

**How university academics respond to the introduction of new quality policies in  
South African higher education**

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**Vanessa Brown**

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR (PhD)**

**in**

**EDUCATION POLICY STUDIES**

Department of Education Management and Policy Studies

University of Pretoria, South Africa

**Supervisor: Professor V. Pillay**

September 2010

## ABSTRACT

This study explores the consequences for a historically black university (HBU) of the South African state's focus on routine and strategic quality evaluation within a policy framework that views higher education as a lever for social change and economic development. It analyses the changing nature of academic work and probes the motivations and understandings of institutional managers and academics in an attempt to explain their responses to policy requirements.

The theory of the Evaluative State is employed to examine the nature and consequences of overzealous responsiveness by a historically black university in transition in South Africa. It suggests that the changing relationship between state and university is characterised by contradictions and ambivalence, a result of the interplay between a strong sense of loyalty to the state on the one hand and a recognition of the failure of the state to recognise and reward achievements valued by the HBU. This study suggests that state steering, through the use of output evaluation and efficiency-directed performance indicators, has resulted in failure to achieve central policy goals of development, equity and social justice.

The study is guided by one main research question: *How do academics in a historically black South African university in transition engage with and implement internal and external quality assurance processes and policies?*

The literature review reveals significant gaps in understanding the consequences of the rise of the Evaluative State in higher education. A major limitation has been a lack of focus on higher education systems in developing countries and on the consequences of imposing neo-liberal frameworks upon local realities which require redress to remedy historically constructed economic and social disadvantage.

The descriptions of academics and institutional managers that emerge in this study highlight stark differences between the two groups in perceptions of and approaches to quality improvement and university work. Significantly, institutional history, context and mission emerge as strong factors shaping academics' and managers' responses to change, factors that have largely been disregarded by state policy which focuses more on output achievement than on input variables.

**Key words:**

- 1 Quality
- 2 Evaluative State
- 3 Quality evaluation
- 4 Quality assurance
- 5 Audit culture
- 6 Performativity
- 7 Managerialism
- 8 Performance indicators
- 9 Historically disadvantaged universities
- 10 Academics' responses

## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

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**Vanessa Brown**

**21<sup>st</sup> day of September 2010**



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**For KELLY-EVE, CLIO and KEENO**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Completing this thesis would not have been possible without the help and support of so many people, whose perfectly-timed acts of kindness helped me through difficult moments. Special thanks to:

- 1 My children, Kelly-Eve, Clio and Keeno, for being tolerant of my absences and preoccupation with this dissertation.
- 1 My family, especially my parents, Ivan and Ruth, who made it possible for me to devote endless time and energy to this task.
- 2 Venitha Pillay, who rescued this project and supervised it with compassion and exceptional skill.
- 3 Valencia, Charmaine and Peter for their generous friendship and much-needed emotional support.
- 4 Joy Papier, long-time friend, who understood the challenges of this journey and was able to anticipate my needs at critical moments.
- 5 Sharman Wickham, for her wisdom and intellectual support, and for sharing her research experience and knowledge with me.
- 6 Lorna Holtman and the PET project at UWC, for making available high quality research training and mentoring.
- 7 Ramesh Bharuthram, who provided critical resources, including space and time, when I needed them most.
- 8 The Sisters of Schoenstatt for offering me a tranquil retreat, a place to think and write.
- 9 John Kench, for editing with intelligence and understanding.
- 10 The academics and senior staff members at UWC who participated in this research, for offering their time and sharing their experiences and thoughts so willingly and freely.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Approaching the study

#### 1.1 Overview

This is a case study of a South African university in transition, from a historically disadvantaged and black university to a research-led institution, re-inventing itself as an institution of exceptional quality. It also explores another transition, in which the University evolved from an institution noted for its brave adversarial stance against state intervention during the apartheid era, to one which has shown itself eager to support the transformation and steering efforts of the post-apartheid state.

The study proposes that in order to understand the University of the Western Cape's shifting position, it is necessary to theorise the changing relationship between higher education and the post-apartheid state in South Africa, in which higher education has come to be regarded as a powerful instrument for economic development and social change. I argue further that the University's positive response to the demands of the post-apartheid state is mediated by its vulnerability, its close identification with the state's political goals, and its desire to claim advantage over its competitors.

In particular, I investigate the contestation between academics, state policy and university managers regarding different views of quality and the role of the state with regard to higher education. My study seeks to understand the role and impact of the Evaluative State on institutional change at UWC. I also explore the experiences of academics at this university, as they face new stresses and strains relating to their university's transition and the transformation demands of the post-apartheid state.

My central proposition is that academics' beliefs about quality are linked to both their views of the purpose of higher education and their beliefs about what the relationship between the state and the universities ought to be. I argue that, as the post-apartheid state begins to resemble the Evaluative State, it encounters different responses. It meets resistance from those academics who favour different models of state control, but acceptance from those who support the emergence of the Evaluative State, with its focus on quality seen as value for money, efficiency and fitness for purpose.

## 1.2 Research questions

The study will focus on the following research question:

*How do academics in a historically black South African university in transition engage with and implement internal and external quality assurance processes and policies?*

The following sub-questions will guide the study:

- How do academics' views of quality differ from those embedded in state policy and those promoted by university managers?
- How do these competing conceptions of quality relate to academics' attitudes towards the implementation of quality assurance policy and practices?
- To what extent does the state's focus on routine and strategic quality evaluation engender tension and conflict between and amongst academics and university managers?

## 1.3 Rationale for this research

I have worked at the University of the Western Cape for 20 years. During this time I have experienced life as an academic, working in the Faculty of Education during the period 1988-1998, as a senior administrator involved in internal reviews of academic departments for eight years, and more recently as assistant to the Vice-Rector.

My experience at UWC began during the heady days of the anti-apartheid struggle. I was recruited after being arrested and imprisoned for a few months, a consequence of my activism as a high school teacher and member of a local teachers' union. This was a time when our fiery Rector, Jakes Gerwel, began actively staffing the University with ultra left-leaning academics, who may have lacked higher education experience and postgraduate degrees, but who had demonstrated a commitment to transforming schooling and education through various forms of anti-apartheid struggle. I began my career as an academic in the Education Faculty, with a four-year undergraduate degree and a teaching qualification.

My work in the Academic Planning Unit in later years (2001-2008) involved conducting internal quality reviews of academic departments. During this time, I participated in the reviews of 28 out of 35 UWC departments, across all seven faculties. These departmental reviews were mainly conducted on a rotational basis, although there were instances when departments were selected for reviews when Deans or senior university managers believed that a particular problem or set of quality problems needed to be investigated. The reviews attempted to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, the degree of student satisfaction, and the effectiveness of departmental leadership and management.

With very few exceptions, the academics regarded these reviews with apprehension, fear, resentment and anger. Reviewed departments seemed excessively concerned about the possible consequences close scrutiny could have on their status in the university, on the resources they might be able to rely on in the future, and even on their continued existence as academic entities. Past experience of down-sizing through academic staff retrenchments (1997) and the closure of the University's Music Department (2000) following a review, were etched into the institutional memory; this ghost of the past, I believe, drove academics' insecurities, fears and anxieties regarding the evaluation dimension of departmental reviews.

Furthermore, the review teams, appointed by a Senate committee and approved by senior management, for their part seemed unaware that focusing significantly, although not exclusively, on quality as value for money and efficiency through the use of indicators like staffing costs, pass rates and throughput, had the potential to ignite simmering tensions and exacerbate conflict in the university. Reviews often left academics feeling misunderstood and unappreciated, believing that these quality evaluations failed to focus sufficiently on their achievements and on the aspects of teaching, learning and research quality that they valued most. In an extreme case, the head of a department resigned after a less-than-positive departmental review report was released.

