

Support Services and Academic Programmes - The link

Over the years, planning and quality assurance have been developing independently of each other, but in practice the two processes are linked in all organisations, and the university industry is no exception.

Through sensible planning, all role players in the university can see exactly what lies ahead in the near future. Planning is important, among others to support meaningful decision making. In this manner, it is attempted to ensure that staff are committed to and have an understanding of the ownership of processes, products and/or services. However, before meaningful planning with a view to the future can be undertaken, every role player, whether a unit or an individual at the university, first has to determine the current status. To this end, quality assurance is of great importance.

There are various concepts which are closely associated with quality management and which are sometimes used synonymously, for example quality monitoring, quality control and quality assurance. The purpose of this article is not to discuss the real differences between these concepts, but rather to indicate how important it is to watch over quality and what the role of academics and support units is in the enhancement of meaningful planning.

An earlier article in this newsletter (February 2008) highlighted the necessity of academic programme evaluation and the difference that it makes. There it was indicated that the purposeful evaluation of processes and outputs yields certain results or data, and that these results or data are used for measuring the impact of the programme and, importantly, also for planning with a view to improvement.

It may be argued that teaching and research are part of the university's core business and that academics are therefore the key players in the university's activities, but support services are an equally indispensable role player in the process.

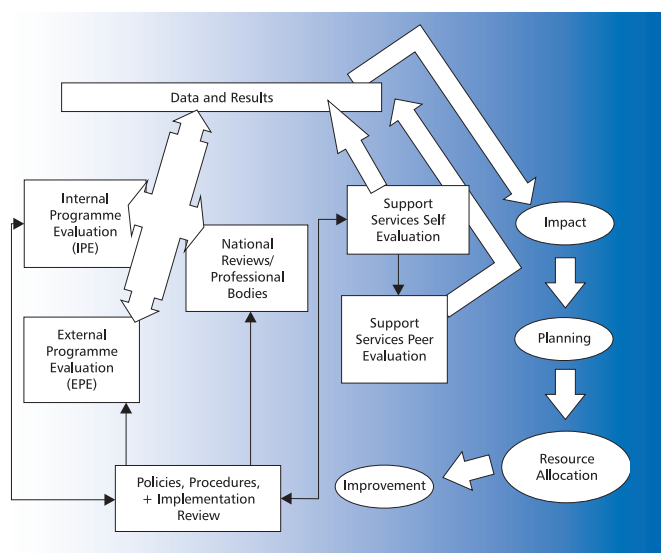
Support services comprise all services which are offered to ensure that the core business of the university complies with the expected minimum standards. Support services which are provided to support the core business include, among others, the following: Academic Development and Support Services; Student Systems; Academic Administration; Physical Infrastructure, Technical Services; Student Financial Support (Bursaries and Loans); Corporate Communication; Marketing; Residences and Catering; Human Resources; Language Directorate; Student Services (Deans of Students); Research Support; Statistical Consultation Service; International Office; Information Technology; Protection Services; Electronic Services; as well as many others.

The Quality Policy of NWU states, among others, that self-evaluation is a fundamental component of the quality assurance system of NWU. Role players in the core business, like academic programme owners, must therefore subject their programmes to internal programme evaluation from time to time. This may be followed up by an external programme evaluation or a national overview by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) or a professional body (see diagram). During such evaluations, the relevant policies and procedures are scrutinised and critically evaluated. Most academics are probably already familiar with this process, because a number of academic programmes have already gone through an evaluation. However, most support services have not yet been subjected to evaluation.

A number of support services are currently documenting the processes for which they are responsible. This documenting is done in quality manuals, in which the quality assurance is also indicated. As explained earlier, these processes yield a product, a service or both. In most instances, products or certain services are offered to academics working in the core business – for this reason, the activities in which support services are involved must also be subjected to an evaluation process. The results of this evaluation must primarily be used to determine the impact of the activities, followed by purposeful planning steps with a view to improvement.

