the understanding of the research context and site.

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of an inquiry could be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination but are clearly derived from the data (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Koch (1995) identifies that while readers may not share a researcher's interpretation, they should be able to discern the means by which the research conclusions have been reached and suggest that this can be achieved by an audit trail. Audit trails are an essential component in a rigorous study (Bryar, 1999; Ryan-Nicholls and Will, 2009). The audit trail was maintained through comprehensive notes related

to the contextual background of the data collected during the interviews and notes from the document analysis of the policies. This further ensured that the impetus was maintained to inform the rationale for all methodological decisions and conclusions reached as directed by results of the study. Keeping a trail of the data collected ensured that any issue described within the findings was not the perception of just the researcher, but rather confirmed by a number of participants who provided the same opinions. In addition, this guaranteed dependability in different contexts.

1.7   KEY CONCEPTS

Whatever its focus, quality has become the vehicle through which accountability is addressed, hence its growth in importance in higher education has put an increasing emphasis on accountability (Stensaker, 2003). Becket and Brookes (2006) argue that quality in higher education is multifaceted and complex, and there are different perceptions of quality assessment and monitoring in higher education. Concepts in this thesis are applied within the higher education space and are defined according to this context. Definitions are provided in terms of educational offerings, business-like terms such as quality as value add, proposition and measurement are used but should be operationalised to apply in educational settings. Three definitions of quality, namely quality as a value proposition, quality as fitness for purpose and quality as transformative are all located in higher education settings. Quality as a value proposition relates to the question of value for money referring to whether higher education institutions can satisfy the demands of accountability and produce graduates within the parameters of restricted resources such as funding through the promotion of efficiency and effectiveness. Quality as fitness for purpose refers to whether individual institutions have achieved or fulfilled their stated missions or the purposes they founded their missions on in terms of standards and outcomes (Biggs, 2001). A table of definitions is provided below which pronounces on the location of concepts of quality; these definitions should continuously be referred to when reading this research report.

Table 1.1   Definitions of Key Concepts

Accreditation	The result of a review of an education programme or institution following certain quality standards agreed on beforehand. It is a type of recognition that a programme or institution fulfils certain standards (Van Damme, 2004).
Quality	An output that assures and ensures the delivery of agreed standards and envisaged outcomes.
Quality assurance	The means by which an institution can guarantee with confidence and certainty that the standards and quality of its educational provision are being maintained and enhanced (Smith, 2010).
Quality control	The verification procedures used by institutions to monitor quality and standards.
Quality enhancement	The process of positively changing activities or processes to provide for a continuous improvement in the quality of institutional provision (CHE, 2014a).
Quality assessment	The process of external evaluation of the quality of educational provision in institutions, as undertaken by an external body. Quality assessment uses various instruments for obtaining objective and valid information on the condition and outcomes of the educational process (Bazhenov, Bazhenova, Khilchenko & Romanova, 2015).
Quality audit	The process of examining institutional procedures for assuring quality and standards and whether the arrangements are implemented effectively and achieve stated objectives. The underlying purpose of a quality audit is to establish the extent to which institutions are effectively discharging their responsibilities for the standards of awards granted in their name and for the quality of education provided to enable students to attain standards (CHE, 2017).
Quality culture	The existence of a high level of internal institutional quality awareness, an embedded assessment culture and the ongoing implementation of the results. Quality culture can be seen as the ability of the institution to establish quality assurance implicitly in the day-to-day work of the institution and marks a move away from periodic assessment to ingrained quality assurance (Harvey & Green, 1993).
Quality monitoring	A systematic and ongoing procedure of gathering and evaluating information on the implementation of quality within an education process, as well as a way of creating a repository of research results as a tool for assessing education quality.
Quality as a value proposition	An approach to quality that positions educational offerings as better or superior to those of other institutions and gives reasons why students must choose to enrol at a particular institution. The value proposition communicates the benefits of the institution's

	qualifications or services in terms of quality. This approach can, however, lead to the commodification of education (Massey, 2004).
Quality as fitness for purpose	A concept that stresses the achievement of or meeting the stated mission or institutional purposes and standards. The focus is on the efficiency of the processes at work in the institution or programme in fulfilling the stated, given objectives and mission of the institution (Vlăsceanu & Grünberg, 2007).
Quality as transformative	Quality is viewed as offering institutional programmes and services that ensure and effect positive change in student learning, and developing their personal and professional potential (Biggs, 2001; Bobby, 2014; Bogue, 1998; Green, 1994; Harvey & Green, 1993; Harvey & Knight, 1996; Haworth & Conrad, 1997; Pond, 2002; Schindler, Puls-Elvidge, Welzant & Crawford, 2015). This approach locates learning within the frame of change and development and focuses on the enhancement and empowerment of the learner or researcher.
Professional body	A body of expert practitioners in an occupational field, which includes an occupational body and statutory council. They create an enabling environment for professional development in the occupation, and growth of that occupation by contributing to its body of knowledge, its relevance, governing principles and accessibility to new and existing practitioners. A professional body serves as the impartial, autonomous representative of its various stakeholders in matters related to the occupation.
Self-regulation	The act of self-evaluation of an academic programme in terms of stated purpose and intentions. The process is informed and periodic through which an institution is self-reflecting on its programmes or procedures over time to meet expectations in terms of purpose, intent and standards (Kells, 1992).

1.8   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The research study aimed to analyse how an ODeL institution as an institutional case relates and responds to the demands of external quality assurance requirements and assesses the relations and/or tensions that could be imposed by external monitoring processes of the HEQC and the professional body, the SACSSP.

The study further aimed to either confirm or dispel the narrative that sees external authorities as watchdogs, imposing control and compliance on higher education institutions. The study contributes to the understanding of how the institution can position its internal quality systems to meet the requirements for the accreditation of

its programmes in a harmonised and aligned manner to external regulation and policy in order to improve outcomes of accreditation of programmes.

Paintsil (2016) highlights that understanding the dynamics of quality assurance is fundamental in the repositioning of higher education institutions to adequately respond to the changing tides of the higher education landscape. Paintsil (2016) further suggests that, in order to facilitate national development imperatives, quality assurance should be viewed as a potentially transformative instrument, with much intrinsic value. In seeking to understand the different relationships and to identify the linkages between internal and external quality assurance, the study attempts to confirm or dispel if quality assurance agencies have indeed the dominant role in QA models as suggested by El-Khawas (2011), thus overshadowing the role of universities. Development or improvement of relationships is dependent on the existence of a harmonious system that recognises all the role-players, and the delineation of roles is critical in better understanding how institutions should position themselves, as most quality assurance policies seek the participation of institutions to drive the development and implementation of policy.

1.9 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis is presented in five chapters. The topics and content of the chapters are briefly introduced below.

Chapter 1: Introduction and orientation of the study

The chapter provides an overview of the study plan, which includes the introduction, and background of the study, statement of the problem, research purpose, objectives, theoretical foundation and conceptual framework of the study. It briefly introduces the research methodology and design.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: internal and external quality assurance in context

The literature review covered literature that was related to key concepts within the study. To this end, the review included sources of literature related to the key concepts of the study, such as quality, quality assurance and multi-levels of quality assurance,

national, regional, continental and international perspectives. The chapter included the identification of the knowledge gap in the literature relating to the key concepts of quality assurance and its interrelatedness among various actors.

Chapter 3:   Research methodology

The methodological presentation of the study was outlined in this chapter. The methodology included both the qualitative exploratory aspects of the study.

Chapter 4:   Data presentation, analysis and interpretation

This chapter presented the results of the study and its findings and proposed guidelines that would promote a harmonised relationship model between the state, the national quality agency, the professional body and the institution.

Chapter 5:   Conclusions and recommendations

The summary of the study was presented in this chapter. Limitations of the study and challenges that were encountered while conducting the study were also presented. The chapter also made some recommendations.

1.10   CONCLUSION

It is noted by Cheng (2016) that higher education institutions tend to go with the flow of externally imposed evaluations, as they feel obliged to use quality evaluations to demonstrate to the public that the education they provide is good and of acceptable standards. Quality should however should not be seen as an external imposition, but institutions should rather find and deploy mechanisms to manage quality in ways that allow them to define quality for themselves as informed by their own contexts. Such an approach affords institutions a level of autonomy in defining quality that is informed by localised realities of the institution.

Given the increasing demands on higher education institutions and governmental interest in higher education, institutions must be able to respond in a balanced manner to the expectations of various actors in the HE system. Schindler et al. (2015) highlight

that quality assurance must be viewed and defined within institutions by the existing state of quality initiatives and strategic plans of the institution, informed by existing cultural, regulatory and political environments. This position requires a deliberate attempt to balance the needs and management of relations with various actors in the higher education sector. Chapter One argues that in an attempt to find this balance an adequate response to external demands requires institutions to look inwardly and define for themselves what is meant in regard to quality.

Standards of quality should be advocated for by institutions themselves in order to enable them to provide evidence-based instruments and policies. A systematic self-assessment of quality should also be informed by the relations promoted and maintained through interactions with various internal and external stakeholders.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW:
INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE IN CONTEXT

2.1   INTRODUCTION

Following on from Chapter One which provided an overview of the study, this chapter presents a review of the literature that is identified as being relevant to the research topic. Relevance to the research topic is assessed on the basis of a primary point, that the identified literature offers insight into the seminal and contemporary thinking on quality assurance.

The strategic review of related research is premised on an assumption, as noted by Barbour (2013) that research is rarely conducted in an intellectual vacuum and the study of any topic must be benchmarked against an existing knowledge base; hence, it is incumbent on all researchers to undertake a formal review of literature to familiarise themselves with that knowledge base.

In Chapter One the researcher presented the concepts of quality as a value proposition, quality as fitness for purpose and quality as transformative, and how the rise of accountability regimes has increased managerialist cultures in higher education. Skolnik (2010) identifies that achieving managerial control means that the strength of the quality outcomes of the institution is measured against pre-determined standards that are externally developed, often regulatory quality criteria. The researcher further argued in Chapter One that quality should not be viewed as an external imposition, but that institutions should rather find and deploy mechanisms to manage quality in ways that allow them to define quality and set quality standards for themselves as informed by their own contexts.

Given the increasing demands from a variety of role-players of higher education institutions and growing governmental interest in higher education, institutions must be able to respond in a balanced manner to the expectations of various actors in the higher education system. The challenges associated with the provision of quality

education are further compounded by the perceived imposition by government at an institutional level of accountability and comparability of programme offerings in terms of the articulation of best practice and standards in order to conform to national and even international qualification frameworks.

In Chapter Two, the researcher explores this concept of the imposition of external regulation by government, how various actors in the ecosystem contribute to the landscape and what roles they assume in the network. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the internal quality assurance of HEIs, and a case of a South African university is introduced. In defining these roles and linkages, a philosophical understanding of QA is firstly significant as a precursor to defining the layers of QA systems in the 21st century higher education landscape and in further identifying the approaches observed from various national or institutional approaches to QA.

2.2   THE PROCESS OF UNDERTAKING A REVIEW

Although dependent on the subject matter and the range of questions being answered, the process of conducting a literature search and the preparation of a written review centres around systematically locating and critiquing studies and drawing conclusions about existing evidence and its contribution to the current understanding of the chosen questions. To this end, a well written research review should provide a well-organised summary of the current state of knowledge on a topic which also highlights both the consistencies and contradictions in the literature (Polit & Beck 2008).

The current review aims to achieve all the above objectives and was structured in accordance with the framework and model proposed by Steward (2004) which includes a number of key sections presented below and provides an overview of the data search strategy outlined in each heading below.

2.3   QUALITY IN PERSPECTIVE

Quality assurance needs to be understood within the context of the interrelatedness of many components, comparable to an ecosystem. Defined in biological terms, an ecosystem is a system that includes all living organisms in an area as well as its physical environment, and all these living organisms must co-exist and function together as a unit. To understand quality assurance, it is useful to define the linkages and relationships between actors and role-players in QA in global, continental, national and institutional contexts. At each level various actors seek to promote outcomes that can assure standards and meet pre-determined expectations of state and society.

Watson (2006) identifies that the history of higher education demonstrates a deeply embedded interest in particularly the quality of the teaching and learning process. Quality assurance in higher education has long been practised in universities to encourage educational improvement in academic offerings and to demonstrate accountability to government and society. Accreditation and programme reviews exemplify the more traditional approaches of quality assurance, embracing the principles of peer review and external standards (Bogue, 1998).

One particular approach to QA, namely Total Quality Management (TQM), gained prominence in business and industrial practices; this approach was formalised by introducing ISO9000 standards. Lawrence and Sharma (2002) argue that TQM is narrow in focus and that due to its managerialist emphasis on business efficiency and effectiveness, students are constituted as consumers, and the public good character of university education is trivialised.

A relationship does however exist between TQM and QA which applies to university settings. In such a complex system as higher education, the diverse needs of stakeholders such as students, governments, society, and the process of satisfying each should be interrogated separately. It is, therefore, important to first understand the similarities and differences that TQM and quality assurance present in education systems (Venkatraman, 2007). As a philosophy, TQM aligns closely to QA and its adoption in higher education settings cannot be ignored. It is therefore deemed appropriate to explore TQM and its relations so as to compare it with regard to QA philosophies in higher education.

O'Mahony and Garavan (2012) suggest that TQM views QA activities as stemming from a need to provide effective services for customers (students) during the basic educational process and the full life cycle of the graduate, as a graduate is a product of an educational institution. The official goals of an education institution should therefore include:

a. Customer (student and his sponsor) satisfaction consistent with the expected educational standards
b. Professional education standards
c. Continuous improvement of service
d. Consideration to the requirements of industry, commerce and the public sector
e. Efficiency in providing the service (O'Mahony & Garavan, 2012).

This general description is then customised to a set of local quality objectives, according to the mission and circumstances of the education institution:

a. Clear definition of customers' (the student and his sponsor) needs with appropriate quality measures
b. Preventive action and controls to avoid customer dissatisfaction
c. Optimising quality-related costs for the required performance and grade of service
d. Creation of collective commitment to quality within the educational organisation
e. Continuous (and never-ending) review of service requirements and achievements to identify opportunities for service quality improvements (O'Mahony & Garavan, 2012).

In higher education, however, quality shifts are occurring in terms of approach and execution, with quality measures taking a so-called watchdog approach by government, relying on government controls, professional credentials, and institutional audits, in other words, more on external evaluations, to maintain standards, eliminate poorly designed academic programmes, and solve problems (Friend-Pereira, Lutz & Heerens, 2002). Such monitoring introduces levels of imposition that are seen as encroaching on the autonomy of institutions in higher education. The introduction of quality management in universities is accompanied by a legitimising discourse referring to the principles of accountability, transparency and good service (Hoecht, 2006). Hoecht (2006) further argues that such a discourse may be used to disguise

the controlling nature of the quality regime imposed on the university sector by external national regulators and government.

The above-mentioned quality shift is observed from an institutionally driven approach in that TQM as conceptualised from a business approach is institutionally based, controlled and executed internally. The emphasis on TQM as a philosophy to some extent gave rise to the formalisation of QA in higher education, but due to its business orientation and its narrow view it cannot be exclusively accepted as an appropriate approach to QA in higher education.

In the next sections the researcher will attempt to demonstrate that managerialist approaches to QA such as TQM, are limiting in a higher education setting and that QA is complex and multi-layered with many facets. Additionally, QA is collaborative in nature, driven by various actors such as national quality councils and professional bodies.

2.4   QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

2.4.1   International perspectives on quality assurance

Kis (2005) suggests that in the early years of the introduction of quality assurance it was seen as a mechanism to address the concerns of governments, students, and society about the value of the education and graduates produced. Through national agencies, governments may set pre-determined standards that must be met for state funding to assure efficiency and the value of the education sector, so that society is protected from poor education standards. In higher education institutions the purpose of quality assurance is often seen as preserving and validating the reputation of the academics and the brand value of the university.

In universities quality assurance is not a new phenomenon; there has long existed in-built academic processes like external examination and moderation. Peer review of research and programme reviews and evaluation have also for a very long time been part of QA in universities. The massification of higher education has brought about the

need to formalise QA approaches, leading to the development of national quality assurance regulation, systems and instruments which governments then introduced in institutions, while setting up structures to respond to state regulation.

Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley (2009) highlight that between 2000 and 2007 there was an increase of 53% in the number of higher education students globally. The response from thousands of higher education institutions across the world was the mass production of higher education to cater for the increased number of students. The CHE (2014) identifies that in response to the massification of higher education, universities built larger lecture theatres to provide ever-increasing numbers of students with access to expert lecturers, who represent a source of precious information. Assessments became more standardised and amenable to machine marking, inhibiting the development of individual student learning and thinking. Large scale online courses and open resources resulted in uniformity and conformity of standards due to the volumes of production (CHE, 2014a). In addition, massification meant the depersonalisation of higher education, where those who could not fit within the narrowly defined parameters of the education system dropped out (CHE, 2014a).

The standardisation and depersonalisation of education led, among other things, to a structured and formalised approach to the development of education standards and matrices where quality could be measured per the business oriented ISO9000 standards and TQM approaches to quality management. As a result, quality assurance was formalised in educational settings, programmes, academic processes and procedures. Billing (2004) suggests that the purposes of external quality assurance in several countries appear to be variants of a mix of the same functions, which can be distilled down to the following:

a. Improvement of quality;
b. Publicly available information on quality and standards;
c. Accreditation (i.e. legitimisation of certification of students);
d. Public accountability for standards achieved, and for use of money; and
e. To contribute to the HE sector's planning process.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2018) highlights that quality assurance is a rather complex topic, with diverging views

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on its role and purpose. Quality assurance should be viewed in terms of its context and application, but its purpose can vary on a continuum from improvement to compliance and control (CHE, 2014a). Jarvis (2014) supports this view and further argues that QA is often a political tool, used to engineer the sector and organisational change associated with specific political agendas. As much as quality assurance involves the pursuit of excellence, as advocated for by quality assurance practitioners (Westerheijden, Stensaker, Rosa & Corbett, 2014), Jarvis (2014) identifies that, as an instrument of governance, quality assurance gives power to some and removes it from others, while facilitating an increase in control by central authorities over desired outcomes or outputs through regulated processes.

Globally, quality assurance has acquired a coercive presence through a number of initiatives (Naidoo, 2009), such as the OECD accreditation instruments, UNESCO programmes, World Bank projects and loans, the diffusive effect of the information sharing and developmental activities of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), various regional quality assurance networks, as well as the activities of professional associations and internationally mobile professionals (Rhoades & Sporn, 2002). Quality assurance at international level focuses on networking and coordination of common qualification frameworks for the recognition and comparability of qualifications that facilitate mobility for students. This approach is witnessed in the European Union, where the Bologna Process led to a common framework for programme recognition, credentials and competencies (Huisman, Adelman, Hsieh, Shams & Wilkins, 2012).

Quality assurance locates itself around the coordination and alignment of national frameworks to promote comparability of qualifications, programme outcomes and facilitation of student mobility. The concept of internationalisation to facilitate cross-border academic mobility and recognition of qualifications within and across regions has gained importance. Singh (2010) highlights that narratives of national accountability and educational improvement have overlays of cross-border trade and regional economic competitiveness. The Bologna Process, the Lisbon Strategy in Europe, regional revitalisation as in the African Union's expectations of African higher education are examples of regional state led initiates.

Universities still grapple with the concept of internationalisation that manifests in activities such as joint research projects, student exchange programs, staff mobility projects, specially designed programmes aimed at foreign students and joint curriculum development initiatives (Singh, 2010). Wächter (2003) defines internationalisation as a process of systematic integration of an international dimension into the teaching, research and public service functions of a higher education institution. The tensions of globalisation through internationalisation put at the forefront decisions that universities need to make in terms of global competition, integration of markets, mobility, communication networks and information flows.

These tensions similarly exist between the various levels of QA: international, national and institutional. Universities operate within a national policy framework and specific national educational systems, regulations and procedures adapted to meet the needs of the domestic economy and culture of their respective countries (Harman, 1998). Strategic decisions need to be continuously made by institutions whether to align their programme offerings for the purposes of recognition and validation of academic programmes, qualifications and credits or to participate in ranking systems, development of international forms of quality assurance and accreditation. The tensions are further compounded by the institutional responses to professional accreditation and recognition demands from professional bodies. Okoche (2017) identifies that some considerations are needed to improve QA, in particular capacity development arrangements for African higher education. He further identifies a need at an international level for UNESCO to set up a Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications, the purpose of which must be to support capacity development for quality assurance in national and institutional contexts. This suggestion by Okoche (2017) provides a consideration for linkages between international and continental QA and suggests further benefits for student mobility and recognition of qualifications across continents.

The noble aims and benefits of quality assurance are well documented (Naidoo, 2009), but within higher education institutions, external quality assurance has been met with a measure of scepticism. A survey by the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Massachusetts (AICUM), (Dill, 2000) revealed that, in the opinion of the institutions, professional accreditation and recognition is a valuable and often

necessary incentive to institutional development, but that it is costly, cumbersome and often viewed as unfair. The AICUM study found that accreditation demands can be duplicative and inconsistent and can discourage innovation and ignore an institution's distinctive goals. The survey further highlights that often the process is accompanied by ill-informed, biased, narrow, self-interested or unrealistic judgments and demands (Dill, 2000). Academics question a state-sponsored project seen to be aimed at producing compliance cultures in institutions where the space for debate, or dissent, is then severely constrained. This view is supported by Morley's (2005) contention that external quality assurance is a regime of power that has a fundamental impact on social justice.

Harvey and Newton (2004) assert that the regulation of higher education has been highly criticised within institutions of higher learning, where governments can be seen to be stripping away the autonomy and independence of academics in their knowledge production and stifling creativity in teaching, learning and scholarship. QA has been critiqued as a policy instrument of state regulation leaning more towards accountability and away from an improvement focus. The view often prevails that the public in higher education would be more efficiently served through consumer choice than quality assurance as a tool of the 'nanny state' (Singh, 2010). Singh (2010) further elaborates that, given the history of quality assurance systems that started with a collegial improvement focus, for example, the US accreditation system which later moved towards a stronger accountability regime, quality assurance has become a management friendly tool for accountability.

From the analysis of several interactions in the policy environment, Ndebele (2004) identifies how on-going political and educational tensions are being negotiated between the isomorphism of quality assurance techniques on the one hand, and the imperatives of contextual environments and local purposes on the other, as well as regarding what or who the winners and losers might be in this process. Academics view quality assurance as the bureaucratisation of academic processes, while professionals in the quality assurance community look at it as a necessary tool to manage quality, assuming that the benefits are mostly positive (Harvey, 2006). Harvey (2006) further identifies that the introduction of external quality assurance as a process has resulted in increased accountability and compliance, with the concomitant erosion

of academic autonomy and freedom. Quality assurance by its nature is complex and involves relationships, shared concerns and differences within institutions, and structural layers at national and regional levels that inform qualification frameworks of many countries. These complex frameworks are then adopted by the state as a means to regulate higher education institutions.