These observations led me to a number of critical questions. How was one to understand a situation in which academics and management responded so differently to the needs and demands of quality assurance, and thought so differently about quality that it appeared they occupied two different worlds within the same university? How were these contending conceptions of quality to be understood and explained?

Having experienced the extent of academics' fear and negativity about internal quality reviews, I did not find it hard to imagine that the introduction of external quality evaluations by the post-apartheid government would stimulate even more intense conflict and contestation in the relationship between academics and institutional managers, and between these stakeholders and the state.

By 2001, seven years into the post-apartheid era, higher education policy suggested that the Ministry of Education wished to adopt a much more controlling role over the affairs of higher education institutions. This included using a new institutional funding framework, together with programme accreditation and external audits, as tools to ensure institutional compliance with state policy (DOE, 2001). It is conceivable that as higher education provision and the assurance of the quality of that provision became more tightly controlled and monitored by these external agencies, so opposition amongst academics and other institutional stakeholders grew and became more widespread.

This research examines the responses of academics to the new quality policy in South African universities, in order to illustrate how different conceptualisations of quality result in struggle and conflict around the evaluation of quality. The research literature has tended to focus on universities in politically stable systems, such as those in the United Kingdom and New Zealand. I am interested in exploring quality issues in the context of both social transition and political transformation, and in the major structural upheavals designed to change the nature and shape of higher education provision in South Africa.

#### **1.4 Background to the study**

What is quality in higher education? How do we know it when we see it? What happens when people look for quality in different places? And why is it that so many academics all over the world seem to resent the implementation of quality assurance policies in their universities? My research sets out to understand how academics think about and deal with quality issues, and how their views differ from the university management's orientation towards quality. It will explore the ways academics understand quality and will examine their responses and attitudes to the evaluation of quality in teaching and in research.

There is considerable disagreement amongst those interested in these issues, to the extent that it is impossible to imagine a common definition of quality (Doherty, 1994; Harvey and Green, 1993; Vroeijenstijn, 1995). It has also been argued that controversies about quality are rooted in conflict about the nature and purposes of higher education (Barnett, 1990). In this view, it is necessary to first uncover what people believe universities are for, in order to understand how they define quality.

Yet another view accepts that different understandings of quality arise simply from people holding different opinions and that quality is essentially a relative concept, meaning different things to different people (Harvey and Green, 1993). This argument holds that quality is a stakeholder-relative concept, with different interest groups holding different views of quality, depending on what their priorities are for higher education (Newton, 2007; Harvey and Green, 1993).

It is not difficult to imagine that these multiple views and definitions of quality could give rise to conflict and power struggles, as different positions demand to be taken into account in quality processes and policies (Tam, 2001). These struggles manifest as resentment and resistance, which invariably show up in quality evaluations and monitoring processes.

Competing views of quality exist within higher education in South Africa. University management and the state appear to favour a model of quality where the emphasis is on the achievement of value for money through the efficient use of resources. Academics on the ground counter this by arguing that this kind of efficiency really means doing more with less, which inevitably results in compromising on the quality of teaching, learning and research.

Little research has been done into the conceptions academics hold of quality, and those studies which do exist have attempted to slot these differences into the mainstream five definitions of quality offered by Harvey and Green. What other notions might there be? And what is the impact on implementation of quality policy of contestations between these ideological positions?

Responses from academics to the imposition of new quality regimes have been described in negative ways. Studies by Halsey (1992), Kinman and Jones (2003) and many other writers have identified a 'sense of loss' (Bundy, 2005, p.89) amongst academics.

Trow (1989) has described academics as being rendered powerless by their position in a rapidly changing higher education landscape. My own experience in a university, however, has revealed the opposite. Rather than surrendering and behaving passively, academics have demonstrated various forms of active engagement with quality policies, ranging from acceptance and adaptation to resistance, and from compliance to internalisation (Trowler, 1997).

My research therefore extends the existing literature by examining whether the earlier sense of despair and hopelessness, dominant in empirical research in America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand a decade ago, pervades South African universities at this time. Have working conditions changed so severely for South African academics as well? And to what extent have demands for greater accountability, efficiency and quality led to similar levels of job dissatisfaction, work stress and low morale?

## **1.5 Significance of the research**

*Sometimes we simply have to keep our eyes open and look carefully at individual cases – not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something (Eysenck, 1976: 9).*

My research examines the beliefs and points of view of academics - the practitioners in higher education who are responsible for implementing quality assurance policies. This research signals an attempt to understand the reality of policy demands and the impact of these on academics' lives as the South African state proceeds with its ambitious transformation of the higher education sector.

The disjuncture between policy and implementation has been widely researched (Fullan, 1998; Ball, 1993; Jansen, 2001a, 2001b; Street, 2001; Sutton & Levinson, 2001). Policy implementation research has shown that policy is more likely to be successfully implemented when it takes account of practitioners' values and beliefs; conversely, change is least likely to result from policy implementation when practitioners' beliefs are assumed or only partially understood.

While this theory of policy change is widely understood and accepted, there has been little emphasis in previous empirical research on uncovering and understanding the beliefs and behaviours of academics as practitioners and implementers of policy. This is an area in which I believe my study will be helpful.

My research will provide an in-depth analysis of a single university engaging in the complex process of transforming itself in accordance with both externally and internally devised policy goals. There is much to be learned from case study research which attempts to understand complex phenomena while generating rich descriptions, through which existing theory can be examined and new theory constructed.

## **1.6 South Africa's challenges**

South Africa, like the rest of Africa, lags behind the world's nations in critical areas of science and technological progress and innovation. International statistics continue to show that the prevalence of malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS in Africa and South Africa outstrips the rest of the world, while enrolment in primary, secondary and higher education lags far behind other nations. The country's global share of new patents is minimal; in particular, the failure to provide telephone lines to facilitate global communication continues to haunt South Africa.

In terms of global Research & Development (R&D) expenditure, at 0.95% of GDP, South Africa trails far behind the OECD's GDP average of 2.26 in 2005. Planned growth took this percentage to 1% for South Africa in 2009, but the HSRC predicted in 2006 that South Africa would need to increase the number of researchers with doctoral degrees by 6000 by 2010 in order to create a R&D workforce capable of utilising the country's R&D budget of 1% of GDP. South Africa produces only 1 doctoral degree for every 500 students who enter higher education, and boasts a scant 23 doctorates per million of the population, compared with Brazil (43), the USA (140) and South Korea (157).

South Africa's world share of ISI (Institute for Scientific Information) publications declined from 0.79 in 1987 to 0.53 in 2006; when allowance is made for non-ISI (non-science) publications, these figures show stagnation in the country's world share during this period (Jeenah and Pouris, 2008).

These are some of the sobering national challenges facing the higher education system in South Africa. The universities have been charged with the responsibility of producing and reproducing knowledge, of growing the highly-skilled workforce the country requires to enhance its research and development capacity, in the interest of addressing the serious economic and social challenges.

The state's response to this national skills and knowledge crisis has been direct and forthright. The National Plan for Higher Education (DOE, 2001) has focused on the need to build high-level research capacity to address the research and knowledge needs of the country. State expectations are high: an increase in participation rates from 15% in 2001 to 20% in 2010 is desired; increased enrolments and graduate success in Science, Engineering and Technology are expected and an increase in the numbers of Doctoral and Masters graduates in the country is sought. It is expected that universities will respond quickly and decisively, to deliver immediate results on these key indicators.

South Africa in 2010 continues to face serious skills shortages which will require a significant increase in the production of highly skilled individuals in areas such as engineering, while graduate unemployment, especially amongst blacks, is on the increase (CHE, 2009). The state's Department of Higher Education is understandably frustrated at this persistent mismatch, more than ten years after launching intense efforts to address the serious gaps between the skills needs of the economy and the expertise of the universities' graduates. Sectors such as engineering, for example, continue to experience huge skills shortages.