The self-evaluations of support services yield certain data and results, just as is the case with academic programmes. To link the academia and support units, it must be determined whether the data and results are compatible. To illustrate this, the following practical examples are given:

On campus A, it was found that 4 academic programmes in faculty Z are understaffed, do not have sufficient lecture venues and do not follow the correct assessment practices. The same scenario was found on campus B in faculty Y, and also in school U in faculty X on campus C. Although the identified shortcomings are managed by the programme owners, school directors, deans and vice-rectors, the results must be compared with data that was obtained from the relevant support units. This makes it possible to analyse the findings of the support unit's self-evaluation in terms of the support the human resource division is offering to fill vacancies. The evaluation of the planning process for appropriate lecture venues by the unit responsible for physical infrastructure can also be analysed in this manner; as can insufficient assessment practices. Processes



Continued on page 2

Ondersteuningsdienste en akademiese programme

Vervolg van bladsy 1

should therefore “communicate” with one another. Lecturers’ failure to practice appropriate assessment practices can possibly be ascribed to

a lack of competence, which must be addressed through training. In such a situation, it needs to be determined whether the relevant support unit or service is offering suitable assistance. This is indeed a complex and interrelated network of processes and sub-processes.

Each individual who is familiar with higher education in South Africa will agree that insufficient resources are probably the biggest challenge in the process of assuring quality.

Hence, it is only logical that resources should be allocated to the areas of greatest risk to NWU. If a request for resource allocation is not supported by a meaningful evaluation process, decision makers will find it extremely difficult to make sensible decisions when these requests are received.

Meaningful planning and resource allocation therefore depend on the self-evaluation data of both academic and support service units.

J Jacobsz

NWU Research Ethics

Research Ethics at the NWU is evaluated by nine sub-committees. During 2008 a total of 99 applications were reviewed. For the 2009 academic year, a total of 66 applications were already reviewed and this number will increase towards the end of the year.

As part of the quality improvement structure of the Institutional Department of Research Support, a workshop on Research Ethics, presented by Prof Minrie Greeff, was conducted on the Mafikeng Campus on 4 August 2009. Similar workshops were also conducted on the Potchefstroom Campus on 4 September 2009 and on the Vaal Triangle Campus on 7 September 2009.

The Ethics module is being tested on the Research Information Management System (Info-Ed) and training and workshops will proceed later in 2010. A new web-based ethics application form has been developed for the interim period, and is

currently undergoing testing to go into production by the end of September 2009.

A task group, tasked by the NWU Research Ethics Committee, will look into the development of a checklist for research committees when evaluating research proposals. The checklist, along with criteria to assist researchers to determine when a research proposal should be submitted,

will be available by the end of October 2009.

Enquiries about research ethics may be directed to Ms Marietjie Halgryn, 018 299 4852, Marietjie.Halgryn@nwu.ac.za. Information about research ethics is also available at <https://intranet.nwu.ac.za/opencms/export/intranet/html/en/in-im-rs/researchethics/index.html>

	2008	2009
African Unit for Transdisciplinary Health Research (AUTHeR)	46	27
Unit for Drug Research and Development	15	7
Unit for Environmental Sciences and Management	1	0
Teaching-Learning Organisations	36	27
Unit for Reformed Theology and the Development in South Africa	1	0
Workwell: Research Unit for Economic Sciences and Management	0	4
Mafikeng, Humand and Social Sciences	0	1
Vaal Triangle	0	1
Total	99	66

Table 1: Research Ethics Applications reviewed in 2008 and 2009

An analysis of the 2008 Publication Output

NWU has exceeded its annual target of 460 publication units for 2008. The total estimate of the 2008 Research Output amounts to 506.87 article equivalents (AEs). Journal articles comprised 92.93% (471.04 AEs), books 0.94% (4.78 AEs) and conference proceedings 6.13% (31.05 AEs).

NWU showed a staggering 45% increase in journal outputs, from 326.47 in 2005 to 471.04 in 2008. Furthermore, the mean article equivalent per author has declined, indicating an increase in the research publication participation and therefore a significantly broadening of our publication base. All three campuses showed a significant growth in terms of research publication output in 2008.

There has also been an increase in female author participation. In 2008, female researchers produced 35% of NWU’s article output. This is above the 2007 national average of 22%.