Even though general models of external quality assurance which demonstrate a high level of homogeneity exist, these models do not universally apply from country to country (Billing, 2004). Billing (2004) further highlights that these general models provide a starting point from which to map deviations and that each country may have specific additions of elements to, modifications of or omissions from the model. These variations in the models are determined by practicalities, the size of the higher education sector, the rigidity or flexibility of the legal expression of quality assurance, or the absence of enshrinement in law and the stage of development of state control of the sector. The application of these varied models at national levels is then followed and adopted by institutions of learning, wherein policies are developed, and processes and procedures are designed to meet the requirements of the national models. Van Damme (2000) suggests that international commonalities and variations in quality assurance models manifest along the following dimensions:

   a. the notion of quality purposes or functions of the quality assurance system; and
   b. public accountability and steering the national HE system in terms of resources and planning.

From an international perspective Billing (2004) asserts that quality assurance should move towards more internally driven mechanisms, placing more emphasis on self-evaluation and self-regulatory activities, should become less dependent on government influence, and be more associated with improvement, management and strategy, with more feedback from students and society. The relationships that exist between international models and national frameworks of quality assurance influence perceptions of quality at country level which translate to institutional framing of policies and processes.

2.4.2 Quality assurance in African higher education

At the centre of quality assurance in African higher education is regional revitalisation, in terms of the African Union's expectations and other political and economic ambitions relating to higher education in the continent (Singh, 2011). Shabani, Okebukola and Oyewole (2014) identify that continental issues of jurisdictional political power and educational authority in quality assurance have become complex and multi-layered. Quality assurance at the continental level involves the Association of African Universities (AAU) and the African Union Commission. The AAU oversees two initiatives, namely, the African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN) and the Europe-Africa Quality Connect Pilot Project. AfriQAN implements its main mandate of promoting collaboration among quality assurance agencies through capacity building and the African Quality Assurance Peer Review Mechanism (Shabani et al., 2014). Shabani (2013) notes that national quality assurance agencies are a fairly recent phenomenon in Africa and are still evolving in terms of scope and rigour, ranging in different countries from the granting of licences by ministries of education to comprehensive, system wide programme accreditation and ranking of institutions.

Materu (2007) highlights that the first formal accreditation processes in tertiary education started in francophone African countries in 1968, with the establishment of the *Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Superieur* (The African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education, or CAMES). Materu (2007) further identifies seven factors that influence and drive the need for quality assurance, particularly in Africa;

    a. increasing demand for higher education and rising private contributions;
    b. rapid growth of enrolments without a matching increase in funding;
    c. demands for increased transparency and accountability;
    d. the need for reforms in higher education to address new challenges;
    e. new methods of education delivery such as technology-mediated delivery that challenge traditional approaches to higher education;
    f. increasing competition and shorter knowledge cycles, which require continuous improvement; and
    g. increasing regional collaboration, which requires harmonisation of qualifications and awards (Materu 2007).

A number of initiatives have been launched in Africa to develop common frameworks for comparable and compatible qualifications in order to promote and strengthen academic mobility. These initiatives point to an increasing focus on using quality assurance as a mechanism to make African higher education more efficient and competitive (Jongsma, 2013; Kigotho, 2013, Mhlanga, 2008). The Association of African Universities (AAU) has launched a quality assurance programme in some African universities but questions are still being raised about the external role of the AAU (Oyewole, 2012). The AAU highlights that the objective of the project is to lay a foundation for institutionalized quality assurance mechanisms within higher education institutions, national quality assurance and accreditation agencies, and an eventual regional network for coordination of cross-border protocols and specialised capacity building in quality assurance (Butcher, 2009). What the AAU proposes calls to mind Harvey and Stensaker's (2008) argument of external versus internal control or quality development, and whether an ideal quality culture can be developed and prescribed by external rules and regulations.

It is important to note the regional efforts in African quality assurance, as Shabani (2013) suggests that these efforts are continuous in promoting and developing a harmonised quality assurance system. The African Union is currently implementing a number of initiatives, one being the African Higher Education Harmonisation Strategy. The African Higher Education Harmonisation Strategy was adopted in 2007 to ensure comparability of qualifications. This strategy can be considered to be a mechanism for implementing the revised Arusha Convention, originally the UNESCO Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in the African States (1981). The harmonisation or coordination strategy focuses primarily on quality of academic programmes and institutions. Continentally, the harmonisation strategy aims to achieve the establishment of an African Qualifications Framework (Shabani, 2013).

Regionally, the Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) and the development of an African Credit Transfer and Accumulation System seem to be the focus of regional initiatives, driven by regional structures and governments. An example is SADC, which is in the process of establishing a regional qualifications framework, named the SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF). The vision and purpose of the SADCQF is to be

a regional framework that is a driving force for regional integration, quality assurance and global competitiveness of education and training systems in SADC member states (Butcher, 2009). Other regional frameworks are the CAMES and the Inter-University Council for East Africa which are two major quality assurance agencies on the African continent with the objective of harmonising academic programmes and policies between their respective countries. The Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) has the responsibility of ensuring internationally comparable standards in the five-member states of the East African community, namely Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. This mandate is implemented through the establishment and use of a sub-regional quality assurance framework.

As the need for these initiatives arises to strengthen academic standards and programme provision, there are still challenges that confront QA in Africa. Materu (2007) suggests cost and human capacity requirements as some of the challenges in quality assurance systems in Africa. There needs to be stronger linkages between funding allocations, impetus for quality and quality assurance processes by governments (Daugherty, Miller, Dossani & Clifford, 2013). This foregrounds the argument that quality assurance is costly in terms of human capital and financial resources, and should be a planned, systematic review process of an institution or programme to determine whether acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being met, maintained and enhanced.

Developing appropriate quality assurance systems in Africa seems to be driven centrally by government and national regulators. This approach raises the question of independence or autonomy of institutions and suggests the promotion of a culture of compliance and control. It is inevitable that external imposition will challenge what institutions seek to achieve, namely designing their own QA frameworks free from external influence. The issue of funding seems to stand central in most of the challenges on the continent, as setting up a QA system is costly.

Though all the continental and regional QA initiatives are well intended, Shabani et al. (2014) identify that these regional and continental initiatives aim to drive standards development for institutional quality assurance (IQA). Huang (2007) argues that the approach to standards development should rather be located within institutions themselves and aligned to national or regional QA levels to facilitate

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internationalisation. At an institutional level, there seems to be a need to further support the mechanics of how African institutions ought to deal with issues of quality as most of the frameworks identify as being either regional or driven by governments. d'Egmont (2006) asserts that quality assurance should not be a state or regional led function but must be internally driven by institutions as a bottom up approach in a collaborative manner with external stakeholders and should take on a balanced view in promoting institutional autonomy and independence. The CHE (2017) suggests that a number of higher education institutions in South African and on the continent have established internal systems for QA and have acquired the necessary resources and capacity to meet the requirements, in particular for programme accreditation. Efforts by higher education institutions to self-regulate their academic provision should be supported and must not be burdened with state control and regulation, but a more collaborative approach must be adopted (Evans, 2013). Okoche (2017) contends that if institutions adequately design and implement internal quality assurance mechanisms which comply with requirements of the external quality assurance bodies and the state, these internal quality systems will embody a culture that builds the quality across the entire institution, not just for the purposes of an external system of quality monitoring or a set of bureaucratic procedures to be followed. To ensure that quality is achieved, the quality culture needs to transcend beyond the borders of the institution. In turn this will eliminate the burden of policing institutions, because the cultural orientation to quality will drive quality across all the facets of the institution and the higher education system.

2.4.3 Quality assurance framework in South Africa

Martin (2009) suggests that the South African higher education context is mindful of past disparities in terms of education provision and identifies that there have been systematic attempts to connect the quality question with other social purposes such as redress and access linked to issues of equity, social justice and democracy in a broader understanding of social accountability. These values inform the quality assurance discourse in the South African higher education landscape and as such the

quality assurance system includes criteria on social justice and social transformation (Martin, 2009).

Harvey (2006) though raises questions not only about the need to democratise quality from some of its autocratic forms but asks whether quality could itself be an agent of democracy.

Due to its past and its history of fragmentation, the South African higher education system presents a myriad of complex challenges in relation to quality provision of educational offerings and recognition. A closer look at the South African quality assurance framework highlights some key similarities in terms of the international observations and brings into question a more localised view of the quality frameworks of the country. This convergent nature of quality assurance in terms of similarities, as Billing (2004) asserts, is that it appears to be variants of a mix of the same functions. This demonstrates considerable commonality in the shape of a spectrum from the developmental improvement/informational functions to the judgmental legal/financial/planning functions. The question remains as to what the implementation of such purposes produces in the form of national quality assurance frameworks, and how these inform as well as align with internal quality assurance within institutions themselves.

The South African higher education system is a low participation, high attrition system (CHE, 2017). The CHE (2017) further identifies that this situation is wasteful of both human and material resources, and is impeding South Africa's development, in both economic and social terms (RSA NDP, 2012). Since the formal end of apartheid and segregation in 1994, the country has undergone a series of curriculum and structural changes at school level and in higher education (RSA DHET, 2001). Quality assurance post-1994 is viewed as an instrument that can drive the developmental agenda of redress and access to education through a single coordinated system. The quality assurance framework developed and adopted by the HEQC took on a steering role of evaluating the responsiveness of institutions to the socio-economic needs of the country, in terms of alignment and relevance. For example, the South African qualifications framework as provided for in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (SAQA, 2009) aims to provide an integrated framework for the recognition of

learning outcomes, and to facilitate access, mobility, progression and the elimination of discriminatory practices observed pre-1994.

External quality assurance in the country is located at the intersection of two entities, namely the professional councils for which universities provide students equipped with unique professional knowledge, technical skills and competencies, and national quality councils mandated by government to oversee quality in institutions of higher learning. The Council on Higher Education (CHE) is an independent statutory body established in May 1998 in terms of the Higher Education Act (Act No 101 of 1997) (RSA, 1997). The CHE plays the role of Quality Council for Higher Education in terms of the National Qualifications Framework Act (Act No 67 of 2008) (SAQA, 2009). Through its permanent committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), it is responsible for quality assurance and promotion in higher education. The CHE (2017) emphasises that, in line with international best practice, the HEQC has conceptualised its role in terms of four inter-related components:

a. programme accreditation, which ensures that minimum standards are met in the programme offerings of higher education institutions, thereby safeguarding students against poor quality programmes;

b. national reviews, in which specific programmes offered at HEIs are evaluated by academic peers in the light of national and international good practice, and, where appropriate, the requirements of professional bodies and national regulations;

c. institutional audits, which assess higher education institutions' internal quality assurance mechanisms and identify areas for improvement; and

d. quality promotion and capacity development, in which training, information sharing, and other development opportunities are provided to institutions in order to improve quality management.

The CHE's quality assurance regimen is organised into different activities that are located within different parts of an overall conceptual framework. Quality assurance within the CHE context is understood as an overarching term, which encapsulates different kinds of activities that span a continuum from quality control to quality enhancement, and which focus on either the institution or the programme level as the unit of analysis. Evaluation of the CHE functions and framework provides a broader

context, where the integration of a multi-layered approach to quality can be identified (Geyser & Murdoch, 2016).

It needs to be pointed out that quality assurance of HE in SA did not commence with the establishment of the CHE and its permanent sub-committee, the HEQC, but that issues and mechanisms of quality assurance are as old as universities in South Africa. Yet, prior to the establishment of the CHE, responsibility for quality assurance in South Africa was not centrally coordinated. The Certification Council for Technikon Education (SERTEC) and the Quality Promotion Unit (QPU) established in 1988 and 1996 respectively were the two main institutions that were responsible for quality assurance in South Africa prior to the establishment of the CHE.

Universities have been always concerned about the quality of their teaching and the Committee of University Principal (CUP) decided to form a task team to look at the establishment of a quality body for universities (Selesho, 2006). The Quality Promotion Unit (QPU) for South African universities was established by the CUP in 1996. The purpose and aim of the QPU was to advise and support universities to maintain and improve the quality of educational programmes. The QPU was independent from any university and conducted the first institutional audits in South Africa (Botha & Muller, 2016).

The QPU was, however, predated by SERTEC by several years. The purpose of SERTEC was to promote accountability and improvements in education offering of technikon type programmes. SERTEC's further purpose was to assure equality of standards across the technikons and to certify successful learning. SERTEC and the QPU paved the way for the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) to perform its roles as assigned by the Council of Higher Education (CHE) (Selesho, 2006).

During the first period of national quality assurance from 2004 to 2011, policies and procedures were developed to strengthen the quality of educational offerings and practices in South African higher education institutions. A rigorous system was set up for accrediting every higher education programme offered at every institution. In addition, during this period the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) was developed through a collaborative project of the CHE, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the Department of Labour. The CHE further

implemented a national review process for benchmarking key qualifications nationally and internationally. In addition, a comprehensive framework and process was developed and implemented for auditing the quality of individual institutions' policies and practices in relation to the three core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement, as well as management, governance and administration (CHE, 2017). A strong relationship between institutional accreditation, also referred to as institutional audits, and programme accreditation as a requirement by accreditation bodies exists, where such a requirement has direct implications for the institution and students in terms of professional practice registration and employability. Therefore, programme accreditation as a quality assurance instrument lies central to both the institution and its students.

Within the higher education system there are other actors such as regulatory councils or professional bodies that oversee programme quality linked to a specific profession. These entities also play a quality assurance role. Marock (2000) identifies that a regulatory professional body is established by government to regulate qualifications and training for a particular occupation, for example, the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA), the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), and, importantly for the purposes of this study, the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP).

This study attempts to analyse the relationship between government agencies, in this case the CHE and the HEQC, and the professional, regulatory and statutory bodies as external quality assurance bodies that oversee the professions on behalf of students and society, and how these entities influence the internal quality assurance processes of higher education institutions and relate with institutions of higher learning in their pursuit of producing students that are readily absorbed by the world of work.

The integrated quality assurance framework of the CHE (2017) seeks to centre enhancement as an output of quality assurance. Institutions are expected, in terms of the CHE position on quality, to drive quality internally, and programme accreditation is but one of the focus areas. At programme level, the accreditation of programmes is carried out in terms of the HEQC's Framework for Programme Accreditation of 2004 revised in 2009 (CHE, 2015), which was seen at the time as an ambitious initiative

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intended to accredit all new programmes in higher education, to conduct mid-term reviews, and to regularly review existing ones. Given the size of the mandate and the number of programme offerings in the system, all existing programmes were deemed to be accredited after a single national process, and the focus for the development of the accreditation system became the process for accrediting new offerings; a process that has since grown with the placement of existing programmes with new ones in an alignment process onto the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) (CHE, 2017).

Coupled with the accreditation of new programmes, existing programmes were reviewed in a number of reviews of offerings in specific disciplines at all institutions, through an accreditation process known as national reviews. The first decade of the accreditation process ran concurrently with the first cycle of institutional audits and national reviews. More recently national reviews have been extended with the reviews of the Bachelor of Social Work degree (BSW) and the Bachelor of Laws degree (LLB). It is primarily at this level that links between the role of the CHE and those of the professional bodies are observed. These roles are connected by programme benchmarks and standards. The CHE (2014a) provides that standards articulate what a programme leading to the qualification type intends to achieve and how the standard can be achieved. Therefore, the achievement of the standards would then demonstrate fitness for purpose.

Standards aim to provide institutions with nationally established benchmarks for programmes and may be used for internal quality assurance as well as external comparison (CHE, 2014a). Standards setting serves as a point of convergence at programme level by providing a framework for cooperation in the development of standards for higher education qualifications. The relationship between the national regulatory body, the CHE, and the professional body is provided for although limited in terms of the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 (CHE, 2015). The Act assigns overall responsibility for quality assurance in higher education to the HEQC, including the coordination of quality assurance in higher education.

The first layer of quality assurance in terms of the CHE (2017) is the accreditation of programmes, the second layer are the national programme reviews and a third layer

are the institutional audits that focus on the assessment of quality at an institutional level. These layers integrate and intersect to form the integrated framework of quality assurance of the CHE. This study focuses on the two first layers of programme accreditation and national reviews. Programme accreditation in terms of the CHE accreditation framework is viewed as the 'promise' in terms of accreditation standards and minimum requirements for delivery and the programme reviews follow up on the commitment and the 'keeping of the promise' by the institution in ensuring that those minimum standards are met during the delivery of programmes. The CHE conducts national reviews across all the public higher education institutions in an attempt to evaluate qualification standards. The national review process of the CHE is aligned with the programme accreditation system which evaluates new programmes and changes to existing programmes. The fundamental aims of a national review are to ensure that minimum standards in programmes are met, that students are protected from programmes that do not meet minimum quality standards and that public confidence in higher education programmes is assured (CHE, 2015).

The HEQC has executive responsibility for quality assurance decisions, including decisions in respect of national reviews and programme accreditation. This process of national reviews requires institutions to engage in critical self-evaluation and reflection to identify areas of improvement and for possible benchmarking with other similar programmes across the sector. National reviews provide benchmarks for best practice, improvement areas, and other interventions required to enhance the quality of the programmes (CHE, 2015).

The process of programme accreditation involves the commitment to a promise and the national review process involves the re-accreditation and evaluation of the programme after its delivery. The CHE (2015) further asserts that the two processes are closely inter-related and inform one another. To be re-accredited, programmes need to meet the national qualification standard and the programme-level criteria in terms of the programme accreditation framework. A national review aims to be a means not only of quality control, but also of quality development. The review seeks to identify and acknowledge areas of above-threshold practice which could be shared among the entire academic community, to the benefit of the qualification at a national level and, where required, enhance its international comparability.

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The HEQC makes its accreditation and re-accreditation judgements independently of other national agencies and professional bodies but takes into consideration their work where issues of quality and standards are involved (CHE, 2007). Decisions of the HEQC are based on peer evaluation and expert review processes. The complementary and inter-connected processes of national reviews and programme accreditation confirms a continuum of external quality assurance, ranging from those that have a hard accountability focus such as programme accreditation and re-accreditation, to those that, while addressing accountability, are also developmental in orientation such as institutional audits (CHE, 2015).

In its discussion document entitled *An Integrated Approach To Quality Assurance In Higher Education,* the CHE (2017) acknowledges the evolving maturity of the higher education sector in South Africa, and highlights that the completion of the HEQSF alignment process for programmes signalled the need for a new strategic plan for the next phase of programme accreditation and QA; the emphasis of this strategic plan for the next quality cycle is an integrated quality assurance framework. The view of the CHE seems to suggest that at least some institutions of higher learning are now equipped to drive their own quality assurance internally, in particular the programme approval processes. The CHE further recognises the role and value of professional bodies in external quality assurance.

In general, the CHE (2017) suggests that the national quality assurance framework has become well established, and its impact is extensive. The CHE (2017) further elaborates that the higher education landscape is a significantly different one to that which provided the backdrop for its establishment in 1998, and highlights that the different quality assurance methodologies it employs can be better integrated to ensure the greatest possible impact on quality across the sector and the inclusion of all actors in the system. Through this integrated framework, the CHE asserts, institutions can take a central role in driving their own quality assurance processes and programme accreditation activities with minimal involvement from external regulation.

2.5   THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL BODIES IN QUALITY ASSURANCE

For an integrated system of internal and external QA to optimally function there needs to be constant engagements among the various role-players in the system. McGhee (2003) identifies that in recognising these relationships between national quality councils and professional bodies the challenge is not the legislative requirements in terms of adherence, but rather the levels and focus of engagements. Higher education institutions need to align to their surrounding environments socially and economically to accomplish their institutional missions (Piotrowska-Piatek, 2017) and these environments are driven by relations between institutions with their stakeholders and the regulatory environments.

Professional bodies are a key role-player in universities. Churchman and Woodhouse (1998) note that in the pursuit of quality education, various role-players seek to influence professional education at universities, where the degree of influence of each group of role-players is different for different professions. Professional education is mainly driven by professional councils or bodies. Stoltz-Urban and Govender (2014) define a profession as a group of professionals, organised through a system of self-regulation, with special knowledge and skills built on specific research, education and training, that adheres to a set of ethical standards and that enjoys a particular social status or authority based on this status, allowing them to exercise professional judgement. These proceed to then form professional boards or bodies.

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA, 2018) defines a professional body as a body appointed to represent a recognised community of expert practitioners and this body devises, informs, monitors and continually updates the benchmark standards of competence, both academic, practical and ethical, required in the practice of the profession for which it is responsible. It is noted that the main statutory function of each of these professional bodies is to protect the public by effectively controlling the education and practising standards of the profession that they represent; hence these bodies have codes of conduct that registered persons must abide by (SAICE, 2018).

SAQA (2018) further distinguishes between a statutory professional body and a non-statutory professional body. In terms of the South African National Qualifications

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Framework (NQF) Act 67 of 2008 which came into effect from 1 June 2009, SAQA is required to;

a. develop and implement policy and criteria for recognising a professional body and registering a professional designation for the purposes of this Act, after consultation with statutory and non-statutory bodies of expert practitioners in occupational fields and with the Quality Councils (QCs); and

b. recognise a professional body and register its professional designation if the criteria are met. A statutory professional body is a professional body that has been established through an Act of Parliament of South Africa such as the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) or the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA).

Non-statutory professional bodies are formal formations of a community of expert practitioners that are not guided by regulations to exist in terms of laws enacted through government and the Parliament of the country (SAQA, 2018).

Piotrowska-Piatek (2017) identifies that professional bodies are responsible for:

a. specifying conditions to be met by curricula, descriptions of learning outcomes in a given field, as well as of model learning outcomes in selected fields of study and educational standards in the case of some fields, e.g. medical or teaching professions,

b. defining fundamental rules and criteria for programmes.

Since professional bodies inform, monitor and continually update the benchmark standards of competence from both an academic and a practical orientation, Stoltz-Urban and Govender (2014) suggest that the most critical functions that professional bodies need to perform are those of standards setting or input into curricula, and quality assurance or accreditation of academic programmes and institutions.

Professional education is distinctive, because the curriculum addresses knowledge for and about practice, and is taught both in the context of the higher education institution and the field of professional practice. McGhee (2003) argues that in recognising such relationships between institutions and professional bodies there needs to be a formal structure guided by contractual understanding, such as contractual relationship

agreements between the higher education institutions and the professional bodies. These agreements aim to assist to manage the relationships and role clarification in order to eliminate blurring of roles in terms of ownership and accountability, since the academic programmes are accountable to the institution for the quality of education, and to the professional body for the curriculum outcomes and the competence of graduates (Churchman & Woodhouse, 1998).

Brown (2004) notes that there are many complex negotiations between professional bodies and the institutions themselves. The professional bodies attempt to exercise their control over the licence to practice, while institutions wish to develop within professional programmes breadth of knowledge, intellectual challenge, and the critical abilities of students. Brown (2004) further suggests that since professional bodies and institutions continue to experience different pressures and have rather different objectives, compromises need to be constantly re-negotiated. Thus, the potential for conflict between professional educators, academics, professional and national regulatory bodies is constant.

The Higher Education Act of South Africa (Act 101 of 1997) (RSA, 1997) provides for a number of role-players, in particular the role of higher education institutions, the CHE and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) as national regulatory bodies, but the Act is rather silent on the role of professional bodies which are a critical constituent in quality assurance. The Act provides that the CHE through its permanent quality committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), may, with the concurrence of the CHE, delegate any quality promotion and quality assurance functions to other appropriate bodies capable of performing such functions. This prescript of the Act allows for delegation arrangements, if the CHE so wish, through the HEQC. Such an arrangement has crafted a pathway for complementary accreditation where the CHE can accredit programmes and the professional body can also be delegated accreditation powers; such an arrangement can be witnessed through an agreement of the HEQC with ECSA as professional body.