The University of the Western Cape, the focus of this case study, has demonstrated a significant degree of responsiveness in addressing these national needs and challenges. With its roots as a historically black and disadvantaged university, it was created by the apartheid state for 'coloured' persons who were never expected to excel in areas other than those the state determined or those required by the development trajectories of their own communities. Its students were expected to provide the human resource needs of the coloured administration, together with the development needs of the coloured community as teachers, preachers, nurses and social workers. The University of the Western Cape was not designed and structured to engage in research, nor was it intended to produce highly skilled graduates in the fields of science, technology, engineering, medicine, business or commerce.

Yet by 2009, UWC had transformed itself to the extent that it graduated the largest number of black dentists and pharmacists in the country; it had moved its enrolment away from an overwhelming dominance of human and social sciences in 1995 to achieve the national target of 30% in the areas of science and technology in 2008.

This study investigates the relationship between the post-apartheid state and this particular University, characterised by zealous responsiveness and committed transformation efforts directed at becoming a university of exceptional quality. It further considers the gains that this change and transformation have wrought, the losses and sacrifices that have had to be endured, and investigates the ways in which academics on the ground have perceived and experienced the stance of their institution towards the state's demands, challenges and agenda for change.

All statistics for section 1.5 are from the NACI Annual Reports (2003-2004; 2005-2006) and DST/HSRC National Survey of Research and Experimental Development (R&D) (2005-2006; 2006-2007). Other references for section 1.5 are from NRF annual reports, CHE studies and DOE/DHET HEMIS data, and UWC's own records.

## **1.7 Organisation of the thesis**

Atkins and Sampson (2002) present a conceptual framework for understanding the process of case study research, which was first proposed by Bronts et al (1995). I have found this to be a useful way of defining the case study process, presenting the case study in the form of a dissertation, as well as being a guide to ensuring a good quality process.

I have borrowed from and adapted the original framework, which incorporates ways of thinking, of controlling, of working, of supporting and of communication, to develop the presentation in the following way:

In Chapter One, Approaching the study, I provide a brief overview of the study and an outline of the thesis, which describes the focus of subsequent chapters. This chapter gives the background, rationale and significance of the study and presents the research question and its sub-questions. I also locate the study within the context of the local and global challenges facing South Africa.

In Chapter Two, Describing the case, I provide a description of the institutional context of the case study and examine the impact of policy in higher education in the apartheid and the post-apartheid eras on a historically disadvantaged, historically black university, the University of the Western Cape.

Chapter Three, Presenting the argument, consists of a comprehensive literature review that summarizes the research around key concepts such as quality in higher education and the role of the state in higher education provision. This chapter also describes the theoretical framework that guides both the research and the analysis of evidence.

In Chapter Four, Controlling for quality through design, I present the research design and methodology. I provide information on the data collection processes and describe a framework for the analysis of the data. The case study protocol and descriptions of tests and techniques to be applied to enhance reliability and credibility are also presented in this chapter.

Chapter Five, Examining the evidence: Part 1, introduces the evidence and presents the findings of the study regarding different views of quality and quality improvement amongst academics and institutional managers at the University of the Western Cape, by investigating patterns and connections emerging through analysis of the data. One key finding is that academics' largely prefer a view of quality which links transformation and fitness for purpose, while institutional managers espouse a view of quality as efficiency and value for money.

Chapter Six, Examining the evidence: Part 11, introduces the evidence and presents the findings of the study regarding the beliefs and actions of academics in the context of their implementation of both internal and external quality assurance policies. A major finding is that academics' behaviour towards the implementation of quality assurance policies reflects refusal and resistance, game-playing and compliance.

In Chapter Seven, Communicating the findings, I analyse four central findings in a coherent way, while presenting a synthesis of them to the research community. First, the imperatives driving transition Cape conflict with notions of quality espoused by the Evaluative State, leading to ambivalence as overzealous responsiveness encounters intransigence.

Second, academics' loyalty to the state's agenda for social change is severely challenged by their disappointment that the state's quality evaluation system is unable to address and evaluate their work with disadvantaged students. Third, quality assurance practices adopted at UWC in the interest of accountability result in an increase in monitoring performance rather than an improvement in quality. Fourth, there is contestation between managers' accountability to the Evaluative State and academics' accountability to student success, expressed in contestation around institutional mission

## CHAPTER TWO

### Describing the context

#### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will attempt to contextualise academics' responses to policy change at UWC by describing the process and nature of change at the university in the post-apartheid era. I will argue that, in the face of tremendous external and internal pressures, UWC has made particular transformation choices which have had a substantial and possibly irreversible impact on the university's academic projects.

I use Weiler's (2005) notion of ambivalence to structure an explanation for the tensions and contradictions, discontinuities and inconsistencies which have come to characterise the university's response to society and the state, as well as to the national and the global economy. This chapter constructs a narrative of institutional responses to these multiple pressures and stimuli. It examines both the planned and unintended consequences of the choices made by the university as it traverses this minefield of higher education transformation in post-apartheid South Africa.

I examine the institution's history in brief, in an effort to account for and explain the position the university has taken with regard to policy implementation, namely one of enthusiastic compliance and responsiveness. I will also examine the dilemma facing UWC, caught in a trap of responsiveness: building on its historical context, which is the source of its unique identity, while trying to disentangle itself from its past in order to carve a new identity as a world-class institution able to compete with any university in the country or in the world. It faces the future with a great deal of ambivalence relating to its transition towards an entrepreneurial university - constantly looking forward, pursuing aspirational goals, but often at the expense of attending to pressing and present challenges.

## 2.2. Introducing change at UWC

Explaining change at UWC calls first of all for an understanding of the developing relationship between the post-apartheid state and the higher education sector. This involves implementing the application of three major steering mechanisms, namely *planning, finance and quality*. Higher education policy has repeatedly articulated the role of these three levers in directing responsiveness to policy goals and objectives, as well as their interrelatedness, as a trio of control and surveillance, in guiding and propelling the sector in the appropriate direction.

The choices made by UWC in this context of state steering and control must be understood within the convergence and interplay between external and internal factors, between history and present imperatives. Together these bring into existence what I have termed an institutional propensity for compliance, a disposition to responsiveness.

The significance of this institutional inclination is best appreciated when one considers the fact that many higher education institutions across the globe and more particularly in South Africa, have approached policy implementation in different ways, choosing either to ignore state imperatives and face the consequences, or to comply formally and minimally, simply because it is required and/or is too costly to resist.

UWC, in contrast, has chosen to engage whole-heartedly and enthusiastically with policy objectives, a zeal which often overtakes the state's expected rate of change. Overzealous responsiveness has propelled the university along the path towards becoming an entrepreneurial university. In its quest to become an institution of exceptional quality, it has moved at a breathless pace that many internal stakeholders, most notably the academics, have been unable, and often ideologically unwilling, to match.

Becoming an entrepreneurial university engaged in market-related activities has also thrown into sharp relief UWC's identification as a historically black university (HBU) and historically disadvantaged institution (HDI), serving the poor and responsive to the needs of disadvantaged communities - the institution's *raison d'être* in the past and arguably still today.

Fundamentally, UWC's essential identity as an HBU/HDI has come up against its new construction of itself. The new trajectory and the past identity are inimical to each other. As in

Muller's contradictory couplings (2003), 'market' university and HBU are in direct opposition. Attempts to balance the two in order to do justice to both market and community; entrepreneurialism and development, engender ambivalence, inconsistencies and internal contestation.

## **2. 3. A History of South Africa's HBUs**

### **2. 3.1. Apartheid creations**

UWC was established in 1959 by the apartheid state, for people classified 'coloured', and was located 25 km outside the urban centre of Cape Town. All higher education institutions for black students during apartheid were labeled Bush Colleges, and UWC's location was also credited with earning it the title of Bush College. With sandy flatland on one side and dense bush immediately surrounding it, UWC was located in a desolate segment of land designated a 'Coloured growth area' by the Nationalist government. In 1960, 166 coloured students enrolled there, and were offered 'limited training for lower to middle level positions in schools, the civil service and other institutions designed to serve a separate coloured community' (*extract from the university's webpage from a section entitled 'Proud History'*).