The national benchmark showed in 2007 that 10% of all output is produced by black authors (CREST Report1). NWU managed to increase participation by all races, so that 17% of the 2008

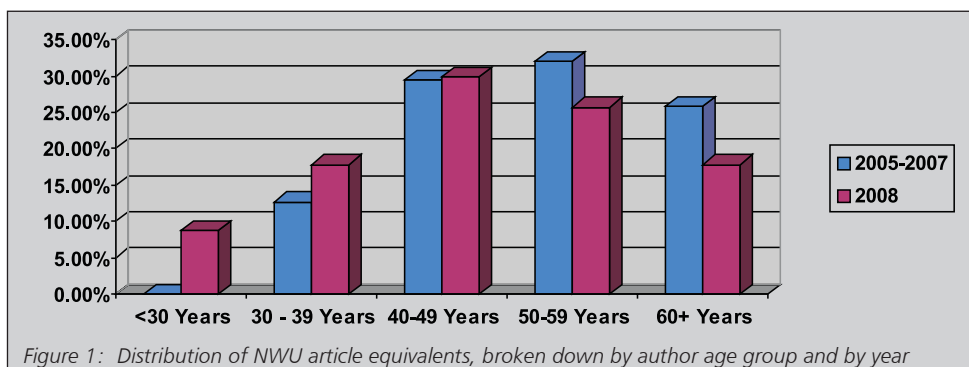


Figure 1: Distribution of NWU article equivalents, broken down by author age group and by year

article output has been published by Africans.

During 2008, the core researcher publication group at NWU shifted to the age group 40-49 years. Almost 30% of article equivalents in the university were produced by this group. More younger researchers under the age of 39 years published, which could contribute to the broadening of the base, but which can be an indication of an increase in post-graduate and post-doctoral student participation.

Although almost 52% of the journal output is published in international journals, the 2 most selected journals are both local journals and account for almost 10% of the total journal

output. More than 41% of the total journal output is published in the 25 most selected journals.

Collaboration between authors seems to be declining, since more than 31% of the journals contributions are single-authored. As indicated in the CREST Report1, NWU has to improve collaboration to increase international visibility. NWU’s research output is still dominated by the Social Sciences & Humanities fields, which accounts for 52% of the total article output.

Enquiries about research publication output could be directed to Ronel Pieterse, 018 299 4853, Ronel.Pieterse@nwu.ac.za.

Continued on page 3

An analysis of the 2008 Publication Output

Continued from page 2

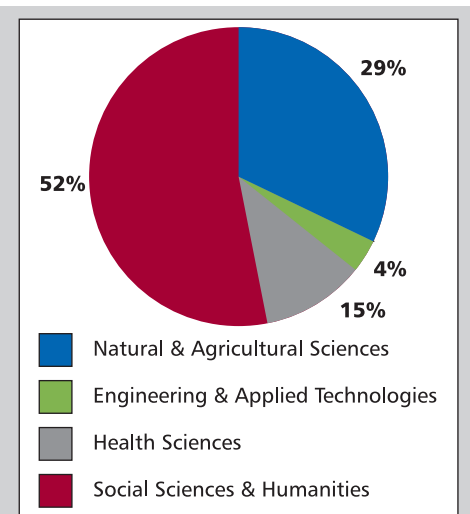


Figure 2: Broad scientific field distribution of NWU articles, 2008.

HEQC: Closing the gap

During the recent audit (March 2009) of the NWU by the HEQC, it was found that many of the interviewees were ignorant or poorly informed about Supplemental Instruction (SI) and the SI programme of the NWU, although the Institution was commended for its SI programme on the different Campuses. In an effort to close some of these gaps the Institutional owner of the SI programme shares a few facts about SI.

Overview

Supplemental Instruction (SI) is a peer facilitated academic support program that targets historically difficult courses so as to improve student performance and retention by offering regularly scheduled, out-of-class review sessions. Faculty and staff from over 1800 institutions from 30 countries have been trained to implement their own programs. The International Center for Supplemental Instruction has six National SI Centers in Australia, Canada, Grenada, South Africa, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In this section a brief overview and history of SI is given which includes the following topics: The definition and origins of SI; the purpose and rationale of the program; the participants who benefit; and the stakeholders who are involved.

