

The HEQC audit has come and gone: where do we go now?

The NWU is on the right track in terms of quality assurance. This is clear from the audit report by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) that the University received in May 2010. This report resulted from the institutional audit in March last year.

In the report, the HEQC highlighted seven aspects as being commendable, including the practice of programme evaluation, sound financial management, research support and the use of study guides.

Clear recommendations were also made with regard to aspects or gaps requiring attention. These aspects include transforming the staff profile across the NWU, upgrading the libraries, developing

staff in terms of assessment, establishing policies for postgraduate studies, and improving research ethics in all disciplines.

The gaps that were identified largely correspond with the so-called gap register which was kept up to date by the project team during the self-evaluation process. The gaps which have already been identified are being addressed very seriously and therefore provision is already being made for this in the NWU's 2010-2012 Institutional Plan.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

The NWU now has the opportunity to make a complete analysis of the HEQC audit report and to compile an appropriate improvement plan. This improvement plan should be submitted to the HEQC by October/November 2010.

The implementation of the improvement plan will be divided into various projects and managed in cooperation with the Project Office. After three years, a complete report should be made to the HEQC on the improvement or total elimination of gaps.

After this report, the NWU will start preparing for the next HEQC audit. Remember, the objective of the HEQC audit is, among others, to support the NWU to establish and sustain a culture of ongoing quality improvement.

Enjoy the journey along with the Institutional Project and the Quality Office...

– **Dr Jannie Jacobsz, Institutional Director: Quality Office**



NWU personnel that were interviewed about quality management at the NWU during the audit in March 2009, are from left Dr Ngoato Takalo, Executive Director: Teaching-Learning and Vice-Principal, Prof Amanda Lourens, currently Vice-Rector: Research, Potchefstroom Campus, Prof Susan Coetzee-Van Rooy, currently Research Leader, Faculty of Human Sciences, Vaal Triangle Campus, Prof Daan van Wyk, former Vice-Rector: Planning and Quality, Potchefstroom Campus, Mr Attie Juyn, Director: Institutional Information Technology, Dr Jannie Jacobsz, Institutional Director: Quality Office, Prof Linda du Plessis, Vice-Rector: Academic, Quality and Planning, Vaal Triangle Campus, and Prof Sevid Mashego, Vice-Rector, Quality and Planning, Mafikeng Campus.

Support Services inspire others

Ground-breaking work. An inspiration. These are the words used to describe the activities and positive evaluation of two support units at the NWU.

These units, the Institutional Language Directorate and Statistical Consultation Service on the Potchefstroom Campus, were the first two NWU support units to undergo the process of internal self-evaluation followed by external peer evaluation in 2009.

This was ground-breaking work. Besides, the positive reports that were received were a great inspiration for process improvement and implementation in the relevant departments, and probably also inspired other support units.

– Prof Marlene Verhoef: Management Advisor, Office of the Vice-Chancellor
– Dr Suria Ellis, Head: Statistical Consultation Service, Potchefstroom Campus

With regard to the evaluation report of the external panel, the two units responded as follows:

The most positive comment in the report

Language Directorate: The NWU's language strategy for functional multilingualism is regarded as a national and international benchmark and serves as standard for all educational institutions that pursue a policy of multilingualism.

Statistical Consultation Service: The panel commended the unit for the quality of its service and for its contribution towards the research output of the NWU.

The biggest challenges for the unit

Language Directorate: Internally, to create a greater sense of ownership of the NWU's multilingual language policy in all

internal stakeholders. Externally, it is to establish bigger networks and cooperation agreements with other universities in South Africa and in Africa with regard to the management and advancement of multilingualism.

Statistical Consultation Service: To find or train staff with the right qualifications and experience in order to build capacity and key personnel.

The most important lesson that the unit has learnt from the whole process

Language Directorate: It was a valuable experience, and an opportunity to take a critical look at our strategies and processes.

Statistical Consultation Service: We can learn from similar units at other universities how they deal with issues such as co-authorship of publications.



One of the community projects that the NWU is involved in, aims to improve the quality of teaching in early childhood development.

Community engagement at the NWU aligns well with the institution's entrepreneurial approach to activities and its mission to use its knowledge base productively in relevant community service projects.

These were the findings after the HEQC evaluated the NWU's idea of community engagement, how it is practised across the institution and how the quality of this activity is assured.

The NWU puts its money where its mouth is

WELL DONE

In their report, panel members expressed their appreciation for several community engagement endeavours. They were for instance impressed with the community service projects they saw during their site visits, such as the Science Centre on the Potchefstroom Campus and the Animal Health Clinic at the Mafikeng Campus.

After interacting with the NWU's partners in these projects, the panel concluded that the cooperation and assistance received from the NWU is of a high quality and that there is potential to develop even more in this area.

TRY THIS

The recommendations that the panel made were generally positive and similar to that of other higher education institutions previously evaluated.

A general recommendation was for instance that the NWU develop an

overall strategy, plan and procedures to fully realise the potential of its view of community engagement.

The recommendations were subsequently included in, among others, the NWU's Institutional Plan and will be rolled out from 2010.