Higher education was racially structured, with universities for different racial groups serving distinctly different purposes. This was in line with the goals and strategies of the apartheid state with regard to education. The historically white universities (HWUs) of the time provided a liberal type of education across all disciplines and professions. They served the enfranchised population well, a sign of which was sturdy financial investment by alumni in their Alma Maters during the apartheid years and beyond. The extent of resource provision by the state was reflected in their infrastructure, outward appearance, prime location and the salaries paid to their academic staff.

Universities for the disenfranchised – classified as black, coloured and Indian – were located in the rural Bantustans or in urban dumping grounds far from city amenities.

Designed to offer limited programmes, their under-resourcing resulted in poor infrastructure and a physical appearance hardly befitting a higher education institution. These universities, today termed historically black institutions, served the needs of the disenfranchised as determined by the apartheid planners.

Wolpe (1995) has argued that differences between these HWUs and HBUs were to be found in the varied '*functions assigned to them in relation to the reproduction of the apartheid order.*' In other words, white institutions were meant to cultivate privilege while black universities were tasked with the production of semi-skilled workers and the constrained professional development of a black middle class. This was in line with apartheid education's goal of limiting black economic involvement to little more than 'hewers of wood and drawers of water' (Verwoerd, 1953, quoted in the Afrikaans newspaper Die Burger).

The intention was that the educated black middle class would occupy lower and middle level administrative positions in the civil service of the independent homelands, or bantustans, while the coloured and Indian middle class would occupy the same kinds of positions in the urban areas, serving separate development administrations. Further, professional training was limited to careers which allowed these graduates to serve their own racial groups, within the rural or urban ghettos where they lived. Consequently, the HBUs were limited to training many teachers and preachers, some social workers, lawyers and nurses (but no doctors), and many administrators. Wolpe has argued that these limitations ensured that HBU training would not threaten the 'existing racial division of labour' (Wolpe, 1995).

Enrolment in HBUs in science and technology was abysmally low, as was that for business and commerce, while most black students were filtered into education and humanities programmes, including law. As late as 1990, enrolment in the HBUs for science and technology, business and commerce, education and humanities reflected a ratio of 10:4:49:37, compared with those in English HWUs at 40:16:7:37.

Enrolments in the HBUs were concentrated at undergraduate level, while the HWUs continued to train large numbers of postgraduate students, a critical ingredient in the development of a strong institutional research base.

Research output in the period 1984-1991 was almost 37 000 units, with HBUs contributing less than 5% to this total (Wolpe, 1995). A consequence of this was felt well into the post-apartheid era, with research output dominated by aging white professors, and differences in research productivity across institutions in 2008 still reflecting earlier patterns of disadvantage and inequality.

UWC was created in this context in 1960, after the promulgation of the Extension of University Education Act of 1959. This Act euphemistically referred to extending university education to other races, when in fact it was designed to redirect students from white institutions and the independent College of Fort Hare, where many qualified before 1960, to racially inscribed locations where control could be exercised over the academic programmes offered and hence the future careers and development of disadvantaged groups.

The response of coloured people to the establishment of UWC was varied. Many exercised a pragmatic view and sent their children there to be educated, while another sector of the population expressed resistance by refusing to send their children and persuading others to boycott the institution.

The other regional higher education option was for coloured persons to enroll at the University of Cape Town, the university for white students, through an application for special permission from the state education department to attend, on the grounds that a specific course of study was not offered at UWC. The successful applicant was then granted a permit to attend, but such concessions were limited – granted to small numbers of applicants and restricted to the study of obscure courses like Comparative African Government and Law (CAGAL).

There is little historic evidence that the establishment of UWC was celebrated and embraced by the coloured population for whom it was established. On the contrary, much evidence exists to suggest that, from 1970 onwards, a decade after its inception, UWC was characterised by student resistance and struggle, which involved contestation with the early Afrikaner senior management and academic staff.

### **2.3.2. Funding the HBUs**

In order to understand the structural inequalities and disadvantages with which these institutions entered the post-apartheid era, one needs to examine the funding basis of the apartheid higher education system. White universities were funded on the basis of a funding formula, and black institutions on the basis of negotiated budgets.

In brief, the Holloway subsidy formula, which applied to white universities, funded staff remuneration, administrative costs, equipment and full-time students, according to a calculation which also accounted for student fees as a source of income (Steyn and de Villiers, 2007).

In contrast, HBU funding was in the form of negotiated budgets (Institutional profile, 2004) which involved institutional submission of needs in the form of expenditure and income. Spending was controlled according to specific line items in the budget and unspent money had to be returned to the state.

The Holloway formula, in effect, granted a greater deal of freedom to institutions regarding the way money was spent. In their analysis of the general advantages of subsidy funding, Steyn and de Villiers suggest that such funding 'does not prescribe how the allocated money is to be spent' (Steyn & de Villiers, 2007; Bundy, 2005.) suggests further that in practical terms, institutions could decide on student numbers and fees, and on staff numbers and salaries. A further advantage was that long-term planning was facilitated in that the rules of allocation were clearly spelt out, allowing for more effective institutional budgeting and the possibility of building up a reserve from unspent money.

In stark contrast, the line item expenditure budget was a symbol of control and another nail in the coffin of HBU desires for autonomy. This form of funding, which required government approval for every cent spent, removed all possibility of spending flexibility.

In particular, the insistence on the return of unspent monies '*meant that no financial reserves could be built up*' (IOP, 2004), making long-term planning for growth and development completely impossible, and providing no future security to weather tough financial times. Nor could HBUs make decisions about staff employment, student numbers, or the acquisition of research and other equipment (Bundy, 2005).

By 1988, however, HBUs and HWUs were funded according to the same subsidy formula, called SAPSE (South African Post-Secondary Education), but the initial euphoria at having achieved funding equity and financial autonomy with the HWUs was soon tempered by the realisation that uniform spending across the sector would continue to entrench inequality rather than dismantle it. The HWU's had benefitted from the Holloway formula's flexible application over an extended period of at least fifty years.

Consequently, by the time a single-formula funding framework was applied to all institutions, the infrastructural differences between the two types of institutions were glaring, especially in terms of resources such as library holdings, research equipment acquired earlier, science laboratories, and building maintenance and refurbishment.

HWUs were also able to charge and collect higher student fees while receiving substantial additional revenue from earlier investments and from long-term substantial and renewable donations and scholarships. Moreover, alumni funding kept flowing into these institutions from ex-students who after graduation were able to fill positions in the upper echelons of society and the economy. These differences are experienced to this day and remain an unfortunate legacy of apartheid higher education.

A Mathematics professor interviewed for this research explains:

*There are definitely differences between universities and it's not fair to compare just UCT and UWC. Both are located in Cape Town, but UCT attracts far more donor funds than we do and I can tell you why that is so. We at UWC were training teachers, and we trained excellent teachers and thousands of them. But teachers do not sit in big companies, so UCT was turning out the people who are now company directors, and as they say, charity begins at home. They first ensure that UCT has been properly covered before they think of giving some small change to UWC. (Interview with Albert).*

Ironically, the very policy instrument which the HBUs expected would level the playing field as far as funding was concerned turned out to be a double-edged sword, bringing instead an illusion of equality which was hard to challenge.