The legislation that prescribes national quality assurance frameworks of the HEQC and the professional bodies as external quality assurance entities requires institutions' professional oriented programmes to be accredited by a professional body, as well as

by the HEQC. Such an arrangement positions the higher education institutions at the centre of the two regulatory bodies, namely the HEQC and various professional bodies, as they require institutions and programmes to meet accreditation standards and requirements. This arrangement resulted in a formalised agreement between the CHE and one professional body, namely ECSA. ECSA is a statutory professional body in terms of the Engineering Act of 2000. The Engineering Act provides ECSA with the responsibility of accrediting Engineering programmes offered at undergraduate levels. A memorandum of understanding signed in 2006, and renewed in 2012, provides for the quality assurance of Engineering programmes offered by higher education institutions in South Africa. It also provides for a model of cooperation allowing the HEQC to delegate to ECSA the quality assurance functions with respect to undergraduate Engineering programmes. In its integrated proposal for quality assurance, the CHE (2017) proposes a partnership model with institutions and extends such potential partnership to professional bodies.

Pertinent questions in this regard remain. Through these partnerships, can we then assume that the integrated quality assurance model recognises all stakeholders and affords them the space to exercise their mandate? Further, what measures are in place to facilitate these partnerships other than formal contractual agreements? These questions position an intersection of roles between the institutions, national quality council, the CHE, and the professional body.

Table 2.1 below provides a high-level representation of characteristics across three role-players, viz. external quality assurance bodies, professional associations and institutions.

Table 2.1: Characteristics of External and Internal Quality Assurance

#	Characteristics	External Quality Assurance	Internal Quality Assurance	Professional Body
1.	Objective	Accountability and Compliance	Improvement and Enhancement	Improvement and Enhancement
2.	Authority	Legislative and Mandatory	Administrative and Optional	Dependent on the nature of the professional association
3.	Nature of Regulations	Universal application	Local application	Limited to Profession and Practice
4.	Control/Management	Government Agency	HE Institutions	Government and Professional Association
5.	Level of operation	National Level	Institutional Level	Sectoral
6.	Nature of report	Public	Private	Both Public and Private
7.	Actors/Role-players	Government, National QA and Public	Management, Academics, QA practitioners	Management, Academics, QA practitioners

Source: Adapted from Paintsil (2016).

The professional bodies may at times confuse their role in assurance of quality and provision of advice with the power to specify how a programme should be developed, and professional agencies may further interfere with an institution's mandate to manage its QA philosophy, curricula, people and funds coherently. Further, the results stemming from accreditation outcomes from professional bodies at times tend to give limited public access to results beyond whether or not a programme is accredited.

Churchman and Woodhouse (1998) identify the purpose of professional bodies' monitoring of professional programmes as the protection of the public by assuring the

quality of programmes and graduates, but further suggest that some of these bodies also act to define territory and to protect employment, status and incomes. Dill (2000) argues that this further perpetuates a belief in gatekeeping by the professions with their established roles and privileges. As such, the role of the professional body needs to be evaluated against the national context of the higher education sector and located within the ambit of social justice, redress and access.

2.6   INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Embedding quality in higher education requires the development of a culture within an academic department, faculty or higher education institution in which staff continually strive to improve the quality of provision, and where such improvement is a naturalistic process, fuelled by a desire for excellence (Lomas 2004). Lomas (2004) further argues that linkages from quality embedded as an institutional culture extend beyond the institution, to the professional practice as regulated by the professional body, to the national quality agency and society.

Internal quality assurance as opposed to external quality assurance promotes self-assessment with attention to self-improvement, thereby building a culture of quality in the university (Materu, 2007). Okoche (2017) argues that, without external pressure and fear of repercussions, an internally focused quality culture fosters social cohesion and teamwork with inbuilt mechanisms promoting accountability and cultivating commitment and a common focus on quality. Internal quality assurance enables the institution to understand its strengths and weaknesses and to generate collective commitment to pursue quality.

Within the South African context, the CHE (2017) stresses that institutions ought to be empowered for taking on the responsibility for the kind of education they offer, becoming self-aware of their goals and purposes, and monitoring their own quality instruments (CHE, 2017). This acknowledgment by the CHE identifies that institutions are central to their own quality assurance regimen and that quality ought to be driven from within. This assertion affirms a level of trust in the institutions, highlighting a shift

from the initial thinking of quality as a control mechanism used to steer the sector by the state after 1994.

Transformation of the higher education sector and the institutions themselves is critical, and it is important to understand that transformation relates to the appropriateness of purpose, identity and role of an institution in the South African context. The acknowledgement of transformation at an institutional level as a dynamic and agile concept implies institutional quality assurance that brings about improvement and helps the institution to engage in collective appropriate decision-making and reflection, such that change can be undertaken continuously, in a manner that respects the core values and role of the institution (CHE, 2017). Institutions are expected in terms of the CHE's position on quality to drive quality internally. This positions institutions as drivers of their own quality standards but also seems to suggest that there are a number of other stakeholders that must be taken into consideration when institutions design and develop their internal systems for quality assurance.

Naidoo (2009) contends that quality assurance will continue to vary around the same themes of accountability, improvement and standards, with a balance between accountability and improvement, between external social pressure and internal academic control, riding on a seesaw shaped largely by the choices and views of policymakers about higher education accountability and responsiveness. Naidoo (2009) further argues that within such themes of accountability and improvement, established systems would continue tinkering at the edges, while newer ones would become increasingly institutionalised. Quality assurance therefore provides a space for inward looking and an institutionalisation of a quality culture that fosters good relations to be built in the pursuit of quality education, producing quality graduates with the requisite competencies required for professional practice.

The CHE's current focus on the transformation of institutions as one of the drivers of an integrated framework for quality assurance and programme accreditation signals a shift away from its previous approach of driving quality assurance externally. Developing external measures for improving quality and enhancing accountability in an equitable manner across the higher education system promotes self-awareness of institutions to drive their own QA and transforming a higher education sector that was

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characterised pre-1994 by a legacy of fragmentation, uneven provision, and racial segregation (CHE, 2014b). The CHE (2017) and the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (2013) identifies a conceptual shift from unifying the higher education sector to conceiving of it as integral to the post-school education and training sector. There now exists a need for articulation across different types of institutions, as well as the emergence of new forms and modes of offering such as blended and online learning. These new modes of teaching and learning challenge the traditional definitions of contact and distance provision, and as such the differentiated placement of higher education institutions gives rise to differing levels of maturity within institutions and positions improvement and internal quality assurance processes as an absolute necessity (CHE, 2017).

Lomas (2004) identifies possible institutional requirements to inculcate a culture of quality as follows:

a. the need for a quality culture and the possible value of quality management models;

b. the importance of high-quality training for newly appointed lecturers, and continuing professional development;

c. peer review of teaching for more experienced academics; and

d. the importance of appointing and/or developing transformational leaders who could implement effective quality and change management strategies.

The question is whether institutions design their quality frameworks to satisfy and meet their own quality standards or to meet subtle external imposition by government. Odukoya, Chinedu, George, Olowookere and Agbude (2015) highlight that quality assurance is imperative for any institution, and notes that its aims ought to be to:

a. deliver on its basic functions (teaching, research, innovation and community service);

b. ensure effective service delivery (which demands that facilities and accompaniments must be quality-defining and quality-driven);

c. enhance its value standing, locally and globally (institutional/programme accreditation), and

d. provide solutions to national and global needs.

Odukoya et al. (2015) further suggest that institutional quality assurance models should be centrally positioned to drive a culture of quality, and ought to include principles such as:

a. teamwork, acknowledging that everyone from professor to the cleaner, is involved;

b. bottom up, where quality starts from the units/departments, and extends outwards to the whole university;

c. emphasis is placed on internal assurance mechanisms;

d. continuous quality improvement is the focus; and

e. there is recognition that external quality assurance is a mere validation of the efficiency of the internal assurance mechanisms.

Billing (2004) identifies that quality assurance recognises the need for a university to accept responsibility for its own internal processes. Billing (2004) further suggests that quality assurance is a total, holistic process, concerned with ensuring the integrity of outcomes, and this places the responsibility for quality with the university itself; this is expressed through its relationship with its stakeholders, students, employers, professional bodies, national regulators and society.

An improved internal quality system and quality culture allows for greater responsiveness to external demands for accountability, transparency and credibility and this should be viewed as an assurance to the public that the responsibility of the institution is safeguarding of its academic offering, and so promoting the autonomy of institutions (Kristensen, 2010). In turn, such an approach will seek to enhance the institution's capacity to operate in a responsive way, where individual universities have the responsibility of assuring the quality of their educational offering.

There are diverging views that prioritise the role of the institution differently; this disparity of views between role-players result in relations that are at time seen to be unfavourable for the necessary output for quality education that benefits the students. The students seem to be identified as the common feature for the pursuance of quality in teaching, learning and programme output. The CHE recognises quality assurance as an integrated approach (CHE, 2017), and that the institution ought to define its own internal quality processes positioning the student at the centre of its QA activities in

teaching, learning, scholarship, and service, to safeguard its standards and improve its educational offerings. Therefore, internal quality assurance should be student-centric with its primary purpose being to improve the learning experience for the student. Whatever approaches are adopted they should strategically locate the needs of the students and programme learning outputs.

2.7   THE RELATIONSHIPS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE

Governments and higher education institutions have long been partners in QA. This historical relationship of shared responsibility was the basis for developing appropriate responses to new demands for ensuring quality in education. El-Khawas (2001) asserts that a long-term partnership must be based on mutual trust and shared responsibility for meeting society's expectations. Government as the main role-player in external quality assurance needs to understand that education is complex and multi-staged with multiple layers and recognise that the purpose and objective of higher education institutions is to develop people by imparting specialised knowledge, analytic skills and sophisticated technical competencies, as well as appropriate values, dispositions and work habits (El-Khawas, 2001). External quality assurance (government, quality agencies and professional bodies) and institutions therefore should forge a strong partnership to serve the public interest and educational issues and recognise that standards should be given primary consideration when major decisions are made on educational matters.

Ansah, Swanzy and Nudzor (2017) identify a necessary condition that in order to achieve a cohesive long-term relationship, recognition of all role-players in both external and internal QA, balance and reciprocity must be upheld and there needs to be stability to achieve quality enhancement or improvement. Ansah, Swanzy and Nudzor (2017) further highlight that a stable QA framework (internal or external) is a balanced framework where all the key components receive equal attention. Williams (2016) cautions though that balance is needed but too much reciprocity may be bad for practice, as too much reciprocity can harm the independence of external quality assurance, quality agencies and professional councils.

El-Khawas (2001), however, argues that quality assurance has changed the relationship between government and higher education, and identifies that quality assurance agencies representing government has the dominant role in most QA models, overshadowing the role of institutions, resulting in a relationship that is one-sided because decision-making belongs to the government and quality assurance agency. El-Khawas (2001) further argues that institutions have a weak role that is often restricted to the communication channels that they can use to offer opinions or state objections to proposals that may have been developed without their participation. The result of limited participation of higher education institutions and their weakened role is controversial as the resultant effect of this limited role is the adoption of a compliance mentality among university officials (El-Khawas, 2001).

Ansah, Swanzy and Nudzor (2017) further assert that this unequal relationship between external quality assurance and institutions could result in tensions and a quality assurance framework becoming unstable as a result of little attention to the input of one of the key role players. Ansah, Swanzy and Nudzor (2017) further identify professional associations as major role players in the enactment of quality assurance, but suggest that their role in external quality assurance is still going through reforms and can best be described as 'work-in-progress'.

Since there are multiple perspectives on quality which demand alignment of different perspectives and expectations from role-players, quality assurance activities within higher education institutions ought to acknowledge and involve these key external role-players, and at the same time external QA needs to recognise the role and value of institutions and internal QA. A balance is a necessary condition for any resilient quality assurance framework (Ansah, Swanzy & Nudzor, 2017).

2.8   CONCLUSION

Actors in quality assurance systems, whether internal or external, have defined roles, but at times these roles become blurred either legislatively or administratively, and certain activities or actions they take could be informed by the expansion of the roles

they assume in the quality assurance system. This condition, Painstil (2016) argues, can then lead to the potential for conflict in the relationship between the two quality assurance systems, which poses a challenge for attaining the expected quality of higher education. Painstil (2016) further asserts that the condition persists as a potential challenge for coordination and integration of quality assurance processes, and a potential risk to the effective functioning of the internal quality assurance system. The potential for conflict positions the institution in a somewhat precarious position in trying to balance internal and external QA systems.

The QA system, whether internal or external, should seek to align through the multiple layers of QA, whether continental, regional, national and institutional and roles be appropriately defined. The QA system should be in accord with the legislative requirements, but also provide spaces for meaningful engagements. These engagements should be formalised by some form of agreement that defines each role-player's activities in an attempt to minimise any blurring of roles. Internally designed and developed quality assurance systems position institutions to better understand their strengths and weaknesses whilst promoting the ability of building a collective commitment to pursue quality.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to identify and analyse how one South African University interacts with and through its internal quality mechanisms responds to the external quality assurance requirements that are obligatory and set by external quality monitoring and assurance agencies. The research assessed how the structure of the University's internal quality systems meets the requirements for the accreditation of programmes as a form of quality assurance as prescribed by the Council of Higher Education (CHE) through its permanent quality committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) as well as the relevant professional body, the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP). The study centred on identifying and exploring the relations between institutional responsiveness and external accountability within the contexts of internal and external programme review and accreditation processes as a form of quality assurance. The study further pursued to explore the nature of the interaction between internal and external quality assurance processes and the mechanics that drive these processes.

Chapter Three discusses the research methodology, approach and design and expands on the introductory overview articulated in Chapter One. The research methodology and approach to the study are introduced in a pursuit to identifying how the research question and sub-questions could be answered. Ngulube, Mathipa and Gumbo (2015) identify that a practical research framework is based on what works and in terms of the framework the problems addressed are those of the people and systems involved. Ngulube et al. (2015) further identify that practical research frameworks tend to be narrow and limited to situational context and narrow insider perspectives. This study took place in a localised context as a case study and was limited to one institutional type, a comprehensive ODeL University. The chapter also discusses the research design of the study. This includes discussions of how the data

sources were identified, and how the data was treated and interpreted. The chapter further reflects on the scope and nature of the data. It also discusses the ethical considerations pertinent to the study that were addressed in order to avoid potential biases that could have compromised the credibility of the study.

The focus of the study was on the accreditation aspect of quality assurance, in particular programme accreditation. Seeing that a relationship exists between institutional quality assurance and programme accreditation, the study focused on the evaluation and examination of programme accreditation as a quality assurance instrument. One programme, the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), was used as an exemplar of programme accreditation. This involved assessing the review processes and outcomes of the national review of the programme by the HEQC conducted in 2013 through to 2014, and administrative processes related to the delivery of the programme. This also required the evaluation of related policies both internal to the institution and external.

The study had two distinct phases; the first phase was a document analysis and involved the review and analysis of a number of internal institutional and national policies as a starting point. This was intended to help the researcher gain a better understanding of the national and institutional landscape, i.e. the national regulatory environment of external quality assurance and the situational context of the institution. The second phase consisted of semi-structured interviews (n=9) in which nine respondents were interviewed. Thematic data analysis was adopted as the primary data analysis approach for the emergent data.

The research study finds its location in the interpretive paradigm which emphasises that social reality is viewed and interpreted by the individual herself according to the ideological positions she possesses and the social constructions of reality flowing from such positions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013).

3.2   RESEARCH SETTING AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

3.2.1 ODL and ODeL

University X, the case institution for this study, transitioned in 2015 from Open Distance Learning (ODL) to an open distance e-learning (ODeL) educational and business model. The new model and framework were adopted and approved by its University Council in 2018 which informed the character of the institution transforming from from ODL to ODeL in 2018 (University X, 2018). Seeing that this case study is situated within a comprehensive ODeL institution, it is important to contextualise the site of the study and explain how this context relates to quality assurance. To appropriately contextualise the site of the study it was deemed important to first define ODeL and then define the comprehensive nature of the institution. For the purposes of this report and to maintain anonymity, the institution will be referred to as University X throughout.

ODeL institutions find their location in traditional perspectives of distance education institutions (ODL) and are continuously confronted with perception challenges of poor quality provision in that their programme offering is at times seen as inferior to that offered at contact institutions. The challenges often cited with reference to ODL institutions can be viewed as undermining the credibility and effectiveness of the quality of teaching and learning, the quality assurance processes and outcomes, and the perceptions of students, staff and employers.

Ngubane-Mokiwa and Letseka (2015) highlight that by their nature, ODL institutions provide educational opportunities to mature, non-traditional, working students who are often unable to access higher education in contact and campus-based institutions as full-time students. Different ODL institutions in South Africa and on the African continent use a wide variety of modern and affordable technologies to facilitate the sharing of learning content with and among their geographically distant students (Fien, 2004; Perraton, 2000; Perraton, Robinson & Creed, 2001; Peters & Wills, 1998; Rowntree, 1995). Moore and Kearsley (1996) identify that ODL is an organised learning activity that is deliberately designed to afford learning opportunities to everyone, everywhere they are located. The student is then required to study and

complete their degrees without physically attending classes. Ngubane-Mokiwa and Letseka (2015) define ODL as a learning model that attempts to bridge the time, geographical, economic, social, educational and communication distance between the institution and the students, the academics and the students, the learning materials and the students, and amongst the students themselves.

According to Letseka and Pitsoe (2013), ODL has been marketed through the use of a plethora of descriptors such as open, accessible, flexible, supportive and affordable. Letseka and Pitsoe (2013) further argue that these descriptors are premised on the assumption that distance learners are responsible adults who can self-regulate their own learning.

ODeL is characterised by the use of web and technology tools to facilitate learning. E-learning refers to interactive instruction which is enhanced, supported, mediated, delivered or assessed by electronic means (Mbatha, 2014). The provision and delivery of academic programmes at University X is through both distance and e-learning. E-learning allows for more online interaction between the lecturer and the students, the students and the learning environment, the student and fellow students, and the students and the institutions at which they are enrolled (Mbatha, 2014).

Completion rates in ODeL institutions remain an issue in many cases; overall ODeL often has lower levels of retention than does campus-based education. Tait (2013) argues that this is not a failure of particular educational institutions or distance learning in general, but because ODeL is meeting the needs of a diversity of students, some of whom are mature students, or ethnically diverse, as well as those with lower or no previous educational qualifications, with no family tradition of higher education or who live in rural and remote areas. ODeL institutions tend to accept students with lower entry qualifications than those required for conventional universities and as such the volume in terms of student numbers tend to be high.

By its nature, an ODeL institution is a complex environment which requires the meeting of different and diverse student needs. The CHE (2014b) suggests that due consideration must always be given to what implications these student needs and the decisions on technologies to facilitate learning, programme offering, and mode of

delivery have for quality assurance. Ngubane-Mokiwa and Letseka (2015) suggest that the success of such an institution depends on functional and optimal student support systems. Jung, Wong and Belawati (2013) have analysed the challenges faced by distance education institutions in embedding quality systems and identify that quality at such institutions is maintained by means of comparability between distance and campus institutions and ensuring that similar quality assurance frameworks and processes are employed in their quality management systems.

Gaskell and Mills (2014) argue that, in the context of the convergence of distance and contact education, the QA frameworks that are used to evaluate programmes should not make distinctions between distance education and conventional higher education or between e-learning and face-to-face teaching, but rather that the evaluation of programmes must be premised on the same qualification standards.

3.2.2 University X as an ODeL institution

University X is a large, ODeL institution that in 2019 had a headcount of 358 000 students. In its strategic documents University X identifies itself as an ODL institution that further progressed to adopt e-learning, therefore defining itself as an ODeL institution. The transition to e-learning meant that the institution had to come up with initiatives that facilitate teaching and e-learning and the roll out of student support in the ODeL mode of delivery. These initiatives included the introduction of e-tutoring and digital literacy courses for students and staff. The e-tutoring initiative is part of the Integrated Tutor System (ITS). The aim of ITS is to enable Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to facilitate positive learning among students. Mashile and Matoane (2012) define e-tutoring as a tool that can be used to facilitate learning, steer students towards successful completion of their courses and effectively manage the learning environment.

As a comprehensive institution University X offers both formative university qualifications such as generic degrees and vocational type qualifications such as diplomas. Its programme offering includes professional type qualifications such as those required by graduates to practice their respective professions.

Comprehensive institutions in South Africa are expected to contribute to meeting a range of goals identified in the National Plan which are central to the Government's Human Resource Development Strategy, including:

a. Increased access, in particular, to career-focused programmes with prospective students able to choose from a wider variety of programmes with different entry requirements.

b. Improved articulation between career-focused and general academic programmes, thus facilitating student mobility between different programmes.

c. Expanded opportunities for research and the strengthening and development of applied research through linking emerging foci of the Technikons to the current research strengths of the Universities.

d. Enhanced capacity (because of the broader range of expertise and foci) to respond to the social and economic needs of the region in general and of industry and civil society in particular (RSA DoE, 2001).

These requirements compelled the institution to undergo a process of refocusing its mission and reconfiguring its academic programme offerings. A comprehensive institution is complex in nature, and this requires that its programme offering be strategically positioned to ensure a balance of academic offerings that are clearly differentiated. In addition, academic offerings that facilitate mobility and open pathways across the qualification variants need to be provided. This places emphasis on the quality of the offering and the mode of offering.

One qualification variant that is offered at University X is the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW). The BSW is a professional degree programme. Professional degrees by their nature are designed in consultation with professional bodies and recognised as a requirement for a license to practice after professional registration. These professional programmes have a strong vocational and career orientation that aims to prepare students to deliver quality service in practice. Professional bodies and the CHE provide minimum qualification standards for the development of curricula, and higher education institutions develop learning programmes guided by these standards and the requirements of work-based learning.

3.3   RESEARCH QUESTION AND SUB-QUESTIONS

The study was constructed on several assumptions, firstly, that quality assurance constitutes a steering instrument by government to drive the attainment of certain goals by institutions. The second assumption is the co-existence of relations and tensions between internal and external quality assurance measures at policy and institutional levels.

The study undertook an investigation into whether and how, in the view of both internal institutional policies and role-players and external quality assurance bodies, the purposes of the programme accreditation processes as a quality assurance instrument have been satisfied, and included an assessment of:

a. the range and nature of institutional policies on quality assurance with regards to their alignment to national policy and the CHE Framework for Programme Accreditation;

b. where and how the interaction of role-players involved in internal and external quality assurance take place in terms of policy, procedures and implementation;

c. the impact as experienced by the institution of the accreditation and de-accreditation of the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) in terms of the national review process of the CHE and HEQC outcomes;

d. the existence a relationship management framework to support quality assurance processes within institution.

Seyfried and Pohlenz (2018) assert that quality mechanisms such as external programme accreditation and internal institutional QA mechanisms should align, and that these mechanisms are supposed to draw on common sets of quality standards and benchmarks for institutions to better assess the standards of their programmes against those of other institutions and facilitate better recognition of their degree offering.

The main research question for this study relates to seeking clarification and to explore how the relations between internal and external quality assurance are structured and experienced and if they are appropriately aligned to promote the assurance of positive outcomes in the accreditation processes of programmes.