– Ms Beatrix Bouwman, Director: Community Engagement

DID YOU KNOW?

Areas in which the NWU is active in community service include programmes relating to HIV and AIDS, arts and culture management, agriculture and animal health, social work in family health, community law, science education, support for school-level education, entrepreneurship and enterprise development.



E stands for efficiency

The Department of Research Support received a commendation from the HEQC on their efficiency and effectiveness.

To a great extent, this commendation is owed to the Department developing and implementing initiatives to assist in the capacity building effort of the NWU during the two years before the HEQC audit in 2009.

To this end a competition for Most Productive Researcher of the year was instituted and a targeted emerging researcher development plan implemented.

COMPETITION TIME

In the Most Productive Researcher of the year competition, three awards are made available each year. These are for Most Productive Senior Researcher, Most Productive Junior Researcher and Most Productive Research Entity of the Year.

GIVING THEM WINGS

Another very successful initiative was the implementation of the targeted emerging researcher development plan. This is aimed at improving academic qualifications of permanently appointed staff members of the University.

For instance, funding is made available for lecture replacement support for up to six months to enable the candidates to write their theses. This money can also be used for editing, printing and binding of theses, for travelling or for spending time with a mentor who is an expert in the field.

Workshops are also held annually to further enhance the development of young researchers.

– Ms Hannekie Botha, Research Support

They enhance the **teaching-learning environment**

In their report, the HEQC commended the work of the Institutional Academic Development and Support Unit and the Academic Support Services on the campuses. They also expressed appreciation for – amongst others – the development of study guides and the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Award.

ASSISTING LECTURERS

One of the gaps identified by the HEQC was with regard to student assessment. Staff development in the area of assessment has intensified on all campuses in an effort to close this gap.

The Unit also continues to prepare new lecturers through the Institutional Course for New Lecturers, thereby introducing them to the philosophy of teaching and learning at the NWU.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS

In response to the HEQC's report, the Unit is also identifying the factors that influence the throughput rate at the

NWU. Once this has been done, current support systems for students – including Supplemental Instruction and reading laboratories – will be extended and new systems introduced.

ALIGNING PROGRAMMES

The NWU started a process of programme alignment in 2006 to ensure consistency of all academic programmes across the University.

In their report, the HEQC recommended that the University put the necessary mechanisms in place to ensure that this process is effectively used as an opportunity to review different approaches to curriculum transformation, the academic focus of the different campuses and the extent to which aligned programmes respond to the requirements of NWU graduates.

– Dr Muki Moeng, Institutional Director: Teaching-Learning

Seeing is believing!

If you were told that Management has awarded every staff member a merit bonus of R100 000, you will probably say: "That I must see to believe!" or "Show it to me black on white!".

By doing so, you would in essence touch on the subjects of records and evidence and this exactly what Records Management and Administration supplied during last year's HEQC Audit – records and evidence.

By gathering applicable documentation, they provided evidence of processes and activities described in the NWU's self-evaluation report.

A FILE PLAN THAT WORKS

The categories identified by the HEQC as areas for discussion in the self-evaluation report coincided largely with the business activities of the NWU on which the classification system or file plan of records of the NWU is based.

This confirmed the fact that a business activity classification of records was solidly based.

But once again it was a case of seeing is believing – the NWU's draft file plan had to be seen in action. Therefore the NWU decided to pilot the file plan for the HEQC audit of 2009. This subsequently led to the approval of the revised records management policy and file plan by Council in November 2009.

Therefore: if you are told that Management will pay merit bonuses of R100 000 to all staff members, it can only be believed if recorded properly. Oh, by the way, no record about the enticing R1000 000 merit bonuses exists, as it is only a rumour...

– Ms Amanda van der Merwe, Manager: Records Management and Administration

Quality Calendar 2010

Mafikeng Campus

- 9 April EPE* – Chemistry (subject-in-programme** – undergraduate and honours)
- 23-27 August Visit by the *South African Veterinary Council****
- Date unknown Visit by the *Health Professions Council of South Africa* – Psychology subject group***
- 23 September EPE – Mathematics (subject-in-programme – undergraduate and honours)
- 13 October EPE – BA *Peace Studies and International Relations* (undergraduate and honours)



Potchefstroom Campus

- 2-12 March Audit of School of Continuing Teacher Education
- 31 May South African accreditation of Actuarial Sciences***
- 20 August EPE – MA Forensic Social Work – Forensic Practice
- 12 September Follow-up visit by *South African Institute of Chartered Accountants****
- June and November Gathering for Curators of the Reformed Churches in South Africa****
- 2 November EPE – Master's in Business Administration



Vaal Triangle Campus

- 16 March EPE – History (subject-in-programme – undergraduate)
- 7 September EPE – Master's in Theology
- 12 September Follow-up visit by *South African Institute of Chartered Accountants****



Institutional Office

- May Final HEQC report received
- October Improvement plan of HEQC report submitted
- 2nd semester Evaluation of two support units on two of the three campuses



* EPE: External programme evaluation of academic programmes. ** A subject taken by students from different programmes. *** Evaluate NWU qualifications in terms of compliance with requirements of professional bodies. **** Evaluate student training.