A Chemistry professor whom I interviewed and who had been at the institution for 35 years at the time of this research, articulated the impact of the shift from negotiated budgets to formula funding for UWC:

*Before 1984 the state gave UWC a fixed amount of money which was based on the number of students and staff, and which was pretty royal. The fees students paid before 1984 went into a separate fund and we couldn't touch that money, it was given back to the state. Then the university authorities here indicated to the state that they didn't like this treatment and wanted to be funded as all other universities were at that stage. So after 1984 we got funded as all other institutions and our revenue fell like a brick. Our students didn't pay their fees because they saw UWC as an extension of the government, which it wasn't really. We were pretty independent at that stage. But we now got the same amount of money as the white universities...and the rest of the money we had to raise from student fees, investments and donations.*

*And of course we couldn't do that. The other institutions had a legacy of people who have made donations over the years and they had huge amounts of money invested that they could draw on. Their fees were also higher than ours, and people could pay. So we went into a bit of a negative decline as far as our funds were concerned, and students didn't pay fees, so we had huge debts which we had to carry along year after year. (From Igor's interview).*

In a paper describing the history of higher education funding, Bunting (2002) sheds more light on the financial decline following the 1988 extension of the SAPSE formula to black universities, to which Igor alluded.

## **2. 4. The History of UWC**

### **2.4.1. Political struggle in the 1970's and 80's**

The first decade of UWC's establishment proceeded fairly uneventfully, with a conservative Afrikaner rector supportive of the ruling Nationalist party, Afrikaner academic staff, and a state-picked council presiding over its affairs. In 1970 the institution was granted university status, meaning that it was able to award its own degrees.

Fifteen years after its establishment, the first black rector was inaugurated, a consequence it appears of continued student protest against the conservative white university management. Despite the institution's autonomous status and the change in leadership, the university Council, the ultimate decision-making body, continued to be staffed by the state with appointments aimed at the continued exercise of control over the activities of the university.

1970 also heralded the start of struggles to come. A student was sent out of a lecture for refusing to wear a tie, and in the first ever confrontation, students burned a tie in protest (HSF, 1999). In 1973, students protested against the University's refusal to recognise a draft constitution drawn up two years earlier because it was not aligned with the provisions of the Extension of Universities Act. (Lalu, 1999) and protestors bore a poster entitled "*White Arrogance leads to Black Frustration*". Two years later, in 1975, the campus erupted in a mass confrontation which began as a protest against the quality of food. In response, and as a placatory measure, the state appointed the first coloured rector at UWC. Mounting student dissatisfaction grew to reflect the national wave of protest, with discontent against the apartheid government gathering momentum all over the country.

By 1976, at the time of the Soweto uprising and the start of student-led mass action, students at UWC were ideologically prepared to join this mass student movement.

The growth of the Black Consciousness Movement at UWC has been adequately documented by Anderson (2002, 2003), as a critical force in conscientising students against apartheid oppression. It served also to unite oppressed racial groups, black, coloured and Indian, around the concepts of blackness and resistance. Student protest escalated as students became radicalised and a new site for anti-apartheid struggle emerged from the foundations of the 'Bush College', originally established to serve the human capital needs of coloured separate development.

A marked feature of this era was that both students and significant sectors of black staff were united in protest, both against the apartheid state and against the institution in so far as it was serving the separate development interests of the government. Furthermore, the more radical future leadership of UWC was to be drawn from the ranks of this student-staff anti-apartheid alliance of the late 1970's and 80's.

Within this volatile climate of resistance against the intentions of the apartheid state, radical academics, many of them students in the era described above, were able to pass a motion in the university's Senate in 1982 which clearly and unambiguously rejected the state's 'politico-ideological' foundations for the establishment of this particular HBU.

A new mission was crafted by the Senate which asserted the institution's role in social development and upliftment, and crucially, in an act of explicit defiance against the state, declared the university open to students of all races.

The new mission statement pronounced indisputably that the institution had entered into a new era in terms of its vision of its own purpose and its role in serving the disenfranchised and disadvantaged. A number of elements of this mission statement are worth elaborating on here.

Several broad themes characterised this sense of purpose. Firstly, flying in the face of its establishment to serve one ethnic group, the new mission declared the university open to all races.

An earlier decree had served to open admissions on academic grounds, but kept entry requirements low by declaring that UWC was 'a university which opened its doors to all who fulfilled the minimum qualifications.' The new 1982 mission, however, declared that the 'doors of learning shall be open' to all races who qualified, and re-inscribed the earlier policy of keeping fees low to enable access for working-class students.

Secondly, the mission declared open admissions on academic grounds as well. Henceforth, all students meeting minimum admissions criteria, namely a pass at Matric or school-leaving level, would be accepted at UWC. And thirdly, the university declared its commitment to social and community development and upliftment, using the term 'Third World' to indicate that its notion of community included local communities of disenfranchised and disadvantaged people.

Through this seminal act, UWC became associated with broadening access and participation to include the poor, all races, and those badly served by the apartheid schooling system.

#### **2.4.2. Becoming an Access institution**

Between 1983 and 1984, student numbers at UWC grew from 4 885 to 6 125. Six years later, in 1990, the numbers had doubled to 12 473, under the radical leadership of Professor Jakes Gerwel. An ex-UWC student himself, he had been appointed as Rector in 1985. His role would be to implement the 1982 mission and transform the Bush College into an 'Intellectual Home for the Left'.

The 'Intellectual Home for the Left' was so called because of Gerwel's deliberate recruitment of radical thinkers and political activists onto his academic staff. This was in keeping with his own commitment to positioning the institution as a key driver of political change in the province, as evidenced in the following extract from his 1987 inaugural address.

*I am from a younger generation with a good dose of Marxism as critical paradigm.. I come from a generation which says that politics always plays a role; academe and the university also have a real role to bring about political change...I am becoming rector at a time when the crisis of authority, the crisis of validity - some people call it the crisis of legitimacy - of the state and the government is not any longer just a theoretical construction but is written in huge letters in every house, every school and every university. (Gerwel, 1987).*

The story of UWC is one of political struggle, of flaunting apartheid legislation through its commitment to bringing about political change. The university marked up to its credit key achievements in the anti-apartheid struggle through its promotion of People's Education, through its recruitment of openly radical academics. These comprised a cadre of intellectual activists, some of whom still remain, and many of whom used their position in the institution to research and formulate future policy for the new state.

Not surprisingly, many alumni and academics from UWC were drawn into the ranks of power in the new South African state; indeed, some critics have gone so far as to argue that UWC deliberately positioned itself as an intellectual home for the left and a site of struggle to secure for its alumni and staff positions of power in the new government (Neville Alexander, 1988).

The story of UWC also includes an early attempt at widening access and increasing participation of African students in the higher education sector – an achievement which was to become a key policy goal of the new post-apartheid state. In 1986, 400 African students were registered; by 1992, 4 308 African students constituted almost 50% of the student body at UWC.

Running parallel to this successful story of equity achievement, inclusion and transformation of the student profile, is a bitter narrative concerning access. This incorporates both the impact of rising student debt on a situation of increasing and chronic financial insecurity and the consequences for academic quality of the commitment to accepting large numbers of academically weak and under-prepared students, themselves a product of an appallingly under-resourced schooling system for blacks.

### **2.4.3 The state's response to resistance**

By 1987, the university's relationship with the apartheid state was clear and unambiguous: it would continue vigorously to resist the state's intentions and control, and would henceforth officially align itself with the anti-apartheid movement. However, the decision in the late 1980's and beyond to continue to oppose the apartheid state has been framed by Anderson (2002) as a somewhat irresponsible and reckless act.

Anderson (2002) argued that UWC could ill afford to 'bite the hand that fed it,' dependent as it was on state funding. When the state retaliated, it did so by wielding the most potent weapon of all – financial support.

In 1987, as more African students sought admission to UWC following its open admissions policy, the state declared funding levels to be frozen at 1986 enrolment levels, an act which effectively paralysed student growth. Those institutions which agreed to 'open their doors' to the increasing numbers of young black people who demanded entry were severely chastised and experienced immense financial losses as a result of the state's action. The message was unequivocal: universities that wished to engage in this form of defiance did so at their own peril.