The additional research sub-questions which arose from the main research question were:

a. What is the range and nature of institutional policies on quality assurance with regards to their alignment to national policy and the CHE's Framework for Programme Accreditation?

b. What are the interactions of role-players involved in internal and external quality assurance and how do they interact in terms of policy, procedures and implementation?

c. What is the impact as experienced by the institution of the accreditation and de-accreditation of the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) in terms of the national review process of the CHE?

d. Is there a relationship management framework within the institution to support quality assurance processes both internally or externally?

The concept of quality assurance can be interpreted as an uncomfortable mix of improvement, accountability, enhancement and compliance. There are contradictions in its purposes and its interpretations are informed by the relations among its actors, role-players and stakeholders. The role-players' interpretations of quality assurance is informed by their located contexts and the research questions highlight the possible contradictions and nuances between various purposes and relationships of control, improvement and accountability contextualised within a higher education institution and external QA regulation.

3.4   RESEARCH PARADIGM

To adequately position the research study, there needed to be an awareness and recognition of the social location of the research activities. Therefore, an appropriate

paradigm and methods were identified from the interaction between the researcher and conditions of the environment. This interaction provided a means by which the researcher could seek to resolve the contradictions or affirm and prove a research question. Guba and Lincoln (1994) define a paradigm as a belief system based on ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions shared by a scientific community. A paradigm provides a framework of thinking about a study and helps establish acceptable research methodologies available for the study (Simukungwe, 2018).

A paradigm gives rise to a methodology which consists of methods which are employed either as qualitative or quantitative, or as mixed methods. Therefore, a paradigm with its attendant methodology and methods produces different meanings in a study, as it infers a framework of thinking. This study adopted an interpretivist research paradigm as an underpinning paradigm which encompasses an interpretive stance and methodologies whose suppositions effected the ontological (how the environment is viewed) and epistemological grounding for this study. Taylor and Medina (2011) provide a linked definition and expresses a paradigm as a comprehensive belief system, world view, or framework that guides research and practice which assists in providing a philosophical perspective comprising a view of the nature of reality. The linked definition as suggested by Taylor and Medina (2011) identifies ontology and its related view of the type of knowledge that can be generated and standards for justifying it, the epistemology. The methodology is then defined as a disciplined approach to generating that knowledge (Taylor & Medina, 2011).

The ontological, epistemological and methodological stance was grounded in the interpretation of meanings made by the actors in quality assurance as informed by policy and practice in higher education. The interpretivist paradigm was chosen as the most fitting since this paradigm has its roots in the German intellectual traditions of hermeneutics and phenomenology (Blaikie & Priest 2019). Phenomenology and hermeneutics contend that human meanings, values, beliefs and feelings are transmitted through artefacts of human creations, such as language, dress, patterns of action and written texts (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015). Phenomenology and hermeneutics are both interpretive philosophies, which in the context of this study includes policy analysis.

Taylor and Medina (2011) suggest that the interpretive paradigm is a humanistic paradigm, and that the epistemology of this paradigm is inter-subjective knowledge construction. Interpretive knowledge is then produced through a prolonged process of interaction undertaken by the researcher who immerses herself within the culture she is studying.

Because the research study finds its location in the interpretivist paradigm, it emphasizes that social reality is viewed and interpreted by the individual herself according to the ideological positions she possesses (Cohen et al., 2013). The study is shaped by the understanding that knowledge is personally experienced rather than acquired or imposed from outside. The interpretivist paradigm positions reality as multi-layered and complex (Cohen et al., 2007) - a single phenomenon having multiple interpretations. The interpretivist paradigm essentially emphasizes understanding and interpretation of phenomena and making meaning out of this process. The paradigm stresses an interpretive approach and attaches importance to a range of research techniques focusing on qualitative analysis. The chosen research inquiry of the author finds its location within this paradigm and employs a qualitative approach to the research. Quality assurance is contextual in nature and can be a subject of many interpretations informed by context. The different interpretations of meaning and social constructions of reality as experienced by the actors in quality assurance as foregrounded by the interpretivist paradigm provided the anticipation that different meanings of the interpretations and understanding of the concepts of quality and quality assurance were experienced from different role-players in higher education in terms of where and how they interact.

This interaction of internal quality and external quality assurance created an awareness of the different meanings of quality and quality assurance as articulated in the national policy and interpreted by stakeholders and role-players or actors. There are different stakeholders, role-players and actors within universities as higher education institutions, such as employers, academics, and students, and each stakeholder or role-player may interpret the implementation of quality assurance policy differently from the intent of the national legislation. Yanow (2015) contends that interpretations among role-players occur not only because they focus cognitively and

rationally on different elements of a policy issue, but because the different role-players value different elements of a policy differently. These contending views of different role-players, internal or external to the institutions, may offer alternative views of what quality assurance for universities should be, rather than accepting the external view of regulators and external agencies such as professional bodies.

3.5   RESEARCH APPROACH

Traditionally research methodology is determined by philosophical perspectives. The view that all knowledge is knowledge from some point of view (Fishman, as cited by Feilzer, 2010) implies that the choice of a social science research method is a reflection of the researcher's understanding of the world. The interpretation of research findings exposes the researcher's underlying philosophical position, his/her so-called paradigm (Feilzer, 2010). Plowright's alternative view argues that philosophy does not determine the research methodology employed, but rather that methodology leads to a philosophical perspective that helps explain methodology. Paradigms compete with one another to provide an explanation for the methodology of the research (Plowright, 2013).

Rudestam and Newton (2015) refer to methodology as a plan of the enquiry and posit that the paradigm frames the study's approach to addressing the research question. This study followed a qualitative approach and was informed by an interpretivist paradigm as its philosophical underpinning. The strength of qualitative methods is the ability to produce complex descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. Qualitative research approaches provide information about the human side of an issue, that can often be contradictory behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals. By their very nature qualitative methods seek to explore phenomena, are flexible and allow for greater spontaneity and adaptation of the interaction between the author and the study participants. For this study an interview protocol was designed to collect the qualitative data and to solicit the views and opinions of the research participants.

The objective of the research approach was to identify, describe, and explain relationships and individual experiences. Qualitative methods in exploratory research are useful in their use of open-ended questions which allow for further probing, giving the participants the opportunity to respond in their own words when relating their lived experiences. The research design and approach employed were exploratory and qualitative, grounded in the legislative framework that informs both internal and external quality assurance. Qualitative data was collected from policy documentation and through narrative interviews on the opinions and perceptions of research participants about issues of quality assurance. A qualitative exploratory enquiry located in the interpretivist paradigm was deemed most appropriate for the study as it contributes to fundamental knowledge and understanding of quality assurance in higher education (Cohen et al., 2013; Patton, 2014). The policy documents and semi-structured interviews were the primary data sources for this study. Policy analysis and interpretation formed the foundational layer of the study and informed the design of the interview protocol used during the interviews.

The study had a strong internal focus to allow for an institutional perspective on how University X interacts and interprets its relationship with external authorities involved in external quality assurance.

3.6 SAMPLING

Gentles, Charles, Ploeg and McKibbon (2015) define sampling in qualitative research as the selection of specific data sources from which data are collected to address the research objectives. To adequately select the appropriate participants for the study, simple criteria based on the following characteristics were adopted:

a. position and designation in the institution
b. expertise and knowledge of quality assurance and accreditation,
c. content knowledge of the BSW,
d. familiarity with institutional or external approval and management structures for academic programmes.

The selection criteria were applied to ensure that the most appropriate participants were chosen to make up the sample. Purposeful sampling was applied as a method

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for the selection process for both the identification of appropriate documentation for document analysis and selection of participants.

The population size for the interviews, based on the criteria explicated above, was n=17 (see Table 3.1 below for the breakdown). Participants were invited to participate in the study through email and n= 9 participants accepted the invitation to participate.

Table 3.1: Population and sample size

Designation	Category Group	No. of Participants invited	No of Accepted Invitations
Vice Principal: Teaching and Learning, Community Engagement and Student Support	Institutional Management	1	1
Executive Director: Planning or QA		1	1
Executive Director Academic Planning		1	1
Executive Dean of College	College Management	1	0
Deputy Dean of College		1	1
School Director		1	1
Chair of Department	Academic Department	1	1
Senior Lecturer		1	0
Lecturer		1	0
Deputy Director Quality Assurance	Professional and Administrative staff	1	1
Manager: Academic Information Administration		1	0
College Quality Assurance		1	0
CEO	SA Council for Social Services Professions: (SACSSP)	1	1
Registrar		1	0
Quality Assurance and Accreditation Officer		1	0
Director Programme Accreditation	Council on Higher Education CHE	1	0
Director National Reviews		1	1

The participation by the academic department, the CHE and SACSSP was rather low but the seniority and experience of the individuals provided for useful engagement as they brought a wealth of experience in the field of quality assurance, occupied senior roles in these organisations and had worked previously in other organisations practising within the same field of higher education and QA.

3.7   DATA COLLECTION

Quality is stakeholder-relative (Harvey & Green, 1993) and multi-dimensional (Sahney, Banwet, & Karunes, 2004). It cannot be assessed by a single indicator. Therefore, Harvey and Green (1993) suggest the need to define criteria that each stakeholder uses when judging quality as clearly as possible to allow competing views to be taken into account when quality assessments are undertaken. From this standpoint, it is justifiable to have various mechanisms that assess the interpretation of quality at institutional level and external to accommodate the various perspectives of stakeholders, actors and role-players.

The study was segmented into two interrelated phases for data collection purposes. Phase one involved an analysis of institutional instruments for programme review, policies and strategic documents. Document analysis was undertaken to contextualise the research phenomenon within University X, and this involved analysing purposively selected strategic documents, institutional policies, accreditation reports and national legislation, frameworks and instruments for quality assurance. Document analysis was used as a method to interpret data from four main sources:

a. National policies, plans and frameworks including policies relating to professional practice in Engineering and the Health Professions;

b. CHE policies and reports;

c. Professional body (SACSSP) legislation;

d. Policies and reports from University X (2012 – 2018).

Purposive sampling of the documents was applied to identify the most relevant institutional and national legislative documents appropriate for the study. Document

analysis as an analytical method was used to gain an understanding of the trends and patterns that emerged from the data (Creswell, 2003). The analytical procedure entailed finding, selecting, appraising (making sense of), and synthesising data contained in the documents (Labuschagne, 2003).

The primary focus during this data collection phase was the relationship of institutional policies to the legislation in terms of quality assurance and the conformance of the institution to the processes of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the HEQC and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) as far as programme approval, accreditation and registration are concerned. In addition to this purpose, the national review processes of the HEQC and related data sources, CHE documents and reports were analysed to identify relationships that inform the two processes of programme accreditation and national reviews. The programme accreditation processes and national review policy documents were then juxtaposed to relate to institutional policies and programme review reports of the BSW. The documents included the following national policies:

i. **National Policy Documents.**
    a. The Higher Education Act No 101 of 1997 as amended
    b. National Plan for Post Schooling in South Africa, 2017
    c. White Paper for Post School Education and Training, 2014
    d. Higher Educations Qualifications Sub-Framework, 2013
    e. The National Qualification Framework (NQF) Act No. 67 of 2008
    f. SAQA Act No. 58 of 1995
    g. Engineering Act No 46 of 2000
    h. Health Professions Amendment Act No 29 of 2007
    i. Universities South Africa (USAf), 2015. Strategic Framework for Higher Education Institutions 2015 – 2019.

ii. **CHE and HEQC Policy Documents.**
    a. HEQC Framework for Programme Accreditation, 2004
    b. Distance Higher Education Programmes in a Digital Era: Good Practice Guide, 2014
    c. Framework for Qualifications Standards, 2015

    d. Framework for National Reviews, 2015

iii. Professional Body Documents

    a. Social Services Professions Act of 1978 as amended.

    b. Social Work Act of 1978

Data collection in Phase two involved the interviews (n=9) with the research participants. In-depth interviews are optimal for collecting data on individuals' personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being explored. An interview protocol was designed in advance and 11 questions were included (See Appendix 2 for a copy of the interview protocol).

The interviews were designed to be an hour long and involved a total of nine participants who agreed to participate in the study. Quota sampling was considered as a type of purposive sampling and selection of participants. Quota sampling allows for decisions around participant selection while designing the study and how many people with which characteristics to include as a criterion for selection of participants. The participants' role, position and level of involvement through institutional committees of University X were considered for participation in the study. The criteria contributed to the identification of the individuals who were most appropriate and with the most likely experience, knowledge, or insights in quality assurance. Seven of the nine participants were institutional employees and only one respondent came from the professional body. One research participant from the CHE was identified and invited to partake in the study.

Data collection was primarily done via audio recording but as a back-up, handwritten notes were taken. To support this, formal informed consent was sought and obtained from all participants. A semi-structured interview protocol was designed to solicit the views of the participants and to that end, it included questions that were open-ended and provided a framework in which participants could respond. The interview format provided opportunities for them to expand on their responses should they wish to. During the interviews with the research participants a third party was present to oversee and observe the process as prescribed by the ethics review committee to mitigate any conflict of interest that may arise due to the researcher's position in the

institution and her role in the accreditation and quality assurance of academic programmes at University X. The third party is an experienced academic who is has extensive experience in research.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involved reading the interview transcripts about six times and recording emergent themes at each iteration.

An interview protocol was designed to facilitate an hour engagement with participants. The qualitative method allowed for open-ended questions to be included in the interview protocol. The interview sessions were designed to be semi-structured and flexible to allow for open interactions with the respondents. The interviews were carefully structured to elicit valuable perspectives from participants that are directly involved in quality assurance, both internal to the institution and externally, and to obtain their perceptions of the quality assurance mechanisms, relations and effectiveness of QA systems. This approach was beneficial to the study because most of the identified interviewees have a scientific background, although varied in terms scope and level, and are involved in quality assurance and academic programmes; therefore; they were able to provide a reasonable self-assessment against the questions outlined in the interview protocol.

All participants were asked the same questions, but their responses demonstrated considerable variety in terms of what they deemed to be important according to their experiences. Participants were free to respond in their own words, and their responses tended to be more complex than simply "yes" or "no" answers. The interview protocol allowed for further probing and consideration of various issues in terms of how they relate to quality assurance and how the institution interacted with the external environments of equality assurance.

Flexibility was central in the design of the protocol and reflected the kind of understanding of the problem that was being pursued. The design of the interview protocol allowed for a less formal relationship between researcher and the participants. Participants responded freely to the questions and with as much detail as they felt they needed to provide to adequately address questions and provide answers where they

deemed necessary. The interview guide made provision for the researcher to have the opportunity to respond immediately to what participants were saying and adapt subsequent questions to the information the participant had provided.

3.8   DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative research generates large quantities of data and as a result, condensing, organising and making meaning of this mass of data was the most time consuming part of the study (Polit & Beck, 2008). The researcher took a relatively long time to immerse herself into the data in order to get a better understanding of how the data responded to the research question and sub-questions. The researcher reviewed the data repeatedly to ensure that the research report gives a true picture of the participants' feedback (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Polit and Beck (2008) identify that data analysis is the separation of data into parts for the purpose of answering the research question. Polit and Beck (2008) further describe qualitative data analysis as the organisation and interpretation of narrative data for the purpose of discovering important underlying themes, categories and patterns of relationships. This is the process whereby collected data is transformed into meaningful findings (Srnka & Koeszegi, 2007). Lacey and Luff (2007) suggest that there are many ways of analysing qualitative data that stem from a combination of factors, inter alia, the research questions posed, the theoretical framework of the study, and the appropriateness of the technique for making sense of the data gathered. Although it is beyond the scope of the current research study to give a comprehensive description and procedural details of every qualitative data analysis strategy, the researcher deemed it to be useful to briefly highlight some methods that are used by qualitative researchers to analyse qualitative data.

3.8.1   Methods of qualitative data analysis

Lacey and Luff (2007) suggest that there is no single right way to analyse qualitative data, hence the availability of several approaches regarding how qualitative data is

sorted, organised, conceptualised, refined, and interpreted. The following are some of the approaches used to analyse data in qualitative research studies (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

3.8.1.1 Constant Comparative Analysis

Polit and Beck (2008) identify that constant comparison is a procedure often used in a grounded theory analysis wherein newly collected data are compared in an ongoing fashion with data obtained earlier to refine theoretically relevant categories. Further, Boeije (2002) emphasises that the constant comparative analysis strategy entails taking one piece of data (one interview, one statement, one theme) and comparing it with others that may be similar or different in order to develop conceptualizations of the possible relations between various pieces of data. However, constant comparison analysis might be better suited to grounded theory as opposed to this study where it is used to study human phenomena such as behaviour and experience, for instance (Boeije 2002). The current study is phenomenological in nature and therefore, data cannot be analysed using constant comparative methods.

3.8.1.2 Narrative Analysis

Maxwell (1961) refers to narrative analysis as a qualitative means of formally analysing text, including stories. When stories are analysed, the researcher unpacks the structure of the story. A story includes a sequence of events with a beginning, a middle and an end. Stories have their own logic and are temporal (Maxwell, 1961). Structures can also be used to determine how people tell stories, how they give shape to the events that they describe, how they make a point, how they 'package' events and react to them and how they communicate their stories to audiences (Burns & Groove 2009). Narrative analysis is a strategy that recognises the extent to which the stories people tell provide insights about their lived experiences. Riessman (2008) asserts that the narrative method uses interviews, documents or observations to follow participants down their trails, focuses on the story itself and seeks to preserve the integrity of personal biographies or a series of events that cannot be adequately understood in terms of their discrete elements (Riessman 2008). This method revolves around

reading the stories and classifying them into general patterns and main narrative themes within the accounts which people give about their lives, thereby discovering how people understand and make sense of their lives. The current study does not seek to trail or understand participants' stories and so narrative analysis method was deemed not appropriate for this study.

3.8.1.3 Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis is defined as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through a systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Stemler (2001) and Oosthuizen (2012) consider content analysis as a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content-related categories based on explicit rules of coding. Thus, content analysis enables the researcher to sift through large volumes of data in a systematic fashion.

The purpose of content analysis is to provide knowledge, new insights and a representation of facts (Oosthuizen, 2012). Stemler (2001) adds that qualitative content analysis is a rich and meaningful technique that extends far beyond simple word counts. Moreover, it allows the researcher to understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) identify three approaches or types of qualitative content analysis, namely, conventional, directed or summative. Only one of the approaches, directed content analysis was used to interpret meaning from the content of text data and hence, adhere to the naturalistic paradigm. Humble (2009) states that directed content analysis involves the application of conceptual categories to a new text. With a directed approach, analysis starts with a theory or relevant research findings as guidance for initial codes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Using content analysis researchers begin by identifying key concepts or variables as initial coding categories. The purpose of directed content analysis is to validate or extend a theory or conceptual framework (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Content analysis can be used in an inductive or deductive way. In inductive content analysis, the categories are derived from the data, while in deductive content analysis, the initial coding categories are based on an existing theory or model and therefore moves from the general to the specific (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). The current study followed the deductive approach; directed content analysis could described as being deductive in nature (Humble, 2009). The content analysis approach was followed with policy documentation and related reports in the data source sample. The process of content analysis was extensive and required the researcher to read the data multiple times to ensure that analysis of the data was adequately performed.

3.8.1.4 *Thematic Analysis*

Braun and Clarke (2012) describe thematic analysis as a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Although Braun and Clarke (2012) highlight that thematic analysis minimally organises data and describes data in rich detail, they do argue that it frequently goes further to interpret various aspects of a research topic. Braun and Clarke (2012) further contend that a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set.

In thematic analysis the patterns are identified through a rigorous process of data familiarisation, data coding, theme development and revision. This method puts emphasis on the need for organisation and rich description of the data set that entails going beyond identifying implicit and explicit ideas within the data. The researcher chose this method because of the following advantages or merits, as identified by Braun and Clarke (2012):

a. It is theoretically flexible in analysing qualitative data, that is, it can be used to answer different types of research questions and best suits questions related to people's experiences, views and perceptions.

b. It also suits questions related to understanding, such as, the "how" questions.

c. It allows for categories to emerge from data.

d. It is well suited to large data sets.

Content analysis was applied to the document analysis which was Phase one of the data collection limited to policy documents and reports; simple thematic analysis was applied to analyse the feedback elicited from the study participants in the interviews. The use of a combination of content analysis and thematic analysis approaches follows the recommendations of Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2011), and of Seale, Gobo, Gubrium and Silverman (2004) who argue that limiting the approach of data analysis to a single style of analysis leads to oversimplification and often limits the scope of interpretation for the researcher. Thematic analysis and content analysis were undertaken in the following phases: in Phase one document analysis was done, and in Phase two thematic analysis was applied for the individual participants' feedback. Thematic analysis was best suited to Phase two to come up with themes that best answer the research questions, given the data reported by participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This encompassed the following steps:

a. Familiarisation with data – This step involved reading and re-reading of the data to become immersed and familiar with the content. Thus, the researcher read the notes, transcribed interviews and field notes at least four times as well as listened to the audiotapes several times just to get a general impression, familiarity and basic understanding of the information provided by the participants.

b. Coding of data – This involved generating codes that identify important features of the data relevant to the research question. As data was being read and re-read, the researcher focused on key questions and how participants responded to these questions. Subsequently, data was organised and categorised according to each question and this was done simultaneously with theme identification. Emergent themes which failed to fit into existing categories were accommodated into new thematic categories.

c. Review of themes – This phase entailed refining themes against the data set in order to determine if they answer the research question. Themes were finally re-assessed to ensure that they respond to the research topic and objectives of the overall study. The researcher revisited literature to come up with refined themes that would satisfy the research objectives set out at the beginning of the study.

d. Producing key themes and findings - A determination was made on themes that make meaningful contributions to answer the research question. The

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researcher presented the dialogue connected with each theme through a thick description of the results. The researcher used extracts that capture the full meaning of the point of analysis to ensure that there is enough evidence to support the themes.

In this qualitative study textual analysis as a form of content analysis in interpreting policy data was used for Phase one of the data collection phase. Textual analysis is rooted in the hermeneutic tradition of textual interpretation, which stresses that interpretation of the text must always be taken from the reader's viewpoint (Burnard, 1996).

Data collected during Phase two the analysis used the latent level of thematic analysis as the author attempted to look beyond what was said during the interviews and wanted to identify or examine the underlying ideas, perceptions, assumptions, and conceptualisations of the respondent's experiences in their current context of quality assurance.

Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework (2006) for doing a thematic analysis was followed:

Step 1: Become familiar with the data,

Step 2: Generate initial codes,

Step 3: Search for themes,

Step 4: Review themes,

Step 5: Define themes,

Step 6: Write-up.

Step 2 and 3 of the steps were combined to be consistent with the four-step framework of Korstjens and Moser (2018).

Maguire and Delahunt (2017) and Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that thematic analysis is the first qualitative method that should be learned as it provides core skills that are useful for conducting many other kinds of analysis as novice researchers grapple with the 'how' of qualitative analysis. The goal of a thematic analysis is to identify themes, i.e. patterns in the data that are important or interesting and use these themes to address the research or say something about an issue. This is much more

than simply summarising the data; a good thematic analysis interprets and makes sense of it.

Step one of thematic analysis involved the familiarisation of the data and transcribing it verbatim. Once this step was complete a coding system was then developed. Coding is described by Rudestam and Newton (2015) as a process that consists of deconstructing the data by identifying and assigning labels to the concepts and constructs that overtly present in the data. The intention of this process was to establish whether the observed data was showing specific themes or patterns which could be linked to the problem statement. This first process thus involved the coding of the data into a broad set of nodes of what was emerging. Nodes can be understood as descriptions of topics or themes from the source material. Nodes were then used to gather related interconnected themes in one place so as to identify emerging patterns and ideas. Nodes further assisted to collate evidence about the relationships between responses and interaction of the actors in terms of the respective locations as segmented in the study.