Definition:

Supplemental Instruction (SI) is an academic assistance program that utilizes peer-assisted study sessions. SI sessions are regularly-scheduled, informal review sessions in which students compare notes, discuss readings, develop organizational

Info-Ed: The new Research Information Management System

Info-Ed, the NWU's new Research Information Management System (RIMS), will be launched in November 2009, with the implementation of the Research Output Module. This module is one of many modules which will inter alia be used and implemented by NWU.

Other modules that will also be implemented are Genius, Ethics, Technology Transfer, Grants and Contracts and SPIN. SPIN is a web-based database where funding opportunities may be sought at an international level.

The Research Output Module will enable

users – i.e. research entity officials, research entity leaders/directors, deans and researchers – to capture the publication output of their specific entity and also to generate the necessary reporting.

The different Info-Ed modules are being customised for South African users and are being tested by the South African RIMS Consortium, which consists of 7 institutions taking the lead. NWU is proud to be one of these institutions. As soon as the other modules are completed by the Consortium, it will be implemented at NWU.

For any enquiries about the Info-Ed system, contact Teresa Smit, 018 299 4853, Teresa.Smit@nwu.ac.za, or Ronel Pieterse, 018 299 4853, Ronel.Pieterse@nwu.ac.za.

tools, and predict test items. Students learn how to integrate course content and study skills while working together. The sessions are facilitated by "SI leaders", students who have previously done well in the course and who attend all class lectures, take notes, and act as model students.

Purpose:

1. to increase retention within targeted historically difficult courses
2. to improve student grades in targeted historically difficult courses
3. to increase the graduation rates of students

Participants:

SI is a "free service" offered to all students in a targeted course. SI is a non remedial approach to learning as the program targets high-risk courses rather than high-risk students. All students are encouraged to attend SI sessions, as it is a voluntary program. Students with varying levels of academic preparedness and diverse ethnicities participate. There is no remedial stigma attached to SI since the program targets high-risk courses rather than high-risk students.

How SI Works: The SI model involves key persons:

1. The SI Coordinator is a trained professional who is responsible for identifying the targeted courses, gaining faculty support, selecting and training SI leaders, as well as marketing and evaluating the program on an ongoing basis.
2. The faculty members of the identified historically difficult courses invite and support SI. Faculty members screen SI leaders for content competency and approve selections as well as collaborate with the SI leaders and Coordinator on a regular basis.
3. The SI leaders ("near peers") are students who have been deemed course competent and have been approved by the course instructor and the SI Coordinator. They are trained in

proactive learning and study strategies as well as facilitation skills. SI leaders attend course lectures, take notes, read all assigned materials, and conduct three to five out-of-class SI sessions a week. The SI leader is the "model student", a facilitator who assists students to integrate course content and learning strategies.

4. Students participating in the SI sessions, although mentioned last, are the most crucial component of SI. SI is introduced to specific historically difficult courses. These courses frequently are introductory or "gatekeeper courses" but also include upper level undergraduate courses and courses in professional schools.

Event 2009: FOCUS on SI week (5th - 9th October)

The executive Director of the International Office, Dr Glen Jacobs and a colleague Ms Cathy Unite-Clarke visited the different Campuses during the week from the 5th to the 9th October 2009. During this week all Academic and Supporting staff were invited to attend information sessions on the different Campuses on different days and at different times. There were an opportunity for lecturers on each Campus, previously trained as SI trainers, to attend an Advanced trainers Workshop. Personal invitations were sent to those trained in Nov 2008 and September 2009.

M Klopper



Aligning community engagement with corporate social investment (CSI)

The NWU vision is to be a pre-eminent university in Africa, driven by pursuit of knowledge and innovation. The three areas of business of the university are teaching-learning; research; and the implementation of expertise, including community engagement. In accordance with the vision, this implementation of expertise is focused on Africa, as we are embedded in the African continent and its people. This requires a dedicated commitment, one which challenges our values and objectives to truly ensure transformation that is reflected in our local engagement and public involvement.

Stakeholders of universities expect universities, as public institutions, to engage with their environment through community outreach programmes or community engagement projects. Community engagement is defined as those activities performed by the staff and students of the university primarily aimed at uplifting needy sectors of society and/or individuals in need of assistance or engagement. The primary aim is development, support and upliftment of society. The university community seeks, by virtue of its expertise and engagement in society, to act as a human development agent. Although these activities are often characterised by fundraising campaigns and the implementation of expertise, it normally involves minimal charges for direct project costs and are not performed on a commercial basis.