UWC's funding statistics for 1988 tell a story of strong state political retaliation. In that year, its student enrollment rose to equal 88% of the enrolment at UCT and 86% of that at Stellenbosch University. At the same time, UWC received from the state 36% of the funding allocated to UCT and 37% of the funding to Stellenbosch - a statistically crude but powerful indicator of the consequences to UWC of 'biting the hand that fed it.'

The open admissions policy was aimed also at allowing access to students from low income groups. However, no plan was put in place to augment the university's income to offset these students' inability to pay fees, which were already reduced to unsustainably low levels. The failure to confront the issue of unpaid student fees or to create a financial system to collect student debt, thrust the institution into a state of 'chronic financial instability,' exacerbated by its inability to access funding from third stream sources.

In 1988, UWC sued a local newspaper for alleging that student debt amounted to more than R17 million, proving in court that, by the time the case appeared before a judge, this figure was nearer R5 million. By 1992, however, student debt had indeed reached the R16-million mark.

An article in the Financial Mail for 26 May 2000 quoted UWC's financial director at the time as saying that in 1997 the university had 'hit the wall' financially, with student debt having escalated to more than R83 million. By the time the state came to UWC's aid in 2003, the R127 million rescue was timely but provided little more than was needed to clear UWC's debt to the bank. By 2004, the university's bank overdraft alone amounted to R142 million.

By the time of the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, UWC had experienced relative success, in terms of good quality leadership, the avoidance of total financial collapse, and its ability to maintain a reputation for academic work of a fairly high quality.

In 1996, Nelson Mandela lavished praise on UWC for its role in the political struggle and for maintaining the quality of its academic work through a period of turbulence. He conferred on UWC the status of 'proud national asset,' a description which would be recalled many times in later years by those called upon to make an argument for the university's continued existence, when it faced merger or closure.

Addressing the audience at the inauguration of a new rector in 1996, Mandela said:

*In every sphere of society, UWC students and staff from every section of our population are to be found. And if on travels to neighbouring Namibia, the story is repeated. It is indeed an institution that has attracted and produced men and women of the highest quality.*

*UWC was a model in ways far beyond its immediate concerns. The nation drew inspiration from its defiant transformation of itself from an apartheid ethnic institution into a proud national asset; from its concrete and manifest concern for the poor, for working people, for women and rural communities; and from its readiness to grapple with the kind of problems that a free and democratic South Africa was to deal with later.*

Despite these relative successes, UWC continued to struggle in comparison to the HWUs. In a 1990 study, it was found that the two neighbouring HWUs outperformed UWC on a number of quality criteria relating to research publications, research funding, the number of graduate students and research centres, and the numbers of staff with doctoral degrees, prompting the conclusion that UWC lacked the capacity to contribute to the scientific and technological development of a new South Africa (Jansen, 1991, quoted in Switzer, 1998).

## **2.5. Explaining change at UWC**

### **2.5.1 Changing student profile**

By 1997, there was clear evidence that UWC was in a state of financial decline. Student debt had escalated, and the University's debt recovery system was dysfunctional. Tough measures were put in place in an effort to regain control of the situation. Student protest escalated as up-front payments were demanded for the first time at registration. Students who were unable to pay, or who had not met promotion requirements, were excluded from registration.

Those who owed the university money were not allowed to graduate. As a result, a steady decline in student numbers was witnessed at UWC, at a time when the university sector was otherwise experiencing a surge in student enrolments.

Student numbers grew by 33% overall in the higher education sector in the period 1994-1998, while UWC experienced a 36.5% loss in student numbers in the period 1995-1999. In 1995, student enrolment was at a high of 14 890, but in 1999, only 9 453 students were enrolled. In particular, the statistics indicate a remarkable drop in numbers between 1998 (11 537) and 1999 (9 453).

Student numbers at South Africa's HBUs declined as students gained access in the post-apartheid era to universities which had previously been closed to them.

Within this context of falling student numbers and financial decline, 42 academics were retrenched with effect January 1999 from the University, without prior warning. In September 1998, the Rector had given academics the assurance that there would be no job losses, but only three days later, as student numbers dropped below what management regarded as viable levels, academics from a number of faculties were retrenched.

Demoralisation of students and staff set in as the university appeared to be teetering on the brink of collapse. Data from this study reveal that this period of loss and demoralisation had a significant impact on institutional memory, with academics many years later still experiencing tremendous anxiety and consternation over student numbers, coupled with a clear institutional obsession with counting and accounting for student FTEs (full-time equivalents).

Another significant trend in enrolment statistics indicates shifting enrolment ratios between African and coloured students. African student numbers grew from 27% of the student total in 1990 to 50% of total enrolment in 1995. This was in response to the 1987 strategy of open admissions to all races. However, by 2000, when student numbers were in decline, African enrolments accounted for 67% of the total, and by 2005, African students represented just one third of student enrolments (33%).

The phenomenon of declining African enrolment oddly coincided with a period when the university was in a state of recovery following the appointment of a new rector in 2001.

In an interview, this Rector spoke eloquently of the need to 'win back' certain aspects of the university's identity. Winning back students was one aim, but he also referred to winning staff over and out of a period of demoralisation. From 2001, numbers started climbing, reaching a high of 14 580 in 2005; this was no doubt taken by the leadership as a sign of public confidence in the university's academic status. It was clear that coloured students were returning to UWC, reversing an earlier trend of loss of this segment to other regional universities and technikons, but at the same time a significant loss of African students was experienced.

In a rather pragmatic approach to dealing with the problem, UWC's 2007 Annual Report explained that African numbers fell as a result of the '*normalisation of the university system, the effect of poorer schooling and the recovery of coloured enrolment,*' and noted further that '*the proportion of African enrolment in 2007 (36%) remains considerably higher than the proportion of Africans in the Western Cape.*'

The rather uncritical acceptance of this phenomenon often came up against stronger equity concerns. These were raised by academic staff interviewed for this research who regard the decline in African enrolment as a significant loss to the university, representative of an unfortunate departure from an earlier mission of serving the poor and disadvantaged. Clearly, increasing student fees (8% increase in 2006) and enforcing higher admission requirements affected steady financial recovery and an assumed increase in the quality of the student intake, but it also served to undermine the foundations of the institution's famous 1987 mission and its unique historical identity in promoting access and equity.

This has come to represent one of the major areas of contestation and ambivalence in the university, where the demands of marketisation and commercialisation have come up against the need for equity, redress, social development and upliftment. The management of UWC proudly proclaims the diversity of the student body, pointing out that it is no longer largely poor and under-prepared.

Sections of its academic community, however, view that specific transformation of the student body as a loss, and a signal that the traditional values and mission of the university have lost ground to the advances made by the new 'market' university.

Not only has there been a shift away from majority African enrolment but a movement can also be discerned away from serving poorer students. Official data from the Department of Education indicates that in 2000 a total of 31% of UWC students qualified for and received NSFAS funding, but that by 2005 only 19% of the students received this form of state financial assistance, with 81% not applying for such assistance.

This does suggest that a greater proportion of UWC students in 2005 (81%) were financing their own studies than in 2000 (69%). The state uses this ratio, of the proportion of students receiving state aid, as a proxy for the number of disadvantaged students enrolled at a specific university, and then proceeds to calculate the type and amount of academic support the university has to provide to ensure reasonable success rates in the light of financial aid statistics (CHE Profile of UWC for audit).

One inference that can be drawn from the statistics on student financial aid is that UWC is slowly abandoning its mission of service to the poor and disadvantaged, and is increasingly moving beyond the reach of the working class through higher student fees, more efficient student debt collection and the exercise of more rigorous entry requirements. Yet, despite the apparent decline in the overall disadvantage factor, the research data point to strong academic perceptions of large numbers of (academically and financially) struggling students, while UWC management have begun to construct new descriptions of the UWC student profile which reflect the changes discussed above in the disadvantage factor.