A matrix of relational responses was developed manually to identify possible pairing of all variables; a manual approach was regarded as appropriate. Themes were identified and extracted to segment the main responses for reporting purposes. The themes were then grouped and linked to four main categories identified in terms of participant categories of Senior Management, Faculty Management, Academic Staff and Professional and Administrative Middle Management.

Once the data was paired with themes identified and segmented the researcher further interrogated if there were any emergent factors that shaped interactions of actors with the cultures and structures at individual entities, the institution, the CHE and SACSSP. This was done by examining in the data-sets if the respective respondents elaborated on these factors or the environment.

3.9   TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE RESEARCH

Qualitative research considers dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability as trustworthiness criteria that can ensure the rigour of qualitative findings (Guba, 1981; Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba, 2007). Anney (2014) identifies that novice researchers tend to apply the quantitative criteria of validity and reliability to qualitative studies. Guba and Lincoln (1985) proposed that internal validity should be replaced by that of credibility, external validity by transferability, reliability by dependability and objectivity by confirmability. The rigour of this study was promoted in terms of quality standards of credibility and confirmability which were identified as the most critical standards to promote the trustworthiness and rigour of the study.

Anney (2014) highlights that novice qualitative researchers need to understand and adopt the trustworthiness criteria as this will improve the believability of qualitative inquiry. Credibility deals with the question of how congruent the findings are with reality (Shenton, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that ensuring credibility is one of most important factors in establishing trustworthiness.

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of an inquiry could be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the researcher's imagination but are clearly derived from the data (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Confirmability of qualitative inquiry is achieved through a number of activities, such as an audit trail, a reflexive journal and triangulation (Bowen, 2009; Koch, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1990). Bowen (2009) suggests that an audit trail offers visible evidence from the research process and product and demonstrates that the researcher did not simply find what he or she set out to find. The researcher utilised the assistance of a third party who was a neutral person to assist with conducting the research interviews and data analysis; this was seen as a mechanism of promoting credibility of the study and further strengthening the objectivity of the research results.

Due to the subjective nature of the qualitative approach and the interpretation of data contained in the documents, the researcher aspired to make the process of analysis as rigorous and as transparent as possible, for example, all the documents are kept available for a period as prescribed by the policies of University X. Wallendorf and Belk (1989) raise the concept of integrity of the research findings and argue that the

challenge facing qualitative researchers is how to demonstrate that the data provided by the research participants were not fabricated by them. Since qualitative research investigates the respondents' subjective world views, it is important that this view can be validated in terms of the standards and criteria of trustworthiness; for this particular study this was achieved through the measure of confirmability.

To promote credibility, procedures were employed in terms of the line of questioning pursued in the data gathering sessions through the use of the interview protocol and consistent use of the questions asked; the methods of data analysis allowed for a dialogue with each participant. In accordance with accepted ethical principles, participants were given opportunities to refuse to participate in the project so as to ensure that the data collection sessions involved only those who were genuinely willing to take part and prepared to offer their viewpoints freely. Participants were encouraged to be frank from the start of each session, with the researcher aiming to establish a rapport from the opening of the interview. The researcher probed further where necessary to elicit detailed data and employed iterative questioning, in which the researcher returned to matters previously raised and extracted related data through rephrased questions.

Data analysis was conducted concurrently with the data collection phase to ensure consistency. Further analysis was done post the interviews.

3.10   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In order to ensure that the rights and dignity of individuals, organisations and institutions are protected and respected, a researcher needs to guarantee that ethics are observed throughout the study (Floyd & Arthur, 2012). This process must not only include the bureaucratic requirements pertaining to the acquisition of informed consent ethical clearance and institutional permission, it must also include a continuous reflection on the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the discussions and conclusions of the study do not bring harm or indignity to the research subjects. Agreed-upon standards for research ethics help ensure that as researchers we

explicitly consider the needs and concerns of the people we study, that appropriate oversight for the conduct of research takes place, and that a basis for trust is established between researchers and study participants. Identities of the university and individuals within the university were concealed throughout the study to ensure anonymity and dignity of the study subjects. At times this required some reduction of identifying details from data quotes. This also meant that at times some information simply could not be used as it would immediately identify the research participant.

This study and its findings are not an attempt to ridicule or judge individual institutions or people, but rather it is an evaluative study that focuses on how the system can effectively use the accreditation instruments and the leveraging on relationships to enhance the internal institutional policies and procedures of University X.

3.11   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Data accessibility was a relatively easy process in terms of national policies as these are public documents and published widely on the internet. National policies and the institutional policies of University X were readily available, and the author was granted permission to use the data relatively easily as she was trusted to be able to do so with care.

However, the researcher's previous experience and pre-existing views with regard to the research topic may have been a constraint in some ways as they may have given rise to potential biases resulting from personal exposure to the work area. Her work history and relation with University X meant that the researcher might have come to the study with a variety of assumptions and understandings that could be contested (Levin, 2012). It was therefore important for the researcher to remain conscious of her position as an insider and as a researcher when conducting the analysis and to be on guard against potential personal biases that may have emerged from experiences of working within the area of work from which the research respondents were drawn.

Another potential constraint of the study was the size of the selected sample. A limited number of participants were engaged but this was in line with the emphasis on depth that is typical of qualitative methodologies. The response rate from the external regulator and professional body was very low and the study had a heavy reliance on policy documents instead of human interaction.

3.12   CONCLUSION

Chapter Three presented the methodology of the study, including the research design and processes followed to undertake the study. The research context and setting assisted in fostering insights into conditioning factors that inform the structural and cultural context of University X. The research question and sub-questions were expanded, and objectives elaborated on, to ensure that the analysis of the data was consistent with the objectives of the study. The next chapter (Chapter Four) presents the finding and results of the study.

CHAPTER 4
DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1   INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter (Chapter Three) addressed the methodological aspects of the study. Chapter Four focuses on the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data, as presented in the figure below. Two data collection methods, namely, document analysis and individual interviews, were used in this study to find answers to the research questions and to produce credible results. Babbie and Mouton (2001) emphasise that the worth of scientific findings depends heavily on the manner in which the data was collected and analysed.

Liamputtong (2011) identifies that there are three different ways of presenting qualitative data:
- Option 1 – report without interpretation,
- Option 2 – report and add some interpretation in order to make connections between the reported statements and
- Option 3 – report, analyse in depth and interpret.

The researcher opted for Option 3 in the presentation of the observations and findings. The selection of this option allows for integration of research results presentation, analysis and interpretation in one chapter so that there is logical and scientific coherence in the presentation of the data (Moretti, Van Vliet, Bensing, Deledda, Mazzi, Rimondini, Zimmermann & Fletcher, 2011).

4.2   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question for this study relates to seeking clarification on how the relations between internal and external quality assurance are structured and

experienced, and whether they are appropriately aligned to promote the assurance of positive outcomes in the accreditation processes of programmes for University X.

The additional research sub-questions which arose from the main research question were:

a. What is the range and nature of institutional policies on quality assurance with regards to their alignment to national policy and the CHE 's Framework for Programme Accreditation?

b. What are the interactions of role-players involved in internal and external quality assurance and how do they interact in terms of policy, procedures and implementation?

c. What is the impact as experienced by the institution of the accreditation and de-accreditation of the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) in terms of the national review process of the CHE and HEQC outcomes?

d. Is there a relationship management framework within the institution to support quality assurance processes both internally or externally?

These research questions are answered in this chapter, according to the structure depicted in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: Overall structure of the Chapter

4.3   PHASE ONE - DOCUMENT ANALYSIS AND OBSERVATIONS

Mayring (2004) and Braun and Clarke (2012) suggest that qualitative content analysis can involve any sort of recorded communication in the form of transcripts of interviews, discourses, protocols of observations, video tapes and documents. Qualitative content analysis can be defined as an approach to empirical, methodological, controlled

analysis of texts within the context of communication, following content analytical rules and step by step models (Mayring, 2014).

Becker and Lissman (1973) identify that not only does content analysis analyse the manifest content of the material, but it differentiates levels of content: themes and main ideas of the text as primary content, and context information as latent content. Therefore, content analysis can take on many forms of text analysis. For the purposes of this study content analysis was undertaken within the context of policy documents that inform the national and institutional context of quality assurance.

Wesley (2010) argues that all document analysts must protect the authenticity or truth value of their research. Authentic analysis is one that offers a genuine interpretation of reality, or an accurate reading of a particular set of documents. Denzin (2011) simply defines interpretation as an attempt to explain meaning, while Simukungwe (2018) argues that interpretation is the basis for understanding and engagement which affords an opportunity to understand policy text and to clarify meaning embedded in the text. As noted by Benjamin (1988), interpretation enables the researcher to translate the unfamiliar into the familiar and enables clarity of policy meaning.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that all students of social life must provide two key assurances of the trustworthiness of their analyses:
   a) they must be explicit as to the process by which they interpret their evidence, and
   b) they must provide access to their data, so that their findings may be verified.

Document analysis undertaken in this study was aimed at interpreting the policy content while also pursuing deep, interpretive narrative analysis. Central to the analysis were the research questions. The policy analysis included aspects of text interpretation presented in alignment with findings into observations, which were carefully presented as outcomes of the process of document analysis.

4.3.1 Observations from the document analysis

Document analysis was applied in Phase one of the data collection; the analysis process aimed to address the first research objective which was to:

a. determine the range and nature of institutional policies on quality assurance with regards to their alignment to national policy and the CHE Framework for Programme Accreditation.

Document analysis for this study followed a qualitative method, as the method originates from an interpretive perspective and because the data for this phase was textual, focusing on policy documents (Holloway, 2004). Conceptual analysis and deconstruction analysis were used as strategies in support of my research objective and question. Simukungwe (2018) asserts that conceptual analysis is important in document analysis because it helps to understand the meaning of an idea or concept and to determine how that idea or concept relates to the questions being answered.

4.3.2 Overview of types of documents analysed

The document analysis firstly consisted of an assessment and analysis of policies which specifically focused on programme accreditation and programme reviews as quality assurance instruments for accreditation and re-accreditation of programmes. All other related documents were read to identify any linkages but were not analysed in detail due to their limited focus on programme accreditation. All documents were organised into three categories:

a. National policies
b. CHE/HEQC policies and reports
c. Institutional policies and reports.

Analysis of the policies was applied to identify an internal view of the institution and external quality assurance in order to understand and identify the alignment, purpose and impact of the policies and reports.

Table 4.1 below identifies and presents the set of policy documents analysed.

Table 4.1:   Policies Analysed

Category	No	Policy	Focus
National Policies	1	Education White Paper 3, A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, 1997	External
	2	Higher Education Act of 1997 as amended	External
	3	National Qualifications Act of 2008	External
	4	Higher Educations Qualifications Sub-Framework, 2013	External
	5	White Paper for Post-school Education and Training, 2014	External
	6	Social Work Act, 1978 as amend	
	7	Social Services Professions Act of 1978 as amended	External
CHE/HEQC Policies and Reports	8	HEQC Framework for Programme Accreditation, 2004	External
	9	Framework for National Reviews, 2014	External
	10	Distance Higher Education Programmes in a Digital Era: Good Practice Guide, 2014	External
	11	Framework for Qualifications Standards, 2015	External
	12	HEQC National Reviews Committee (NRC) Report on the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) 2013-2014	External
Institutional Policies: University X	13	Quality Assurance Policy, 2018	Internal
	14	Tuition Policy, 2014	Internal
	15	Curriculum Policy, 2012	Internal
	16	Procedures and Approval Protocols for New Programmes and Revisions to Existing Programmes, 2019	Internal

	17	Response to the HEQC National Reviews Committee (NRC) Report on the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) 2013-2014	Internal

4.3.2.1 National Policies

A total of seven national government policies and legislation were analysed to gain a better understanding and interpretation of the application of these policies and laws. The policies and legislation are statutory in nature, meaning they have been enacted by Parliament.

a. <u>Education White Paper 3, A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, 1997</u>

After the 1994 elections the government announced the establishment of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) in 1995. The NCHE embarked on an extensive process of investigation and consultations with various stakeholders culminating in the NCHE Report (1996) which was followed by the release of first the Green Paper and then the White Paper on Higher Education in 1997. The White Paper laid the foundation for the transformation of the South African higher education system and asserted that the system must be transformed to redress past inequalities.

The policy provided the framework for change in that it argued that the higher education system must be planned, governed and funded as a single national co-ordinated system. The White Paper (1997) proposed a new Academic Policy aimed to provide the academic planning framework and foreground a strategic pillar in the process of constructing a higher education system in South Africa. One of the core principles of the White Paper was quality and the maintaining and application of academic and educational standards; this principle further recognised that quality may have varied expectations and its ideals may differ from context to context, depending on the specific purposes pursued. The White Paper (1997) suggested that in the application of the principle of quality the process should entail evaluating services and products against set standards, with a view to improvement, renewal or progress. The

policy highlighted as a challenge that the system had a separate and parallel qualification structures for universities, technikons and colleges, and this hampered articulation and transfer of credits between institutions and programmes, both horizontally and vertically; hence, a programme-based approach to higher education was proposed. This approach aimed at enhancing horizontal and vertical mobility through flexible entry and exit qualifications. The programme-based approach permitted greater horizontal and vertical mobility in the higher education system in order to eliminate barriers of the traditional pattern of qualifications based on sequential, year-long courses in single academic disciplines.

The White Paper (1997) further proposed a planning framework which included three main planning instruments: enrolments, programmes and funding and all associated processes at the national and institutional levels. The White Paper (1997) further proposed the establishment of a new statutory advisory body, the Council on Higher Education (CHE). The purpose of the CHE was to advise government and assist higher education institutions to develop planning capacity and appropriate institutional missions, as well as ensuring that new programmes are appropriately located within the institutional landscape.

b. Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 as amended

The Act regulates higher education in South Africa and was the founding legislation for higher education in the new, democratic South Africa. For the purposes of this study the Act was analysed to observe its purpose in relation to quality assurance. Chapter two of the Act provides for the establishment of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and details its functions. Section 7 of Chapter 2 identifies that the CHE should establish the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) as a permanent sub-committee to perform the quality promotion and quality assurance functions of the CHE in terms of the Act. According to the Act the HEQC is deemed to be accredited by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) as a quality assurance body primarily responsible for higher education. As a Quality Council the CHE is deemed by the Higher Education Act to be accredited by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) as the primary Education and Training Quality Assurer (ETQA) for higher education and training. This means that the HEQC as the accredited

ETQA has primary responsibility for quality assurance of higher education and is expected to operate within the requirements of the SAQA Act (Act No 58 of 1995) and all its associated regulations.

c. National Qualifications Act 67 of 2008

This Act repealed the original South African Qualifications Authority Act (Act 58 of 1995) and outlines the development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), developed as an integrated framework, overseen by SAQA and made up of three co-ordinated integrated Sub-Frameworks, each overseen by a different Quality Council. The Act outlines the responsibilities of the Minister of Higher Education and Training; the responsibilities of SAQA and three Quality Councils: Umalusi as the Quality Council for General and Further Education and Training, the CHE as the Quality Council for Higher Education, and the QCTO as the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations. For the purposes of this study the analysis of the policy was limited to the Quality Council responsible for higher education, the CHE, and the role of the professional bodies.

d. White Paper for Post-school Education and Training, 2014

The White Paper sets out strategies to improve the capacity of the post-school education and training system, the promotion and improvement of quality, and building appropriate capacities and diversity. The policy further aims to ensure that a wide range of high-quality options and pathways are provided throughout the system, as well as to improve articulation between higher education institutions and between universities and other post-school institutions.

In terms of this policy, the post-school system is understood as comprising all education and training provision for those who have completed school, those who did not complete their schooling, and those who never attended school. The post-school system consists of the following institutions, which fall under the purview of the DHET:

   a. 26 public universities
   b. 50 public technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges
   c. community colleges;

d. private post-school institutions (registered private colleges and private higher education institutions)

e. the SETAs and the National Skills Fund (NSF)

f. regulatory bodies responsible for qualifications and quality assurance in the post-school system – the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the Quality Councils.

The policy advocates for expansion of the system both in terms of number of enrolments and the types of education and training that are available. It further identifies a need for greater differentiation and diversity among higher education institutions in order to provide for the wide variety of needs of both students and employers. The White Paper (2014) identifies quality assurance as a vital requirement of the post-school education system and asserts that curricula need to be designed in close cooperation between employers and education and training providers, especially in those programmes providing vocational training. It foregrounds the adherence to standards of good practice and to appropriate accreditation criteria, and further stresses the need for distance education institutions to strengthen their internal capacity for delivering quality education. The policy identifies a need for concerted attention to be given to the accreditation of new distance education provision that must be informed by an appropriate contextual analysis of need, taking cognisance of existing public and private provision.

e. Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework, 2013

The sub-framework establishes common parameters and criteria for qualifications and programme design to facilitate the comparability of qualifications across the higher education sector. It provides the criteria for the development, registration and publication of qualifications in terms of standards setting, including the development of naming conventions for qualifications. Its main purpose is the provision of a mechanism for improving the coherence of the higher education system and it sets out articulation and comparability standards, and outlines progression routes between qualifications.

f. Social Work Act, 1978 as amended

This Act was repealed by the Social Services Professions Act of 1978 as amended. The purpose of the Act was,

   a. to determine, (on the recommendation of the professional boards), the qualifications for registration of social workers, social auxiliary workers and persons practising other professions in respect of which professional boards have been established.

   b. to regulate the practising of the professions with respect to which professional boards have been established and the registration of social workers, student social workers, social auxiliary workers and persons practising other professions in respect of which professional boards have been established.

   c. to determine the standards of professional conduct of social workers, student social workers, social auxiliary workers and persons practising other professions in respect of which professional boards have been established and to ensure that they are maintained.

All the functions of this Act are now outlined in the Social Services Professions Act of 1978.

g. Social Services Professions Act of 1978 as amended

The Act provides for the establishment of a South African Council for Social Service Professions and defines its powers and functions. These include the registration of social workers, student social workers, social auxiliary workers and the establishment of professional boards. The Act regulates and anchors the control over the professions contemplated in the Act.

4.3.2.2 CHE/HEQC Policies and Reports

a. HEQC Framework for Programme Accreditation, 2004

This policy document sets out a framework for accreditation of higher education programmes, leading to particular NQF registered qualifications in cooperation with statutory professional councils, where relevant. It further stipulates the minimum quality standards and requirements for programme input, process, output and impact,

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and review for programme accreditation. The main focus in the HEQC's programme accreditation system was the evaluation of new programmes.

The Programme Accreditation Framework establishes common parameters and criteria for qualifications and programme design and further address quality-related issues pertaining to the adaptability, responsiveness and innovativeness of academic programmes in the production of new knowledge and skills and the utilisation of new modalities of provision.

b. Framework for National Reviews, 2015

The Framework for National Reviews sets the parameters and procedures for programme reviews to ensure that minimum standards in programmes are met. It provides the national requirements for programme re-accreditation and alignment of programmes to meet the national qualification standards and programme-level criteria.

c. Framework for Qualifications Standards, 2012

The Framework for Qualifications Standards provide both compliance benchmarks and developmental indicators for qualification types as awarded in particular fields of study or disciplines. The qualification standards are important for both the national assessment of qualifications and for confirming the accreditation of individual programmes leading to the award of the qualification.

d. Distance Higher Education Programmes in a Digital Era: Good Practice Guide, 2014c

The Good Practice Guide provides guidelines to assist institutions and individuals involved in programme design and review at an institutional level as well as CHE programme evaluators involved in the accreditation process of distance education programmes. The guide sets out to clarify the key distinctions between distance and contact education provision, and to provide guidelines on how general programme accreditation requirements need to be interpreted for a distance education context.

e. <u>HEQC National Reviews Committee (NRC) Report on the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), 2013-2014</u>

The report presents the findings and recommendations made by the National Review Committee regarding the BSW programme. The BSW programme was assessed by a panel of peers and experts against the 19 accreditation criteria selected from the Criteria for Programme Accreditation, 2004. The review took into account a self-evaluation report prepared by the academic department of University X offering the programme, the supporting documentation presented at the site visit and the information gathered during the different interviews. The programme was reviewed against each criterion of the Programme Accreditation Framework and a number of flaws were identified by the review committee. The findings of the review committee included shortcomings on the programme design and that the programme did not maintain an appropriate balance of theoretical, practical and experiential knowledge and skills. Further it was found by the review committee that the programme meets the credit requirements of the HEQSF and the NQF which recommends a credit weighting of 480, yet it does not comply with the minimum requirement of 510 credits as required by the professional body, the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP). This finding demonstrates the policy tensions between the professional body requirements and national policy of the CHE and SAQA.

The learning outcomes and the degree of curriculum choice were found not be congruent with the credit weighting and the outcomes did not comply with the required credit weighting of the programme. The institution was found to have sufficient administrative and technical staff members to manage the specialised tasks of registry, dispatch, management of assignments, record-keeping, and other issues in relation to student needs, but that these are not adequately aligned to support the needs of the students in the BSW programme.

The report overall found that the BSW programme of the institution failed to meet the critical minimum standards and the overall recommended outcome was not to accredit the BSW programme.

4.3.2.3 Institutional Policies

a. Quality Assurance Policy, 2018

University X's Quality Assurance Policy provides a conceptual platform that underpins the institution's quality assurance, promotion and enhancement activities and serves to create and enhance a culture of quality and excellence in all spheres of the University's activities.

The policy sets the parameters for QA within the institution and recognises the need for a fit between QA and other monitoring and evaluation functions within the internal context with the external quality regulatory environment.

b. Curriculum Policy, 2012

The institutional Curriculum Policy provides an overview of the principles according to which curricula at the institution should be developed and sets out the parameters of how curricula should meet international good practices in curriculum design and being responsive to students. The policy further provides guidelines on the standards for curriculum development and outlines key regulatory instruments that must be consulted when developing and designing programmes.

c. Tuition Policy, 2014

The Tuition Policy recognises the nature of the institution as a comprehensive open and distance learning higher education institution that offers a wide range of vocational, professional and general formative qualifications. It provides for teaching and learning approaches as an ODL institution and the use of technology in teaching and learning which in turn informs programme design and delivery.

d. Procedures and Approval Protocols for New Programmes and Revisions to Existing Programmes, 2018

This document specifies a framework of regulations, guidelines, procedures and QA requirements for academic programme approval. It furthermore provides protocols for the approval of new programmes and modification of existing programmes, and outlines quality assurance mechanisms in the management of programme approval according to the requirements of the HEQC programme accreditation process.

e. <u>Response to the HEQC National Reviews Committee (NRC) Report on the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), 2013-2014</u>

The report responds to the recommendations and the provisional outcome of the review of the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) by the HEQC National Reviews Committee (NRC) as encapsulated in the NRC report.

University X raised concerns in terms of the understanding of ODL by the panel of reviewers and that a number of institutional ODL practices were being taken issue with by the CHE. The programme review panel identified some programme design gaps in the BSW programme on that the students did not undertake practical work from the second year onwards (NQF level 6 to 8), and that the practical work was not coherently integrated. University X contended that such feedback from the panel indicated a lack of appreciation for the unique nature of University X as an Open Distance Learning (ODL) institution and that the programme had a distinction between practice-based modules and work-based modules. The contention further was that the students were actually exposed to practice-based learning from their first year onwards (NQF level 5).