Corporate Social Investment (CSI) is a concept through which organisations consider the interests of society by taking responsibility for the impact of their activities on customers, suppliers, employees, shareholders, communities and other stakeholders, as well as the environment. This obligation is seen to extend beyond the statutory obligation to comply with legislation and sees organisations voluntarily taking further steps to invest in improving the quality of life of employees and their families as well as of the local community and society at large. This includes total accountability with regard to the triple bottom line. Corporate Social Investment

(CSI) refers to a company's contributions to society and community that are extraneous to its regular business activities. Proponents argue that there is a strong business case for CSI, in that corporations benefit in multiple ways by operating with a perspective broader and longer than their own immediate, short-term profits.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is defined as business decision making linked to ethical values, compliance with legal requirements and respect for people, communities and the environment.

A very important basis for CSR is the concept of corporate citizenship in its definition. A good corporate citizen (a responsible one) is a person/entity that has comprehensive values and practices in place, which enable this citizen to make decisions and conduct business operations ethically, meet legal requirements and show consideration for society, communities and the environment. Companies (and for that matter universities too) cannot expect to have an impact in the greater society if a corporate value system does not exist within the corporation.

Achieving social impact requires a complex network of players, which includes direct service organisations, their constituents and resources (public, private or both) from which they receive funding. Investments and grants fuel the system of community engagement and development, and foundations and grant makers all have their own strategies and objectives with explicit milestones at which mercies the grantees are subjected. Grantees are seldom in a position to negotiate aggressively with potential contributors. They often have to accept whatever terms and conditions major contributors impose, no matter how costly and disruptive this may be. This is something that many of us at universities have to comply with, not only in research but also in community development.

A short historical overview

The decades before democracy were characterised by a "welfarist" style of corporate giving which was

influenced by a greater awareness of corporate social responsibility globally and political upheaval for change. Corporate giving programmes catered for "worthy causes", made cash donations, and focused on inputs rather than outputs.

After the 1994 elections, intense restructuring, new policies, institutions and structures replaced the relationship between civil society, the State and business. The rhetoric began to shift from a "welfarist" to a developmental paradigm, which initiated many changes in the dynamics of social giving. Several new agencies emerged with the objective to build and sustain civil society in South Africa. Much of the financial support came from foreign governments that wanted to build our fledgling democracy. Bilateral aid has contributed substantially to development in SA, for example between 2001 and 2006 the US government has funded HIV/Aids programmes to the amount of R900 million. This was followed by a repositioning of the non-profit sector. Through its growing relationship with the private sector, government was able to leverage additional funding and to access important skills and expertise, so enhancing public-sector capacity and the opportunity to convey policy into practice.

One of the most significant shifts was the notion of the triple-bottom-line, which entered mainstream thinking in 2002, through the King Report on Corporate Governance. This was an important development for CSI because the status of CSI as a vital business function was no longer in question.

South Africa is the only country in the world where CSI is codified through legislation, such as the broad-based black economic empowerment (BBBEE) scorecard. CSI has become a formal contributor to social change and a professional sector in its own right. Currently, corporate social investment is a professional and strategic endeavour that aligns business and governments priorities.

In the next issue of Quality read what secures funding for community engagement. B Bouwman

Quality Office says farewell to Prof Es Steyn

Prof Es Steyn is leaving the fulltime service of NWU after 24 years. She was attached to the Faculty of Educational Sciences on the Potchefstroom Campus for nearly 21 years. For the past few years, she worked in the Institutional Quality Office and, among others, helped with preparation for the HEQC audit.

She and her husband, Mr Willem Steyn, a well-known attorney in Potchefstroom, are leaving the

town to settle in Parkrand in the East Rand. They are looking forward to spending more time with their 6 granddaughters.

Prof Steyn's educational expertise will not be lost, though. She is starting an after-school centre where various services, including remedial education, will be offered.

The Institutional Quality Office wishes her and her family only the very best on their road ahead.