### **2.5.2 Changing enrolment patterns**

In considering change at UWC over the years 2000-2005, I am struck by the extent to which the university has very rapidly responded to demands from the state for the reconfiguration of the university system.

Nowhere is this more striking than in the advances UWC has made towards achieving national benchmarks related to the accelerated pursuit of knowledge creation in the sciences. To this end, UWC's enrolment patterns have shifted dramatically since 2000, when 22% of its students were enrolled in the areas of science and technology, to 31% in 2005.

This has required a concomitant shift away from education enrolment, assisted by the removal of state teacher bursaries and a general negative perception of the attractiveness of the teaching profession, as well as away from enrolments in human and social sciences.

The following table demonstrates these changes:

**TABLE 2.1: Changing enrolment patterns as a percentage of total enrolments**

Fields	HE system in 1994	HE system in 2000	NPHE targets 2001	UWC 1995	UWC 2000	UWC 2005	2010 DoE targets for UWC	CHE 2003 benchmar ks
<b>Science, engineering, technology</b>	25	24	30	14	22	31	36	30
<b>Business, commerce, management</b>	25	26	30	9	13	15	14	15
<b>Humanities and social sciences and education</b>	50	49	40	76	66	54	50	45

The benefits accruing from state differential subsidy of different fields act as a critical source of motivation for change and compliance, especially when one considers that UWC has always depended for its financial stability on a combination of state subsidy and student fees. Its own financial analysis, presented in 2009 at a workshop for UWC executive managers and Deans, indicates that, at that point in time, the most critical variables were, firstly, staff salaries; secondly, the bank overdraft rate; thirdly, state subsidy; and, fourthly, student fees. Any changes in these factors would have a critical impact on the university's financial situation.

Changing enrolment patterns in the higher education system, including universities and technikons, was regarded by the state as a critical means of reconfiguring the sector to contribute to national social and economic reconstruction.

Bunting (2002), notes that the earlier NCHE had set two conditions for the transformation of the sector. One was increasing participation in higher education and the other was *'improving the responsiveness of the higher education system to deliver the research, knowledge and highly trained people required for South Africa to compete in a rapidly changing international context.'* The White Paper subsequently took up this recommendation as a responsiveness goal, indicating that *'career-oriented programmes must be expanded, particularly in science and technology.'*

The NPHE set specific targets for enrolment, as shown in the table, and the new funding framework would lever enrolment change by providing differentiated subsidies in what were now referred to as Classification of Education Subject Matter (CESM) categories. CESM categories group disciplines into four areas, with the funding formula allocating different levels of support to each category. Education, law and psychology, for example, fall under CESM Category 1, earning one unit of subsidy, while life, physical and health sciences fall under Category 4 and earn four units of subsidy.

The shift towards science is one which is embraced wholeheartedly by senior management at UWC, who regard this as a major achievement and a proud symbol of the transition the university has made 'from HBU to excellence.'

Table 2.1 shows that by 2000, UWC had already initiated change in enrolment patterns in response to early policy (NCHE and the White Paper), well before the NPHE invoked specific targets and levers to facilitate policy implementation. By 2003, UWC had exceeded NPHE recommendations and by 2005 was well on the way to meeting the new and revised CHE performance indicators for measuring 'well-functioning' universities.

The research data will show the impact of these shifts on quality and the academic project. The varied responses of academics to these new demands for compliance initiated by UWC will indicate the ambivalence with which they regard the university's overzealous response to transformation signals emanating from the state.

It is clear that UWC has embraced higher education policy goals, and has made extraordinary efforts to meet and exceed the targets set by the state. Jansen et al (2007) have argued for the multiplicity of factors impacting institutional change and policy implementation, explaining that:

*Institutional change bows neither to central planning, nor market forces; it yields neither to global pressures nor local realities; it responds neither to institutional inertia nor external pressures. Rather, higher education change, whether planned or incidental, takes its pace and direction from the interaction among these variables, shaped by particular institutional contexts (Jansen et al 2007).*

This is indeed the case for UWC, and I will argue that it was the interplay amongst a host of factors that created within this university a propensity for responsiveness, an inclination for compliance.

First amongst these factors is the history and context of the university itself, as a forerunner in democratising participation in higher education, declaring its doors open to all races and to those ill-prepared for university by the schooling system. These values, tied to a mission of social development and service to the disadvantaged communities from which the students hailed, have carved an institutional identity closely associated with the notion of a socially-useful university. And it is this precise value that is embedded in the principles of massification, democratic participation, equity, redress and relevance that have guided state reforms towards transforming higher education in South Africa.

The critical dimension impacting the rate of change and the degree of compliance is precisely the neat correspondence and overlap between the social and political values developed in the context of the anti-apartheid struggle at UWC and the current principles guiding state-directed change. In short, UWC has not been expected to behave much differently in accordance with the fundamental principles and values underpinning higher education transformation.

Ramirez (2005) argues that universities globally are changing, in response to shared and networked values, in the direction of greater inclusiveness and usefulness. Scharpf (1987) was quoted by Muller (2003) in developing an argument to explain the varied degree of institutional responsiveness to demands for change, claiming that:

*Institutional theory shows that organisations are easier to influence from without only when the outside signals correspond to their internal criteria of, and learnt capacities for, relevance. When the external signals go against these, they become highly resistant: they are able to 'ignore control signals, to forego incentives, and to absorb sanctions, without changing their ways in the direction desired by government policy makers' (Scharpf 1987).*

Together these theorists support the explanation for change outlined above, namely that where there exists a strong correspondence between institutional values and those embedded in state policy, change is likely to happen more rapidly and in the direction required by policy.

A second explanation for the keen responsiveness of UWC to state demands is a more pragmatic one. Simply put, the harsh consequences of 'biting the hand that feeds it' is, arguably, strongly inscribed in UWC's institutional memory, dating back to the punitive financial measures taken by the apartheid state against the university's show of resistance in declaring itself open to all races.

My investigation into UWC's financial records (2007-2009) indicates that state funding, through subsidy and additional funds it has managed to attract for specific activities and projects, accounts for almost 50% of the university's operational budget, and that any change in the portion of its budget sourced from the state will have a dramatic impact on sustainability. Concerted attempts have been made to attract more third stream income to the university, and these have undeniably been successful, but private income will not sustain the university's operations. An example is the newly-constructed Life Sciences building. A symbol of UWC's recent success in attracting donor funds, it is a world-class facility costing R440 million. Atlantic Philanthropies, a keen supporter of UWC's mission, donated the sizable amount of R132 million for this single project, yet the Department of Education's pledge of R220 million serves as stark reminder that the university will continue to rely largely on state funding for its sustainability.

Interestingly, the CHE, in a research report entitled *Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy and the Corporatised University in Contemporary South Africa*, contributed to a debate sparked by accusations by prominent academics in South Africa (Jansen, 2004; Bundy, 2005) about the steady erosion of academic freedom in the post-apartheid state, by arguing that:

*State financing of the higher education system enhances the power of state bureaucrats and political élites. While public funding inevitably comprises a sizable component of the university system, it is important that higher education managers open up other income streams (apart from student fees) to support their institutions' activities and that this is seen as an opportunity, where necessary, to speak with an independent voice (CHE, 2006: 26).*

This view echoes the argument made by Slaughter and Leslie (2006) on the need for universities to become less dependent on state funding:

*For all universities worldwide, the balance must come from the private sector, pushing universities inexorably into 'academic capitalism' (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997) and multiple stakeholder contracts, and away from the singular influence of the state.*

It is apparent that change at UWC can be explained with reference to a combination of factors. Excessive reliance on state funding, the difficult road to building private income, correspondence between values and learnt capacities for social transformation and relevance, and the painful memory of state retaliation against non-compliance have together created a type of institutional response that is extreme and overzealous. Indeed, it surpasses traditional notions of compliance embedded in the literature on institutional change, notions such as formal compliance (Jansen et al, 2007), and swimming or coping (Trowler, 1997).