The institution recommended that advocacy and awareness need to be created within the CHE and training of the reviewers is necessary prior to undertaking the reviews. In the report the institution responded with some concerns in terms of the outcome of the BSW not being accredited. University X argued that in terms of the Criteria for Programme Accreditation (CHE, 2004) what is required for an existing programme not to be accredited during a review, is not to meet "the majority of the minimum standards specified in the criteria". The institution believed that it did meet the minimum standards required in terms of ten out of the nineteen criteria. Only two of the nineteen criteria were not met, which did not constitute a majority. The argument is that the final outcome of de-accreditation was rather harsh seeing that only two of the criteria were not met. University X was of the view that the CHE should review its decision and amend the overall outcome of "Not accredited" to "Accredited (with conditions)" (University X, 2014: 3).

The section below presents the key observations in a tabular format to better illustrate each policy, its characteristics and relationship alignment as per the document analysis procedure.

Table 4.2: Data Sample and Characteristics

Category	#	Policy	CHARACTERISTICS				
Policy Category		Policy Title	Authority	Application of regulation	Control/ Management	Policy linkages and relationships	Stakeholders
National Policies	1.	Education White Paper 3, A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, 1997	Legislative and Mandatory	Across the higher education sector	Government and sectoral	National level linkages and application Alignment to CHE, HEQC	Government, CHE, HEQC and Public
	2.	Higher Education Act of 1997 as amended	Legislative and Mandatory	Across the higher education sector	Government and sectoral	National level linkages and application Alignment to CHE, HEQC	Government, CHE, HEQC and Public
	3.	National Qualifications Act of 2008	Legislative and Mandatory	Across the higher education sector	Government and sectoral distinguishes three sub-frameworks applied to specific quality agency functions	National level linkages and application Alignment to CHE, HEQC and Professional Bodies	Government, SAQA, CHE, HEQC, Professional Body and Public
	4.	White Paper for Post-school Education and Training, 2014	Legislative and Mandatory	Across the higher education sector	Government and sectoral	National level linkages and application Alignment to CHE, HEQC and Professional Bodies	Government, SAQA, CHE, HEQC, Professional Body and Public
	5.	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework	Legislative and Mandatory	Across the higher education sector	Government and sectoral	National level linkages and application Alignment to CHE, HEQC and Professional Bodies	Government, SAQA, CHE, HEQC, Professional Body and Public
	6.	Social Services Professions Act of 1978 as amended	Legislative and Mandatory	Limited to Profession and Practice	Local application to Professional Practice	No distinct alignment to other Higher Education regulation or the SAQA and CHE	Government, Professional Boards and HE Institutions
	7.	Social Work Act, 1978 as amended	Legislative and Mandatory	Limited to Profession and Practice	Local application to Professional Practice	No distinct alignment to other Higher Education regulation or the SAQA and CHE	Government, Professional Boards and HE Institutions

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Category	#	Policy	CHARACTERISTICS				
CHE Policies and Reports	8.	HEQC Framework for Programme Accreditation	Mandatory to HE institutions that fall under the CHE	HE Institutions who fall under HEQC band of authority Qualifications at NQF level 5 – 10 in terms of the NQF	Local limited to HE institutions	Government, SAQA Professional Bodies and institutional policies	Government, Professional Bodies, HE institutions and Public
	9.	Framework for National Reviews	Mandatory to HE institutions that fall under the CHE	HE Institutions who fall under HEQC band of authority Qualifications at NQF level 5 – 10 in terms of the NQF	Local limited to HE institutions	Aligned with the Framework for programme accreditation, HEQSF, NQF.	Government, Professional Bodies, HE institutions and Public
	10.	Framework for Qualifications Standards	Mandatory to HE institutions that fall under the CHE	HE Institutions who fall under HEQC band of authority Qualifications at NQF level 5 – 10 in terms of the NQF	Local limited to HE institutions	Aligned with the Framework for programme accreditation, HEQSF, NQF.	Government, Professional Bodies, HE institutions and Public
	11.	HEQC National Reviews Committee (NRC) Report on the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) 2013-2014	Mandatory HE institutions that fall under the CHE	HE Institution	Local limited to HE institution	Aligned with the Framework for programme accreditation, HEQSF, NQF.	HE and limited relationship to the Professional body standards
	12..	Distance Higher Education Programmes in a Digital Era: Good Practice Guide	Advisory and benchmarking	HE Institutions who fall under HEQC band of authority Qualifications at NQF level 5 – 10 in terms of the NQF	Local limited to HE institutions	Aligned with the Framework for programme accreditation, HEQSF, NQF.	Government, HE institutions and Public
Institutional Policies: University X	13.	Quality Assurance Policy	Internal – HE institution	Internal - Limited to institution	Limited to institution	National level linkages and application Alignment to CHE, HEQC Quality Assurance Standards and Purpose Alignment to NQF and recognises the role of Professional Bodies	Government, CHE and HEQC
	14.	Curriculum Policy	Internal – HE institution	Internal – HE institution	Limited to institution	National level linkages and application Alignment to CHE, HEQC Quality Assurance	Government, CHE and HEQC, SAQA and NQF

Category	#	Policy	CHARACTERISTICS				
						Standards, NQF and Professional Bodies	
	15.	Tuition Policy	Internal – HE institution	Internal - Limited to institution	Limited to institution	National level linkages and application Alignment to CHE, HEQC Quality Assurance Standards, NQF and Professional Bodies	Government, CHE and HEQC, SAQA and NQF
	16.	Procedures and Approval Protocols for New Programmes and Revisions to Existing Programmes	Internal – HE institution	Internal - Limited to institution	Limited to institution	National level linkages and application Alignment to CHE, HEQC Quality Assurance Standards, NQF and Professional Bodies	Government, CHE and HEQC, SAQA, NQF and role of Professional Bodies
	17	Response to the HEQC National Reviews Committee (NRC) Report on the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) 2013-2014	Internal and external	Internal - Limited to institution	Limited to institution	National level linkages and application. Alignment to CHE, HEQSF HEQC Framework for Programme Accreditation and Framework for National reviews	Government, CHE and HEQC, SAQA, NQF

4.4   OVERVIEW OF THE KEY OBSERVATIONS FROM DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Hupe and Hill (2016) suggest that policies are intended to provide guidance, goals and means of improving the quality of the outcomes of the education system in terms of implementation. The education sphere is a policy area where the actual characteristics of policy are likely to be considerably influenced by the context. The means to achieve the policy goals exist at different levels and these levels are interdependent (Simukungwe, 2018). Policies provide a coordination blueprint for structures at national level and setting of standards by government. The functions and operationalisation of the structures are then delegated to national agencies and institutions who have the responsibility to implement the policies.

4.4.1 Observation 1: No acknowledgement of Professional Bodies in Chapter Two of the Higher Education Act

The Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, as amended, drove the analysis in terms of this observation, read together with the NQF Act 67 of 2008, the Social Services Professions Act of 1978, as amended, and the Social Work Act, 1978 as amended. The analysis attempted to identify the roles and linkages at the highest levels of government policy of the various actors in external quality assurance such as the HEQC and the Professional Body.

The Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, as amended, provides for a number of role-players. In particular, the Act prescribes the roles of higher education institutions and regulatory bodies such as the CHE and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) but does not seem to acknowledge the role of professional bodies which are a critical constituent in quality assurance. The Higher Education Act (1997) provides that the CHE through its permanent quality committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), may, with the concurrence of the CHE, delegate any quality promotion and quality assurance functions to other appropriate bodies capable of performing such functions. There is no explicit clarity with regard to the actual functions of the HEQC that can be delegated. Can professional bodies be delegated the

accreditation role of higher education programmes within their respective disciplinary fields?

Marock (2000) identifies that this lack of policy clarity leads to different conceptions held by the higher education sector and various professional bodies about their quality assurance (QA) role. The scope or role of professional bodies is also not provided for in terms of this legislation.

The Social Service Professions Act 110 of 1978 indicates that the purpose of the professional council in relation to academic programmes is to determine the standards of professional conduct and practice of social workers. The Social Service Act seems to be consistent with the National Qualifications Act of 2008 in terms of its role, but the NQF Act goes further to note that the professional body must co-operate with the relevant quality council, in this case the HEQC, in respect of programmes and quality assurance in its occupational field. The NQF Act, however, offers little direction on the delegation of roles by the HEQC to a professional body. The incoherence of these policies most probably leads to an ambiguous relationship between the HEQC and the professional body.

4.4.2 Observation 2: Lack of consistency in Programme Accreditation standards, HEQSF Standards and the Professional practice standards

Observation 2 followed on an analysis and comparison of the HEQC's Framework for Programme Accreditation (2004), the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF, 2013), the HEQC National Reviews Committee (NRC) Report on the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and the institutional response report to the HEQC National Reviews Committee (NRC) on the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW). The analysis of the Framework for National Reviews (CHE, 2015) supplemented the document analysis of this section. The analysis attempted to critically explore the relationships between the programme accreditation criteria of the HEQC, the HEQSF, and the qualification standards in terms of the Framework for Qualifications Standards (CHE, 2012) and the Framework for National Reviews (CHE, 2015).

The national Framework for Qualification Standards (CHE, 2012) provides both compliance benchmarks and developmental indicators for qualification types awarded in particular fields of study or disciplines. The Criteria for Programme Accreditation state that for an existing programme not to be accredited during a review, it has to fail to meet "the majority of the minimum standards specified in the criteria" (CHE, 2004). In terms of the review outcomes of the BSW, the response report of University X identifies that only two of the 19 criteria were not met, which did not constitute a majority.

The HEQSF requires that for a programme to be classified as a professional Bachelor's degree it must have a minimum of 480 credits. The BSW programme of University X was designed to meet this standard of credit allocation in terms of the HEQSF. The HEQSF (2013) asserts that all qualifications must meet the type specifications, which indicate the qualification type, its NQF exit level, and its maximum and minimum credit values. In line with the HEQSF, the professional four year qualification should have 480 credits and be on NQF Level 8.

The BSW was submitted for alignment to the HEQSF as a Category A programme, requiring only minimal changes for accreditation purposes and was informed of its successful alignment and accreditation by the HEQC to a 480 credit NQF Level 8 profession degree. According to the findings of the HEQC National Reviews Committee (NRC) Report (2013) on the Bachelor of Social Work the programme did meet the requirements of the HEQSF and the NQF but it did not comply with the minimum requirement of 510 credits as required by the professional body, the South African Council for Social Service Professions. According to the report of University X, the professional body, SACSSP, having received a self-assessment report by the Social Work department, conducted a site visit during 2012. In terms of the reviewed report by SACSSP no adverse finding was communicated to University X by the professional body in relation to the credit weighting of 480. There was no recommendation from SACSSP to revise the 480 total credits of the BSW programme to 510 credits as was proposed the following year (2013) by the CHE.

From the HEQC National Reviews Committee (NRC) Report on the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), 2013-2014, it is also not clear if the SACSSP was invited or requested to participate in the review of the BSW.

4.4.3 Observation 3: No explicit acknowledgement of the role of professional bodies in National Programme Reviews

This observation follows from the analysis of the HEQC Framework for National Reviews (CHE, 2015), the HEQC National Reviews Committee (NRC) Report on the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), 2013-2014, and the Institutional Response Report to the HEQC National Reviews Committee (NRC) on the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), 2013-2014. The National Reviews Framework (CHE, 2015) asserts that the NQF Act provides for the Quality Council (QC) to delegate certain functions under certain conditions. In terms of the Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act 101 of 1997) as amended, the CHE may not delegate its quality assurance functions beyond its sub-committee, the HEQC. The National Review Framework further asserts that the HEQC has executive responsibility for quality assurance decisions, including decisions in respect of national review and that it makes its judgements independently of other national agencies and professional bodies. The NQF Act, however, stresses the need for cooperation between the QC and the professional body.

A further function of the HEQC identified in the Framework for National Reviews (CHE, 2015), relates to the development of standards. These standards are important to the successful implementation of the HEQSF, as they provide benchmarks to guide the development, implementation and quality assurance of programmes leading to qualifications. There is a close relationship between standards development and national reviews, on the one hand, and the quality assurance of institutional programmes, effected through the process of accreditation and re-accreditation. Programme accreditation involves the application of standards in the decision-making process and relates to assessing the quality of the proposed or current programmes and the fitness of institutions to offer the programmes (CHE, 2015).

The Social Service Professions Act 110 of 1978 also provides for one of the functions of the professional boards as the promotion of the standards of training in higher education institutions. Furthermore, the Social Service Professions Act stipulates that the professional boards determine the minimum standards of education and training of persons practising as professionals falling within the ambit of the professional board.

The national review process of the CHE is aligned with the programme accreditation framework which evaluates new and existing programmes. The primary aim of a national review is to ensure that minimum standards in programmes are met. The National Reviews Framework (CHE, 2015) attempts to clarify a range of standards that include qualification standards, content standards, teaching and learning standards, standards for the assessment of student achievement, and standards for institutional performance. The framework specifies that a qualification standard is largely determined by the purpose and characteristics of the qualification type. There is no distinction how these standards differ from the professional body standards and how they apply to the accreditation of programmes.

Furthermore, no role clarity or alignment could be located in the National Reviews Framework, especially with regard to how the two stakeholders, i.e. the CHE and the professional boards align in their drive toward the attainment of these standards in programmes from a policy perspective.

In terms of standard development, the CHE Qualifications Standards Framework (CHE, 2015) clearly identifies that it convenes a working group of academics from higher education institutions with expertise in the particular field of study, normally after consultation with a representative academic body or association. It is notable that no acknowledgement is made of the involvement of the professional body but rather an academic board or association. The National Reviews Framework (CHE, 2015) specifies that the scope, qualification standard and accreditation criteria specific to a particular programme review are proposed by a reference group composed of field or discipline experts in the higher education academic community. The group is selected by the CHE from nominations received from the affected institutions. Once again, this document makes no mention of the role or inclusion of the professional body in the reference group. This group of selected nominees makes up the national review

committee (NRC) and they represent a standing sub-committee of the HEQC. In terms of the CHE the NRC comprises senior academics with expertise in programme accreditation and, depending on the particular review, expert peers from within the disciplinary area of the programme.

The Framework for National Reviews (CHE, 2015) is also not explicit on the role of the professional boards, while it is comparatively more explicit on the relationship with the academic institutions, in that peer reviewers of the programmes are mainly drawn from institutions themselves. In terms of this framework it is observed that a stronger relationship between the CHE and higher education institutions exist than between the CHE and professional bodies.

4.4.4 Observation 4: Alignment of the Institutional Policies to the external quality assurance framework

Observation 4 is drawn from the analysis of the institutional policies of the University X combined. The Tuition Policy identified the unique character of University X as South Africa's only publicly funded dedicated distance education institution, as well as it being a comprehensive university, and its consequent fitness of purpose.

The quality management ethos of University X, in terms of its QA policy, recognises the important need for one single point of liaison between the external and internal QA environments, which in this case is the Department of Quality Assurance and Enhancement. This Department prepared and coordinated the integrated QA Policy for University X.

In terms of the strategic QA report (2019) of University X the QA department recognised that the QA environment at University X was fragmented, not well coordinated, and continued to be devolved without centralised control over where responsibility and accountability lie, as it is dispersed across various QA functions.

The QA Policy of University X was observed to be aligned with the external national QA policies of the HEQC, CHE, NQF and SAQA. The Curriculum Policy of the institution even went further to provide guidelines and an implementation plan to align programme development to the HEQC criteria for programme accreditation. The implementation plan of the Curriculum Policy identified that the management of the quality of qualifications and programmes, and the planning, development and design of programmes were done in accordance with the HEQC criteria. It, however, further observed that the Curriculum Policy of the institution was last reviewed in 2012 and still utilised old document titles and references, such as use of the term HEQF when referring to HEQSF. Since the Curriculum Policy of the institution was last reviewed in 2012, the policy also had limited alignment with the requirements of the CHE's "Distance Higher Education Programmes in a Digital Era: Good Practice Guide".

The institution recognised in its Curriculum Policy (2012) the role of professional bodies. It noted though that some professional bodies did not have to accredit the University's programmes, but qualifying graduates are still required to register with such professional bodies to be eligible to practice as professionals in the relevant sectors.

4.4.5 Observation 5: A strong reciprocal relationship between the policies of the CHE and the institutional policies of University X, but a limited relationship between the CHE and professional bodies is apparent.

An analysis of the CHE policies, in particular the Framework for Programme Accreditation (2004) and the Framework for National Reviews (2015), outlines a number of principles that inform approaches to programme approval and programme review adopted by University X. From the document analysis, the emergent main principle was that the primary responsibility for programme and institutional quality resides with higher education institutions themselves. The CHE further articulates that institutions should continuously seek to establish and sustain effective mechanisms to facilitate the offering of quality driven programmes. The CHE identifies that its frameworks and other quality instruments support internal programme-related

planning and self-evaluation in relation to external evaluation and public reporting for the purposes of evidence-based peer reviews. This assertion seems to suggest that internal institutional mechanisms must be developed and designed from within the institutions and that the HEQC's responsibility is to establish an external system of programme accreditation that can validate institutional information on the effectiveness of arrangements for ensuring the quality of academic programmes.

The policies of University X align to these prescripts and recognises the role of the HEQC in terms of its external quality assurance role. The Curriculum Policy of the institution articulates its resonance with the HEQC criteria.

Both the Programme Accreditation and National Reviews Frameworks confirm that the HEQC makes its judgements independently of other national agencies and professional bodies but takes into consideration their work where issues of quality and standards are involved. There is no clarity with respect to how this consideration of the professional body is exercised nor an articulation of rules of engagements with the professional bodies. Only a section in the Programme Accreditation Framework (2004) acknowledges that the HEQC's programme accreditation system will focus on the evaluation of new programmes. Notably, it specifies that this will be carried out by the HEQC itself, through partnerships with other statutory quality councils or professional councils in higher education on the basis of memoranda of understanding (MoUs).

The CHE's accreditation model identifies and acknowledges that certain programmes have to meet the licensing and other professional or work-based requirements of statutory councils. It also affirms that the HEQC will enter into cooperation agreements with these bodies. The agreements will be regulated by means of MoUs setting out the terms of the cooperation. The HEQC will ensure that its partnership and delegation agreements will allow it to discharge its own legal obligations for programme quality. In terms of documents sourced, only one professional body possesses a signed MOU with the CHE namely the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA). A desktop search on the CHE's website could not locate any other MOU signed with any other professional body.

4.4.6 Conclusive overview related to document analysis and observations

Hupe and Hill (2016) assert that policy is a deliberate action or inaction. The lack of acknowledgement of the quality assurance role of professional bodies in the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, as amended, suggests that a higher premium is placed at policy level on the HEQC and SAQA. Further, an explicit relationship and alignment exist between the institutions and the CHE and the HEQC. The policies of University X identify with the minimum standards of the HEQC for management of quality at programme level and quality assurance as whole.

The commitment of the HEQC, with respect to the development of MOUs with professional bodies, seems to be limited to only one professional body and there are no other articulations in the CHE policy documents that identify other collaboration mechanisms with professional bodies generally, in terms of programme accreditation and programme reviews.

Lastly, quality standards need to be clearly defined in the various policy documents. There seem to be tensions between what is meant by qualification standards, academic standards and professional standards where programmes are involved, and better cooperation and alignment at policy level between the HEQC and professional bodies can provide more clarity and better alignment between the various quality standards for programmes.

4.5   PHASE TWO – INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Data collection for Phase two involved interviews which were administered via an interview protocol, after ethical clearance was obtained and institutional approval was granted by University X. A total of nine (n=9) individual face to face interviews were arranged and facilitated over a duration of two months. An interview guide was prepared in advance to guide the questions and structure of the interview. The interview protocol consisted of 11 open ended questions. The interviews with the

participants were structured to be 60 minutes (1 hour) long (see Appendix 3 for the interview protocol).

The interviews aimed to address the following objectives of the study:

b. Critically assessing where and how the role-players involved in internal and external quality assurance interact in terms of policy, procedures and implementation;

c. Evaluating the impact as experienced by the institution of the accreditation and de-accreditation of the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) in terms of the national review process of the CHE and HEQC outcomes.

Phase two of the data collection process had as theoretical underpinning Dewey's theory on experience (Dewey, 1938, as cited in Hasbun & Rudolph, 2016), which discusses the value of experience in education and posits that experience comes from the combination of continuity and interaction. Dewey (1938) proposed that a person's past and present experiences impact his or her future experiences (continuity) and that there are contextual influences that affect the current experiences. Phase two attempted to solicit the views and perceptions of participants in relation to their personal experiences and their involvement with the national review of the BSW programme.

It is worth stating that the participants were comfortable to express their views and experiences in English. The interviewees in this study were addressed as participants in terms of presentation of their views and comments. Verbatim quotations from the participants are cited without attempt to correct grammatical errors that may have been made (Tsekoa 2013).

4.6   SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

In this study, purposive sampling method was used to select participants who had relevant knowledge and expertise to inform the study adequately (Heckathorn, 2011). In order to segregate the participants into appropriate categories, the interviewees

were asked about the positions they held, their backgrounds in QA and key institutional functions.

A total of nine participants (n=9) were interviewed. Interactions with such a small sample size allowed for more in-depth questions, and the qualitative nature of the engagements allowed for deeply illuminating responses and detail, i.e. answers to the "why", "how' and "what" questions. Trotter (2012) suggests that there is no ideal standard sample size in qualitative research methods and contends that the depth of exploration dictates how much must be gleaned from the sample group. Since purposeful sampling was applied in the selection of participants, their experience and background in quality assurance was critical. Trotter (2012) further identifies that the selection of an expert group provides a study with an in-depth investigation of a topic that is qualitatively valid and reliable. The participants by category are represented in the pie-chart below.

Participants by occupational designation and category

- institutional managers — 34%
- external quality assurance — 22%
- academic department — 11%
- college management — 22%
- professional and admin support — 11%
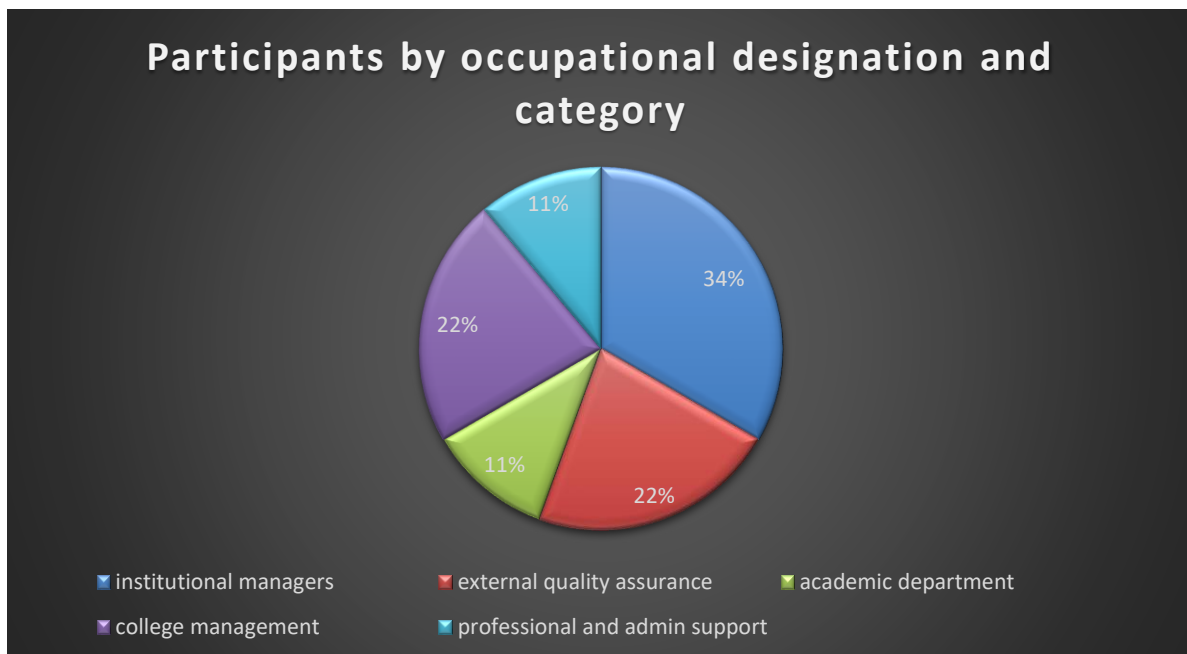
Figure 4.2: Participants by Designation and Category

As indicated above, seven participants were individuals from within the institution, and two were external. A notable proportion of participants (34%) fell within the category of institutional management, while two were within the category of external quality

assurance representing the CHE and the professional body. Only one of the participants was from the academic department, two represented College management and the remaining participant represented professional and administrative support staff at middle management level.

4.7   DATA COLLECTION LIMITATIONS

The major limitation of this section of the data collection was the size of the selected sample. An initial 17 participants were identified through a purposeful selection process. However, due to lack of responses and unavailability of some of the identified participants, the final sample consisted of only nine participants. Response rates from external regulators and the professional body were very low and the study had a heavy reliance on data from policy and document analysis. Since the study was exploratory in nature, it was important to hear the views internally from the institution, and externally, and understand the linkages from a policy perspective, particularly in terms of practice and with respect to their perceptions and experiences of programme accreditation and national reviews. The final sample consisted of key role-players with deep knowledge and insight into the research questions; hence, the interviews generated rich and valuable data.

4.8   KEY FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

The responses from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. The themes and patterns were identified through a rigorous process of data familiarisation, data coding, theme development and revision.

The findings were distilled into categories as per the participants' occupational designation and whether they were internal or external to University X. Responses per participants were categorised into the five main categories of:
   a. Institutional management
   b. College management

    c. Staff from the relevant academic department

    d. Middle management professional and administrative staff

    e. External quality assurance representatives.

Data was organised and categorised according to each question and linked to the objectives of the study; this was done simultaneously with theme identification. The emergent themes in terms of findings were then identified and put into their respective categories.

4.8.1 Finding 1: Culture of compliance

Table 4.3: Culture of Compliance

Objective	Theme	Sub-theme
b) To critically assess where and how the role-players involved in internal and external quality assurance interact in terms of policy, procedures and implementation	Policy implementation	Nature of instruments, processes and procedures
	Compliance	Perceptions on policy culture in the institution

The interviews with all categories of staff internal to the institution revealed that within University X, there is a culture of compliance when dealing with quality assurance matters. In all categories, including institutional management, college management, academic staff, professional and administrative staff, participants agreed that QA is being dealt with as a compliance instrument. The academic category further highlighted that this compliance approach to QA is due to the volume of work they carry out, that workloads are unrealistic and also, that what is expected from them is at times unfair and not feasible. QA and programme reviews are viewed within the institution as compliance driven processes which are more focused on the technical aspects of the process such as the correct completion of forms.

One participant (4) referred to the process of programme accreditation as a "tick box exercise". Participant 5 highlighted that:

QA is viewed as a compliance instrument and we should aim higher than the minimum standards but aim for excellence. (Participant 5).

The same participant suggested some reasons for the reigning compliance culture among academics:

Academics are resistant to it as they link it to managerialism and do not understand it as an academic activity (Participant 5).

4.8.2 Finding 2: Fragmentation of structures and functions

Table 4.4: Fragmentation of Structures and Functions

Objective	Theme	Sub-theme
b) To critically assess where and how the role-players involved in internal and external quality assurance interact in terms of policy, procedures and implementation	Policy	Procedures
	Institutional structure	Functions
	Relationships	Roles

The perspectives of institutional management and college management were that procedures and practice do not always follow on from policy, and that in practice procedures and operations are carried out in silos; hence, fragmentation at the implementation level is observed.

The responses from the professional and administrative staff category supported this finding and highlighted that QA functions are not aligned, that functionality of the process depended largely on the relations among stakeholders, and that coordination was not optimal. A participant from the institutional management category highlighted:

Activities are disjointed, and the different spaces are not talking to each other for example the work at programme accreditation is not harmonized with work in other QA spaces and that department has always been understaffed, internal interactions are disjointed. (Participant 4).

Another participant highlighted that:

There's a culture of blaming at the institution and minimal collaboration and there are no synergies; silos and parallel structures of QA exist with limited opportunities for departments to collaborate. (Participant 2).

The CHE representative agreed with this finding and suggested that the operationalization of the policies should be multi-layered across the various structures. The role-players to build relationships at each layer and the intersections must be identified and roles clarified at those intersections. Role clarification is critical to avoid duplication of functions.

4.8.3 Finding 3: Relations with Professional Bodies are not optimal

Table 4.5: Relations with Professional Bodies are not Optimal

Objective	Theme	Sub-theme
b)To critically assess where and how the role-players involved in internal and external quality assurance interact in terms of policy, procedures and implementation c)To evaluate the impact as experienced by the institution of the accreditation and de-accreditation of the Bachelor of Social Work	Relationship	Role-player Nature of engagement
	Nature of Role in Policy	Role in practice and function

(BSW) in terms of the national review process of the CHE and HEQC outcomes.		

All the categories of participants agreed that the relationships with professional bodies are critical and very important. The college management category firmly stated that the role of SACSSP in the academic activities of the Department of Social Work is very important, so much so that they now have an academic representative at the professional body. Participant 4 further highlighted:

> *There was for many years functionality issues at the professional body. We as a college had to intervene and assign senior academics to be more involved as there was no representation of senior academics in the professional boards of Social Services Professions council and we now find this representation useful.* (Participant 4).

Professional and administrative staff viewed the relationships as critical as well but highlighted that the professional bodies did not seem to follow protocol when they engaged with the institution. There is a need for improved coordination and communication. Furthermore, there are tensions whether colleges should be responsible for liaison with professional bodies directly. Professional and administrative staff further suggested that guidelines are required for the engagement with professional bodies as accountability questions arise when things go wrong.

The CHE representative supported the view that professional bodies have a role to play and that relations are important, in particular during the standard development process of national reviews as this needs to take into consideration the requirements of the professional bodies. The CHE participant noted that there exists a "pulling and pushing" relationship between the CHE and professional bodies at standard development and setting levels and that the relationships can be quite strained in practice.

Both the CHE and SACSSP representatives agreed that their mutual relations can be difficult at times as some of the professional body national regulations or acts still accord them powers to accredit programmes. There also seems to be a lack of

understanding from institutions that the criteria of the professional body and of the CHE differ, and that the professional acts at policy level need to be reviewed.

The CHE representative summed up the relationship with professional bodies by highlighting that relationships between the external authorities must be negotiated at all times as QA is a negotiated space. External authorities, both the CHE and professional bodies, "need to understand the context of the institution", "understand the psyche of an individual" and "understand the different roles".

4.8.4 Finding 4: Internal QA Policies and External Policies are aligned

Table 4.6: Internal QA Policies and External Policies are aligned

Objective	Theme	Sub-theme
a) To determine the range and nature of institutional policies on quality assurance with regards to their alignment to national policy and the CHE's Framework for Programme Accreditation	Policy	Procedures
	Institutional structure	Functions
	Relationships	Roles

Within the institution participants from all categories agreed that internal QA and related policies are mostly aligned to external regulatory policies, and that there is some awareness as the institution seemed to understand the need for alignment. The institutional management agreed that there is a level of alignment but noted that the effectiveness in practice was not optimal and could be improved. One participant, though, indicated that institutional policies must be reviewed in terms of relevance. The professional and administration category also agreed that continuous policy review remained a challenge and further stated that at times the institution suffers from "implementation paralysis".

4.8.5 Finding 5: Capacity development and information sharing

The CHE and SACSSP representatives recognised that a need for capacity development exists, and that the institution seemed to be lacking internal competencies for QA or may not adequately capacitated in terms of human resources to deal with QA matters; this might be attributed to the size of the institution. Therefore, the CHE has had to "hand hold" the institution. The participant from the CHE further highlighted that this scenario is not isolated to only University X, but that a number of institutions are struggling with issues of capacity development for QA.

The CHE highlighted that:

> *Organisational learning from the reviews seems to be not happening in institutions.* (Participant 7)

The academic department agreed that hand holding is required within the institution when dealing with QA and programme accreditation and suggested that programme advisors are required to look more closely at programmes at college level. The institutional managers agreed that more capacity is required at various levels of QA and that continuous improvement and reflection at programme level must be implemented.

The academic department also noted a need for information sharing and that an institutional repository for the storage of programme related evidence is required; this information must be readily accessible. Sharing of best practices and lessons learned from programme reviews was also highlighted as a need that must be addressed institutionally.

4.8.6 Finding 6: De-accreditation of the BSW was unexpected

Table 4.7: De-accreditation of the BSW

Objective	Theme	Sub-theme
	Impact	Location of functions

c) To evaluate the impact as experienced by the institution of the accreditation and de-accreditation of the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) in terms of the national review process of the CHE and HEQC outcomes.	Institutional structures	Functions
	Relationships	Roles

The academics felt that during the preparatory phase of the national review relations within the college were tense and there was resistance from the department as academics were not accustomed to national reviews. The professional and administration category identified that the review of the BSW was driven by the college. At the time their role was to assist with the development of the self-evaluation report (SER) but most of the BSW interactions with the CHE happened at the college level. The professional body, the SACSSP, was not involved in the national review and this was also confirmed by the CHE.

All categories within the institution agreed that the de-accreditation of the BSW was a "shock" to the institution. This was particularly emphasized by the academic department and college management. The de-accreditation of the BSW resulted in a huge fallout within the department and college management. It also had a negative effect on the academic staff and demoralised them, but college management intervened and engaged in team building exercises for the academic department.

All categories further agreed that there were a number of lessons learned. Institutional managers recognised that drivers of QA must not be in support functions or departments and asserted that academics must be the drivers of QA. Institutional management further highlighted that "ownership or lack thereof is one of the critical issues we have in the institution". One respondent from the institutional category further articulated:

> *A lot of QA projects become orphans and support services seem to lead QA activities and these roles have been reversed and this must be changed as academics must lead.* (Participant 2)

Some of the lessons cited included a need for internal reflections and internal reviews of programmes before the submission for accreditation and national reviews. College management also highlighted that as academics they need to conduct regular internal programme reviews and training of academics on QA awareness, and that academics should be better prepared for the external site visits.

4.9   CONCLUSION

Chapter Four presented the outcomes of the data analysis. The chapter also provided in-depth insights into the perceptions and experiences of the participants internal and external to the institution as to how they align and relate to each other at policy and engagements levels, and the nature of their interactions.

The findings covered the two phases of the study; in the first phase the data analysis of policies and institutional reports of University X were presented. The qualitative interview findings show that there is a lot of recognition and appreciation for the involvement of external QA bodies, and that the institution seems to be in alignment with external QA policies. Some challenges, particularly around institutional culture, were, however, also identified.

The detailed conclusion and recommendations will be presented in Chapter Five of the study.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to present the conclusions and recommendations arising from the completion of the study. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the interactions and nature of the relations that exist between the QA actors internal to an institution, University X, and external QA stakeholders, namely the CHE as Quality Council and the relevant professional body, the SACSSP. The study considered whether and how, in view of both internal institutional policies and external quality assurance regulatory frameworks, the purposes of the programme accreditation processes of the institution are aligned with the CHE framework for programme accreditation. The study explored programme accreditation as a quality assurance instrument in the context of programme reviews, the experience of the institution in terms of the accreditation and de-accreditation of the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and the national review processes of the CHE and HEQC. The study further aimed to explore the alignment between and reciprocal influence of the internal institutional mechanisms of quality assurance and external quality assurance as provided for in government policy. Hence, the interactions and relationships of role-players in QA both internal and external, the levels at which they interact, and the relationships within the institution and the nature of the institution's engagement with external regulatory agencies, the CHE and the applicable professional body, the SACSSP were investigated.

The multi-layered nature of quality assurance allows for various role-players to interact at various levels. Harman (1998) notes that tensions exist between national QA and QA at institutional levels. Harman (1998) identifies that universities operate within a national framework and specific national educational systems, regulations and procedures adapted to meet the needs of the domestic economy and culture of their respective countries. This assertion by Harman (1998) was central to this study as the

findings of the study concur that these tensions exists and are experienced, particularly at institutional level. The focus of quality assurance in universities is located inwardly and operationalised within universities themselves. As demonstrated by the findings in Chapter Four, the tensions experienced between institutional instruments and national frameworks occur due to the external location of quality and the high levels of currency afforded to external frameworks as interpreted from government policies and various external stakeholders. The exploratory focus of the study established the nature of the institutional QA related polices of University X and the alignment of these policies to national QA policies of government, the CHE and the professional body, SACSSP.

The study found that quality needs to be operationalised internally by institutions, and that the nature of quality and quality assurance needs to be defined by institutions themselves as they interact with various role-players on the quality of their academic programmes in terms of standards located within their own contexts. The findings of the study further found that quality assurance should not be viewed as an external imposition, but these national QA frameworks must rather be viewed by institutions as blueprints that can be used to model their own internal quality assurance instruments.

The previous chapter discussed the observations at national and institutional policy levels, and the findings from the individual interviews conducted. A detailed analysis of the interviews and narrative responses was presented under thematic headings and each theme was discussed. Chapter Five presents a further interpretation of the findings against the background of the reviewed literature and some recommendations together with suggestions for further research. The limitations and delimitations of the study are also discussed before final conclusions are presented.

5.2   INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE LITERATURE

Suter (2011) contends that research is not conducted in isolation and that any study of a topic must be explored against an existing knowledge base; hence, it is incumbent on all researchers to undertake a formal review of literature to familiarise themselves

with that knowledge base. A plethora of published work on quality assurance and the quality of educational provision exists.

For the purposes of this study, the literature on quality assurance was studied at various levels: globally, continentally and nationally. Literature on globalisation, internationalisation and massification of higher education highlighted how these phenomena had an impact on the quality of programme provision. Initiatives towards the establishment of a regulatory quality assurance framework for the continent and the pursuit of harmonisation for an integrated qualifications framework were highlighted in Chapter Two. At national level one of the trends discerned was that of the government attempting to strengthen collaboration between various sectors and higher education.

Quality assurance needs to be understood within the context of the interrelatedness of many components such as an ecosystem, and the findings of this study confirmed the existence of various multilayers and levels of QA, namely institutional, national and sectoral in terms of professional bodies. The interactions and levels of engagements between these levels are informed by policy prescriptions and the roles are defined by these policies.

The analysis and interpretation of the study data provided some of the answers to the research question which pertained to how the institutional landscape of the case university's internal quality systems aligned to the requirements for the accreditation of programmes as a form of quality assurance as prescribed by the Council of Higher Education (CHE) through its permanent sub-committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The engagement with the relevant professional body, the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) was also explored. The study further sought to examine the relations between internal institutional and external quality assurance, what the nature of the interaction is and the mechanics that drive the processes of both.

Adegbesan (2010) suggests that a quality assurance process should recognise the need for an institution to accept responsibility for its own quality management processes, and that this is the primary difference between quality assurance and

evaluation of quality. The findings of the study demonstrated that quality assurance should be viewed as a total, holistic process, concerned with ensuring the integrity of engagements at various levels of the process. Quality assurance frameworks should place the responsibility for quality within the institutions themselves; this responsibility should be expressed through the relationships between internal and external stakeholders of the institutions themselves.

The study contributes to the body of literature by concluding that quality assurance is a system of interconnectedness guided by policies and informed by the nature of the relationships among relevant role-players. From an institutional perspective the study further concludes that institutions do not exist in isolation, but that they must build strong relations with external authorities in the assurance of the quality of their programmes. The underpinning approach used to inform the conceptual focus of the study were the roles and the role congruity at national policy and implementation levels. The conceptual framing within the various roles was confirmed in the research findings as participants noted the tensions that exist between the roles of different role-players in the implementation of these policies, and that functions, processes and procedures do not translate into effective policy implementation at institutional level. These internal tensions have a direct influence on how the institution engages and relates with external agencies, in particular the professional body.

The research findings confirmed that congruity exists at policy level and that there is alignment of policies of the institution and national policies of the CHE, but some misalignment exists between the CHE and professional bodies in general. This misalignment is largely contributed to lack of policy clarity on roles of professional bodies, more particularly their role in the accreditation of programmes at a national level.

5.3   SUMMATIVE OBSERVATIONS

Using a qualitative approach grounded within an interpretative, phenomenological paradigm, the study explored the experiences and perceptions of nine participants:

seven within University X and two external to the institution, of which one was from the national quality council, the CHE, and one was from the professional body, SACSSP. Participants were purposively selected in view of their background and experience in QA and their involvement in national reviews, in particular the review of the BSW programme. The data collection also included, as the first phase, document analysis with institutional policies and national policies as document sources, inclusive of reports on the review outcomes of the BSW programme. The objectives of the study and how they were met are outlined below in the form of observations and findings of the study. Recommendations are also presented as a summation in relation to each research objective.

5.3.1 Objective 1: To determine the range and nature of institutional policies on quality assurance with regards to their alignment to national policy and the CHE's Framework for Programme Accreditation

The main research question was how one South African university through its internal quality instruments interacts and responds to the external quality assurance requirements of the CHE and the professional body concerned. The study sought to examine the relations between internal institutional and external quality assurance, what the nature of the interaction is and the mechanics that drive these processes. Document analysis was applied as Phase one of the data collection process and its aim was to address objective one of the research question.

The national Acts and in particular the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 and Education White Paper 3, A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, 1997 foregrounded the exploration and analysis at policy levels together with the NQF Act 67 of 2008, the White Paper for Post-school Education and Training (RSA DHET, 2014), the Social Services Professions Act of 1978 as amended and Social Work Act, 1978 as amended. In addition, the CHE policies, frameworks, reports and institutional policies of University X were analysed to understand the nature and range of policies that deal with QA, mainly focusing on programmes and the accreditation aspect of programmes.

The observations from the policy analysis and the individual interviews of the study met the requirements of objective one by identifying the range and nature of the policies of University X and confirming the presence of congruency and alignment of these policies to external national policies.

These findings are consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two that highlighted the existence of policy tensions in quality assurance at international, national and institutional levels. Policy gaps were identified in terms of role clarification of the CHE vìs-a-vìs the professional bodies, and the scope in terms of functions of the professional bodies was also not delineated. The incoherence at policy level in terms of these gaps confirmed the blurred relationships between the HEQC and the professional body, and how they interact with institutions. Internal QA policies of University X seek to align to external policies, but it was found that the effectiveness in practice in the policy implementation phase was not optimal and hindered the effective application of policy.

5.3.2   Objective 2: To critically assess where and how the role-players involved in internal and external quality assurance interact in terms of policy, procedures and implementation.

The findings of the study met the requirements of objective two in that they identified that role-players involved in QA interact at policy implementation levels through procedures and processes of QA. The findings further revealed the nature of the interactions and showed that QA and programme accreditation at University X are observed as compliance driven processes, and that institutional role-players were primarily focused on complying with the technical requirements of the process. It was further identified that at University X there is a strong culture of compliance when dealing with programme accreditation matters, that QA is being dealt with as a compliance instrument and is not seen as an academic matter.

In terms of the QA operations of the institution the findings identified that QA functions are carried out in silos and are fragmented at policy implementation levels. The

findings further identified that the procedures and practice do not always follow on from policy. The institutional management and college management affirmed this, and further identified that the fragmentation of QA processes prohibits the opportunities of collaboration among the various support departments and academic departments. The professional and administrative staff supported this view and further highlighted that functions are not aligned, and that functionality of the processes depends largely on relations among stakeholders; however, internally the relations and coordination are not optimal. The CHE suggested that if institutions in general are to achieve a coordinated approach to quality assurance they must inculcate a quality culture and drive quality assurance internally with its functions and procedures as informed by their contexts. In addition, the operationalisation of the policies should be multi-layered across the various structures and the role-players to build relationships at each layer, and the intersections must be identified, and roles clarified at those intersections.

All categories of research participants agreed that the relationships with professional bodies at an institutional level are critical. The college management category firmly agreed that the role of SACSSP in the academic activities of Social Work is very important, but that the professional bodies did not seem to follow protocol when they engaged with the institution. All categories further highlighted that a need exists for better coordination and communication with professional bodies across the range of professional degrees offered by University X, as the challenge of coordination and communication was not limited to the SACSSP. They further agreed that tensions exist in terms of the structural roles within the institution as there was a lack of agreement on whether colleges should be responsible for liaison with professional bodies directly or whether this was the domain of support departments who deal with QA.

The professional and administrative staff category suggested that guidelines were required on the most effective ways of facilitating engagement with professional bodies as tensions on accountability arise when things go wrong. The CHE's accreditation model acknowledges that certain professional programmes have to meet the licensing and professional and work-based requirements of statutory councils or professional bodies and affirmed in its policy documents that the HEQC will enter into cooperation agreements with these bodies.

The CHE policies further identified that these agreements will be regulated by means of MoU's setting out the terms of the cooperation, and that the HEQC will ensure that its partnership and delegation agreements will allow it to discharge its own legal obligations for programme quality. In practice, though, both the CHE and SACSSP confirmed that they do not have an agreement between them. The CHE further confirmed that only one professional body has a signed MOU with the CHE, namely the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA). A desktop search on the CHE's website also could not locate any other MOU signed with any other professional body. This finding points to a policy gap in that the procedures or implementation do not always follow the policy intents.

5.3.3 Objective 3: To evaluate the impact as experienced by the institution of the accreditation and de-accreditation of the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) in terms of the national review process of the CHE and HEQC outcomes.

The findings of the study met the requirements of objective three and identified consensus among institutional participants that the de-accreditation of the BSW programme was unexpected. The academic sector of the institution, i.e. the academic department and college management stressed that the de-accreditation of the BSW was a major shock to the institution as a whole and resulted in a huge fallout within the academic department and college management. All categories, internal and external, agreed that the de-accreditation of the BSW had a negative effect on the academic staff, but college management interventions assisted in rebuilding the environment, and this assisted in obtaining a cohesive structure in taking the department forward.

There were a number of lessons learned which were identified by the academic department and college management, for example, that during the preparatory phase for the National Review the relations within the college should be improved. The professional and administrative category identified that there needs to be better coordination and role clarification, and their involvement must be considered from the

onset and not only be considered during the compilation of the self-evaluation report (SER). The interactions must involve all key roles within the institution and not only be limited the college and academic department, especially where the interaction involve the external stakeholders, the CHE and the professional body.

The CHE and SACSSP recognised that there is a need for capacity development and that many higher education institutions seemed to be lacking internal competencies for QA or are not adequately capacitated to deal with QA matters. In the case of University X this might at least partly be attributed to the size of the institution.

5.3.4 Objective 4: To develop a relationship management framework to support quality assurance processes within the institution

The findings of the study did not entirely meet the requirements of objective four as not all the indicators that could fully identify the factors that can better inform a relationship management framework were explored. This could be attributed to the limited scope of the study where the focus was in relation to only one professional body, SACSSP.

At policy level the observations confirm that internal institutional mechanisms should be developed and designed by the institution, and that the HEQC's responsibility is to establish an external system of programme accreditation that can validate institutional information on the effectiveness of arrangements for ensuring the quality of academic programmes. The observation that the policies of University of X and the CHE are aligned provides for a strong relationship at policy level and for the recognition of both role-players, and acknowledges that the interaction is reciprocal, but can be improved at implementation levels.

The relationship between the institution and SACSSP in terms of the findings seems stable, with the academic department recognising the value of such a relationship. The finding further identifies that all categories of research participants within the institution agree that professional bodies are critical and that the relationships with them could be improved.

Ansah, Swanzy and Nudzor (2017) assert that a quality assurance framework of a higher education institution ought to cover all areas of quality assurance, i.e. all the processes, procedures, and activities within an institution. These include curriculum design, teaching and learning, governance systems, leadership and management functions, professional development of staff, student assessment, staff recruitment, student admissions, student support services, and partnership and cooperation in addition to other operational areas and activities of the institution in order to sufficiently guarantee and recognise stakeholders' expectations of quality. This research study only focused on particular areas of quality assurance and not all role-players and stakeholders which limits the full achievement of this objective to develop a comprehensive relationship management framework.

Further, the study only focused on one particular professional body and it could not adequately address the need for a relationship management framework and comprehensively provide for an institutional framework inclusive of a number of the professional bodies as the level of engagements with the different professional bodies is varied.

5.3.5   Directions for future research

The study contributes to the body of knowledge in quality assurance and provides an institutional lens on how programme accreditation and de-accreditation impact on institutions. Whilst deliberating on the valuable findings from this study, there are several opportunities for future research to continue exploring the relationships, interaction and individual factors impeding the optimal recognition of various actors in quality assurance and the roles they play in assisting institutions to be favourably positioned to respond to external demands of quality assurance at various levels of policy and implementation.

5.4   RECOMMENDATIONS

Ansah, Swanzy and Nudzor (2017) identify that QA systems (internal or external) are balanced only when all the key components receive equal attention, otherwise the system could become unstable as a result of less attention to one of the key components. The research findings do confirm that less attention is given to the professional body, while all participants within the institution and externally agree that the professional body is critical in QA and that the relationships must be enhanced and strengthened to give more recognition to the role of the professional body.

The findings of the study support the diagram representation depicted below in Figure 5.1, in terms of the current relationship that exists within University X with the external role-players, the CHE and SACSSP.
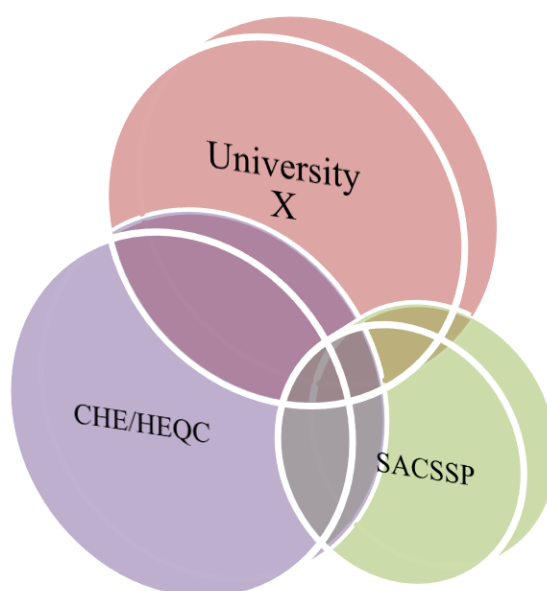
Figure 5.1: Relationship Depiction in terms of Roles and Recognition.

Source: Adapted from Ansah, Swanzy & Nudzor (2017)

The results of the study recommend regular and appropriate balancing of the focus in terms of roles and functions and relationships in QA and giving optimum attention to all key role players, in particular the professional bodies. At policy level the roles, relations and functions need to be clarified to obviate the possible blurring of roles with the external environments of QA.

Quality in Higher Education has mainly focused on processes of quality assurance and associated activities but very few studies have directly explored the relationships between these functions, processes even roles and role-players. This study attempted to explore relationships of the various actors and their functions as derived from QA policies and the interaction of their roles at practice and policy implementation levels.

The findings further identified some recommendations for the institution in that capacity within the institution needs to be developed and that in the case of University X, the size of the institution makes it critical that optimum levels of capacity for QA must maintained; this view was also stressed by the institutional management category.

The findings of the study do confirm that indeed external QA is still going through reforms and characterised by unequal relationships as Ansah, Swanzy and Nudzor, (2017) terms it 'work-in-progress'.

The question of how the two concepts of internal and external quality assurance are related and interact has important implications on how institutions and role players are treated in terms of respect and trust. How institutional internal QA activities are afforded credence and recognition within the broader context of quality assurance remains inadequately explored and further studies will assist in addressing the relationship question in QA.

5.5   LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A good researcher acknowledges that all research studies will have inherent weaknesses and these limitations could cast doubt on the results and conclusions of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Researcher bias could limit a qualitative phenomenological study if the researcher acts as the primary instrument without triangulating the methods of data collection and data analysis (Chenail, 2011). Limitations in the study could arise from the fact that the researcher was a senior member of staff at the University X, and that this could impact the observations and analysis and interpretation of the results. To enhance the credibility of the study and

ensure that the study correctly interpreted and represented the participants' original views, the researcher utilised the services of a third party, a senior researcher, to act as a co-data collector.

The intent of the researcher was to gather data regarding the experiences and perspectives about the nature and interactions with respect to internal quality assurance and external quality assurance. The interest of the researcher was in the depth of understanding of the policies that guide quality assurance at a national level and within the institution, rather than generalisation of the findings. The study was conducted with nine participants in one higher education institution in South Africa, and whilst the findings of the current qualitative study may not be transferable to other situations or institutional cases as the findings are informed by context, the findings of the study do allow for future qualitative exploration. The study relied heavily on policies and the participants' positions, background and experiences, a virtue that is subjective and hence in certain situations may have influenced their answers (Chenail, 2011).

Delimitations refer to what the researcher did not intend to do in the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). These factors both narrow the scope of the study and define the research boundaries as noted by Cochran-Smith and Donnell (2006). The current study was confined to one institution in terms of its relation to external quality assurance role-players, the CHE and the professional body, SACSSP. The study was further restricted to categories of participants who all had direct experience with the phenomenon being studied. The sample participants size was typical of a qualitative phenomenological study.

5.6   CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The study outcomes in relation to the research questions concluded that due to the interactions and relations of internal and external quality assurance, most attention is paid to the relationship between the institution and the CHE and less recognition is given to the role and functions of the professional body, SACSSP.

The findings further identified some recommendations for the institution in that capacity within the institution needs to be developed and that in the case of University

X, the size of the institution makes critical that optimum levels of capacities must maintained; this view was also stressed by the institutional management category.

Balance is a necessary condition for any resilient quality assurance system in higher education because operationalisation of quality assurance requires processes and procedures that are put in place by institutions to guarantee and enact stakeholders' expectations of quality.

In order to safeguard the institutional standards of quality, higher education institutions should recognise the value in defining quality for themselves as informed by their own context, as quality assurance needs to include and acknowledge localised differences. At the same time higher education institutions should appreciate the national and international standards for quality assurance in higher education to enable comparability of programme outcomes

The study highlighted the inadequate involvement of professional bodies in quality assurance which is attributable to insufficient recognition at policy level of the importance of this role-player and their role in various processes of quality assurance, such as standards development and the attainment of graduate attributes for professional practice. Institutions should strategically locate the value of professional bodies in their policies, and their instruments should be oriented to build strong relationships with all its stakeholders. Institutions need to apply the principle of equal recognition of various role-players in quality assurance both at policy and implementation levels to ensure that the underrepresentation of professional bodies is addressed. The equal recognition of all stakeholders and role-players will stabilise the quality assurance instruments of institutions for enhanced quality provision of their programmes.

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APPENDIX A: NOTICE OF APPROVAL

NOTICE OF APPROVAL   29 August 2018

REC Humanities New Application Form Project number: 6625

Project Title: Interaction between internal and external quality assurance: An institutional case study

Dear Miss Sefora Mkuzangwe

Please note the following for your approved submission:

Ethics approval period:

27 July 2018   26 July 2021

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: Humanities, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.

Please use your SU project number **(6625)** on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

FOR CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

Please note that a progress report should be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee: Humanities before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary)

Included Documents:

Research Protocol/Proposal	Research Proposal_ VF_SA Mkuzangwe_13 Oct 17_12 March 18	13/03/2018	Final
Data collection tool	Interview Guide_19 March 2018_V1	19/03/2018	V1
Informed Consent Form	SU_INFORMED CONSENT_SA Mkuzangwe_17 Aug 2018	20/08/2018	V2

If you have any questions or n   ase contact the   C office at cgraham@sun.ac.za.

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graha

REC Coord   ato   esearch Ethi   Committee: anities)

Natio   arch Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number: REC-050411-032.
The Research Ethics Committee: Humaniti complies with the SA National Health Act No.61 2003 as it pertains to health research. In addition, this committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research established by the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the Department of Health Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes (2nd Ed.) 2015. Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

Page 1 of 2

Your REC Humanities New Application Form submitted on **20 August 2018** was reviewed and approved by the REC: Humanities.

Protocol approval date (Humanities)   **Protocol expiration date (Humanities)**

Document Type	File Name		Date	Version

Investigator Responsibilities

Protection of Human Research Participants

Some of the general responsibilities investigators have when conducting research involving human participants are listed below:

1.Conducting the Research. You are responsible for making sure that the research is conducted according to the REC approved research protocol. You are also responsible for the actions of all your co-investigators and research staff involved with this research. You must also ensure that the research is conducted within the standards of your field of research.

2.Participant Enrollment. You may not recruit or enroll participants prior to the REC approval date or after the expiration date of REC approval. All recruitment materials for any form of media must be approved by the REC prior to their use.

3.Informed Consent. You are responsible for obtaining and documenting effective informed consent using **only** the REC-approved consent documents/process, and for ensuring that no human participants are involved in research prior to obtaining their informed consent. Please give all participants copies of the signed informed consent documents. Keep the originals in your secured research files for at least five (5) years.

4.Continuing Review. The REC must review and approve all REC-approved research proposals at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk but not less than once per year. There is **no grace period.** Prior to the date on which the REC approval of the research expires, **it is your responsibility to submit the progress report in a timely fashion to ensure a lapse in REC approval does not occur.** If REC approval of your research lapses, you must stop new participant enrollment, and contact the REC office immediately.

5.Amendments and Changes. If you wish to amend or change any aspect of your research (such as research design, interventions or procedures, participant population, informed consent document, instruments, surveys or recruiting material), you must submit the amendment to the REC for review using the current Amendment Form. You **may not initiate** any amendments or changes to your research without first obtaining written REC review and approval. The **only exception** is when it is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants and the REC should be immediately informed of this necessity.

6.Adverse or Unanticipated Events. Any serious adverse events, participant complaints, and all unanticipated problems that involve risks to participants or others, as well as any research related injuries, occurring at this institution or at other performance sites must be reported to Malene Fouche within **five (5) days** of discovery of the incident. You must also report any instances of serious or continuing problems, or non-compliance with the RECs requirements for protecting human research participants. The only exception to this policy is that the death of a research participant must be reported in accordance with the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee Standard Operating Procedures. All reportable events should be submitted to the REC using the Serious Adverse Event Report Form.

7.Research Record Keeping. You must keep the following research related records, at a minimum, in a secure location for a minimum of five years: the REC approved research proposal and all amendments; all informed consent documents; recruiting materials; continuing review reports; adverse or unanticipated events; and all correspondence from the REC

8.Provision of Counselling or emergency support. When a dedicated counsellor or psychologist provides support to a participant without prior REC review and approval, to the extent permitted by law, such activities will not be recognised as research nor the data used in support of research. Such cases should be indicated in the progress report or final report.

9.Final reports. When you have completed (no further ⟨enrollment, interactions or interven⟩ons) or stopped work on your research, you must submit a Final Report to the REC.

10.On-Site Evaluations, Inspections, or Audits. If you ⟨are⟩ notified that your research ⟨will be inspect⟩ed or audited by the sponsor or any other external agency or any internal group, you must inform the REC immediately of the ⟨planned⟩ ding audit/evaluati⟨on⟩

0 4 SEP 2018

APPENDIX B: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

U N I S A |

UNISA RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE (URERC)

24 April 2019

Dear Ms. Sefora Alice Mkuzangwe

_____

Researcher(s): Ms. Sefora Alice Mkuzangwe

Centre for Higher and Adult Education

University of Stellenbosch

amkuzangwe@gmail.com; 012 429-2320, 079 264 2685

Supervisor: Prof M. Fourie-Malherbe; mfourie@sun.ac.za, 021 808 3908, 083 645

4471 **Interaction between internal and external quality assurance: An
institutional case**

study

Qualification: M. Phil in Higher Education

_____

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa Research
Ethics Review Committee (URERC) for the above mentioned research. Ethics
approval is granted for three **(3) years; 18 April 2019 to 17 April 2022.**

NHREC Registration #: (if applicable)

ERC Reference #: 2018_URERC_009_RS

Name: Ms. Sefora Alice Mkuzangwe
Student #: N/A
Staff #: 90176219

Decision: Ethics Approval from 18 April 2019 to 17 April 2022

*The **medium risk application was reviewed by URERC** on 18 April 2019 in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and

   principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.

2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is

   relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the URERC.

3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.

4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of

Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.

6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.

7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **(17 April 2022).** Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

*The reference number **2018_URERC_009_RS** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

_____

Yours sincerely,

pp. Dr. Retha Visagie: Deputy Chairperson: URERC

E-mail : visagrg@unisa.ac.za ; Tel : (012) 429-2478

_____

Prof Les Labuschagne : Chairperson : URERC
E-mail : llabus@unisa.ac.za ; Tel : 012 429-6368

URERC 25.04.17 - Decision template (V2) - Approve

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

_____

Research Project Title: INTERACTION BETWEEN INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL
QUALITY ASSURANCE: AN INSTITUTIONAL CASE STUDY
Researcher Name: Alice Mkuzangwe

_____

The interview guide has been developed as part of a study on quality assurance at the
University of South Africa (Unisa). The study aims to investigate the institutional
responses to an increasingly challenging external quality monitoring environment in a
turbulent and complex organisational landscape. The interaction between the internal
and external quality assurance environments will also be investigated, and the
evaluation of how the institution positions itself to the possible pressures that are
brought about by these environments.
Interviews will be conducted at Unisa, at the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and
the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP). Participants have
been selected from the three institutions and include Management of the Unisa,
academic staff, senior and middle management members of the College of Human
Sciences, Professional and administrative staff.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you please tell me your position and a little bit of background and your role
   in quality assurance in your institution and describe some issues of quality
   assurance, programme accreditation that are pertinent in your environment?

2. Briefly explain how in your environment does internal institutional quality
   interact with external quality authorities in terms of programmes and
   programme accreditation?

3. What are the current policy and legislative responses to quality assurance in
   higher education you are familiar with and how they impact your environment,
   institution or department?

4. Do you think the current internal institutional policies assurance are adequate? Do they address the interactions between internal quality and external quality assurance, are the policies aligned, coherent and facilitate a positive pathway for implementation?

5. In your view what can be done from a policy perspective to improve the response to quality assurance in programme accreditation, institutional policy and structural responsiveness to facilitate policy implementation.

6. Have you ever participated in national reviews or were what was your role in the programme review of the Bachelor of Social Work?

7. In your observations how was the interaction between internal institutional staff with external officials from the CHE and SACSSP?

8. In your view Who are the key actors in programme accreditation s, programme reviews and how do these roles interact? What roles do you see as most pertinent for programme quality and why? Do national programme reviews result with improvement in programmes?

9. What competing interests, roles or challenges hinder or facilitate the ability of positive accreditation and re-accreditation outcomes? How has these roles impact on the BSW review?

10. What resources or support would you find useful for effectively implementing existing policies on quality assurance and programme accreditation? Are there any gaps, tensions or incoherence in quality processes and implementation in the institution?

11. Briefly share the de-accreditation outcomes of the BSW on the institution what would you take as value adds in the quality of the programme, were you satisfied with some of the suggestion for programme improvements and quality enhancements identified? If yes, please elaborate and identify them?

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Ethics clearance reference number: CUR-2018-6625

Research permission reference number: CUR-2018-6625

08 March 2019

TITLE: INTERACTION BETWEEN INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE: AN INSTITUTIONAL CASE STUDY

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Alice Mkuzangwe and I am doing research with Prof M Fourie-Malherbe, a Professor in the Department of Curriculum Studies, Centre for Higher Education studies towards a degree title MPhil in Higher Education at the University of Stellenbosch. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled Interaction between internal and external quality assurance: An institutional case study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is expected to collect important information that could assist in identifying and analysing how Unisa interacts and responds through its internal quality

instruments to the external quality assurance requirements that are obligatory and set by external monitoring and assurance agencies. The study will assess how the institutional positioning of its internal quality systems meet the requirements for the accreditation of programmes as a form of quality assurance as prescribed by the Council of Higher Education (CHE) through its permanent quality committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and professional bodies within the South African context. Gaskell and Mills (2014) highlight that distance education institutions often have to overcome negative perceptions about the overall quality of their programmes and qualifications and the challenges often cited is undermining the credibility and effectiveness of open, distance and e-learning (ODeL), the quality of teaching, learning and quality assurance processes; outcomes; and the perceptions of students, staff and employers.

The research study aims to analyse how Unisa as an ODeL institutional case relates and responds to the demands of external quality assurance requirements and assess the relations, anxieties that might be imposed by external monitoring processes of the HEQC and the professional body such as the SACSSP. The study adds value to the current narrative that sees external authorities as watchdog: imposing control and compliance to institutions. The study will assist to assess how the Unisa positions its internal quality systems to meet the requirements for the accreditation of its programme in a harmonized manner that is aligned to external regulation and policy and thus circumventing the much dreaded outcomes of de-accreditation of programmes.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

The identified participants were selected as possible participants in this study because of their expertise and knowledge of quality assurance and programme accreditation processes. Further to their expertise, the content knowledge of the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and the national review processes of the CHE were also identified together with their familiarity on institutional approval and management structures for academic programmes.

Participants were identified through institutional committees and in their participation in various institutional structures in terms of varied capacities and involvement in programme development, accreditation of new programmes and approvals. Further to the internal institutional participants, external participants were identified through their direct involvement with the approval and accreditation processes programmes in particular the BSW.

A total of seventeen (17) participants have been identified to participate in the study.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

Describe the participant's actual role in the study.

The study involves a semi-structured interview and the interview will include questions such as:

a. Briefly describe some issues of quality assurance, programme accreditation that are pertinent in your environment

b. In your view what are the issues that are very prevalent and are the most common in internal and external quality assurance?

c. Briefly explain how in your environment does internal institutional quality interact with external quality authorities in terms of programmes and programme accreditation

d. What are the current policy and legislative responses to quality assurance in higher education, are you familiar with how they impact your environment, institution or department?

The Interviews will be conducted by a 3rd Party, Prof J Maritz at Unisa, at the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) and will be an hour (one) long.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation.   If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to

keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This study is expected to collect important information that could assist in identifying and analysing how Unisa interacts and responds through its internal quality instruments to the external quality assurance requirements that are obligatory and set by external monitoring and assurance agencies. The study will assess how the institutional positioning of its internal quality systems meet the requirements for the accreditation of programmes as a form of quality assurance as prescribed by the Council of Higher Education (CHE) through its permanent quality committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and professional bodies within the South African context. Gaskell and Mills (2014) highlight that distance education institutions often have to overcome negative perceptions about the overall quality of their programmes and qualifications and the challenges often cited is undermining the credibility and effectiveness of open, distance and e-learning (ODeL), the quality of teaching, learning and quality assurance processes; outcomes; and the perceptions of students, staff and employers.

ARE THEIR ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

There are risks associated with the study and the study is classified as a medium risk due to the possible sensitive information in relating to academic programmes and the relationships that exist across institutional structures the management of quality.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research. No one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers

will be given a code number and segregated into a category and you will be referred to in this way in the data and report.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of hiding each participants name. The data analysis process will organise the data in a coherent manner to provide structure and comparison of responses, where the data will be partitioned into word or phrase variables and differentiated systematically into ordered explanatory matrices. A coding process for data analysis will be followed to identify the critical links between the data collected and its explanatory meaning without any identification of the names of the participants. The identity of the participants will be protected at all times during the reporting and all the participants responses will be segregated in four main categories of Management, College Management, Academics, professional and administrative staff.

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet at Unisa, Pretoria for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable.

After five years, the hard copies will be shredded, and electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software once the data has been analysed and coded after safe keeping as prescribe by the Unisa policy.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet at Unisa, Pretoria for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable.

After five years, the hard copies will be shredded, and electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software once the data has been analysed and coded after safe keeping as prescribe by the Unisa policy.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

No cost will be incurred by participating in this research nor any payment will be made to research participants.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Stellenbosch University REC and by the Unisa Research Ethics Review Committee (URERC) and RPSC permission was has been obtained. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Alice Mkuzangwe on 012 429 2320 or via email at amkuzangwe@gmail.com The findings are accessible for 5 years. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact the principal researcher Alice Mkuzangwe 012 429 2320 or via email at amkuzangwe@gmail.com or the Supervisor; Prof M Fourie-Malherbe, Tel: 021 808 3908 and email: mfourie@sun.ac.za.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact the Supervisor, Prof M Fourie-Malherbe, Tel: 021 808 3908 and email: mfourie@sun.ac.za.

Ethical complaints may also be directed to Unisa context to the Deputy Chairperson of URERC Dr. RG Visagie, Visagrg@unisa.ac.za; 012 429 2478.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.

SA Mkuzangwe

Sefora Alice Mkuzangwe.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the interview for data collection purposes.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname…………………………………………… (please print)

Participant Signature…………………………………………….. Date…………………

Researcher's Name & Surname…………………………………………… (please print)

Researcher's signature…………………………………………..

Date…………………

APPENDIX E: LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Academic and manuscript Editing Services.

Annexure

To Whom It May Concern:
Date: 28/10/2019

Re: **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN HIGHER EDUCATION** Thesis Title:
INTERACTION BETWEEN INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE: AN INSTITUTIONAL CASE STUDY

Client name: Alice Sefora Mkuzangwe

This serves to confirm that the above identified -dissertation was edited and finalised by feraPHASE Academic and manuscript Editing services for language and format adherence in line with the Harvard (version 2.1) manuscript formatting requirements. This was in preparation for submission in accordance with the requirements for the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN HIGHER EDUCATION** in the Department of Curriculum Studies, Centre for Higher Education at Stellenbosch University.

Dr Sunil Sagoo
Director "feraPhase Academic and manuscript editing services.