## **2.6. The transition: 'Moving UWC from HBU to excellence'**

### **2.6.1 Understanding the transition**

UWC, at the time of this study, was an institution in transition, from an HBU with a strong community-orientation in its mission and work, to a 'market' university eager to enter the race towards entrepreneurialism, and to compete with the best, not only in the traditional areas of teaching and research but also in new areas of innovation and commercialisation.

In the oft-repeated words from the Rector at the time (2008), this transition required 'moving UWC from HBU to excellence' within a strategy designed to create a 'modern learning culture,' in which UWC would be a symbol of the 'achievement of greatness' and a signifier to the international community that 'immense possibilities exist in all spheres in South Africa.'

Equally important, in the post-apartheid era, was that its relationship with the state would change, from an adversarial one, continuously and deeply challenging policy designed to shape universities into entities serving the state, to a relationship of enthusiastic compliance and zealous pursuit of the state's goals and objectives for transformation.

In this section, I will argue that the defining moment, one signaling a dramatic change in this particular university's relationship with the state, was when UWC was able to persuade government that it should remain an independent university, and that it should not suffer the fate of a merger with a technikon in its region.

This was at a time when public perception was united against historically black universities; and no doubt some HBUs at the post-apartheid moment did not do justice to the title of university (Jansen, 2004).

The 2002 draft report of the National Working Group on restructuring the higher education sector recommended the merger of UWC with a neighbouring technikon. The university's management was determined to overturn the recommendation. It eventually achieved this by engaging with government on the basis of, firstly, the university's reputation as an institution which had played a key role in the anti-apartheid struggle, challenging the apartheid government ideologically and physically, and, secondly, as an HDI which had managed to maintain a fairly strong academic reputation despite these struggles.

I quote a senior institutional manager who describes UWC's engagement with the state on this matter as a strategy of contestation aimed at forcing the state to acknowledge and reward the university's contribution to political change:

*We began to speak to ministers, to talk about this university and how brave it was in struggle, how it was still up to then. How it had produced more black graduates than any other university. How there was incredible potential here. How there were already pockets of scientific endeavour developing which were equal to the best in this country. And for them not to acknowledge that and to destroy that history is to interfere dramatically within an almost aspirational trajectory. We had aspired to be free and had worked assiduously to be free. Now, or given what's inside this university, there's a possibility that it can aspire now to deal with the next set of freedom challenges, the knowledge challenge. For us, that is the fundamental next set of freedom challenges. And for them to cut this short is to destroy the one university who because of its history can with integrity be fore-grounded as aspirational (From Interview with Thabo).*

On June 4, 2002, the Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, himself a Professor of Human Rights at UWC during the period 1990-1994, at the height of the apartheid struggle, responded to a question in Parliament as follows:

*Mr Ebrahim asked why the University of the Western Cape (UWC) was not merged with Peninsula Technikon (Pentech) as it was initially proposed.*

*The Minister explained that there had been many impressive institutional changes and positive academic developments at UWC that made it unwise to merge it with Pentech (Parliamentary Monitoring Group <http://www.pmg.org.za>).*

In return for escaping the fate of a merger, UWC had to demonstrate its viability into the twenty-first century, meaning essentially its viability as a market university. With this assurance, it was granted 170 million rands in recapitalisation funding; this was to meet the costs of the incorporation of the University of Stellenbosch's Faculty of Dentistry and of housing a shared regional nursing platform, as well as to redress past inequalities and place the university on a more secure financial footing.

This successful engagement with the state ensured UWC's continued survival. As a consequence, however, it had produced a single-minded determination on the part of institutional management to be seen to measure up to the best universities in South Africa, and, as a corollary, finally and unquestionably to bury the label of inferiority associated with its status as a historically disadvantaged and historically black university. Importantly, that success would signal a change in UWC's relationship with the state. In its zeal to prove its worth as a viable independent university, it would participate enthusiastically in all of the state's plans and goals for transformation. Contestation would become a thing of the past, and a new relationship with the state would emerge, with UWC as the leading partner in higher education transformation, serving the needs of the post-apartheid state and economy enthusiastically, often uncritically.

A senior manager described the new relationship between the state and UWC in 2008 as follows:

*The relationship's been very respectful. It's not one of tension and conflict. But it's also saying something about civility and a respectful approach and understanding that there was a time when the battle was fought as a battle and you had to go to war. I think it's understanding that in the new environment the state is not the enemy and the state is part of society... in a sense of the triple helix of the state and the sacred space universities occupy in society and the role that business and others with economic interests will pursue. If one sees the state as part of an understanding of civil society, then the relationship must be a positive one. It can't be one that's acrimonious and fraught by unnecessary tensions and politicking (From interview with Rafieck).*

This study will show that UWC has often exceeded the pace of the state's pursuance of its own policy goals. I have termed this tendency 'overzealousness', characterised by over-enthusiastic pursuit of the goals of economic and social transformation and a tendency to overtake the state's agenda of higher education reform.

## 2.6.2 Overzealous responsiveness

In July, 2002, the Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, delivered a seminal speech in which he focused on key achievements that needed to be made in areas of science, technology and development, at the unveiling of UWC's Cray supercomputers.

Presented below are extracts from this speech; I would argue that these form a number of fundamental platforms of reform required by universities, with which UWC is certainly keen to engage. Speaking about advances in bioinformatics which led to the acquisition of the supercomputers, the Minister said:

*I believe the work that you are doing is going a long way towards implementing one of the priorities of the NPHE, that of sustaining current research strengths and to promoting the kinds of research and other knowledge outputs required in meeting national development needs.*

Referring to the continuing and worrying dominance of research outputs by aging white academics, he noted that the Ministry of Education would expect universities to be engaged in the following:

- *Promoting equity of access and outcomes and to redress past inequalities through ensuring that student and staff profiles reflect the demographic composition of South African society*
- *Increasing outputs of postgraduate students particularly at masters and doctoral levels. In this regard I am pleased to see so many young black scientists this morning. I am informed that UWC has become the premier site for black scientists to perform research in the life sciences.*

Referring to the President's State of the Nation address in February, 2001, the Minister continued:

*President Mbeki said that "the application of modern communication and information technology in the fields of education, health, commerce and government will be expedited". While some only think of ICT as a tool to communicate, you have shown through the use of bioinformatics, which combines computers and information technology and biology, that it is possible to bridge the digital divide. You have also managed to focus your research on African problems such as TB, malaria and HIV/AIDS. You have also managed to act as an incubator for Africa's only bioinformatics company, Electric Genetics.*

*Last week I was talking to eminent business leaders... As entrepreneurs, their primary interest was on how education, and in particular science and technology, could help grow our economy. I indicated that there is an inextricable link between the level of innovation and knowledge production and economic growth. The ability of our higher education institutions to generate the knowledge stock must be supported by mechanisms of translating the knowledge into innovative businesses. The private sector and ourselves must find ways of increasing our investment in start-up ventures such as your incubator company, to unlock the knowledge generated by our higher education institutions so that we can show that science is helping to make a better life for all.*

I have quoted extensively from the Minister's speech in order to show the nature and intensity of the new expectations of universities, enshrined in policy and constantly reiterated by high-ranking state officials such as the Minister of Education. That these expectations represent strong exogenous pressures on universities to change the way they operate in the post-apartheid era is indisputable. The fact that this speech was made in July 2002 is in itself a powerful indicator that UWC had by then already made a commitment, and had taken determined steps to change its focus in the direction required by the state.

Its invitation to the Minister of Education to preside over these proceedings, which involved unveiling new developments in science and technology, demonstrated UWC's confidence in its own capacity for transformation and responsiveness, and served as a strong indicator both to the university and the broader higher education community of its future aspirations and its approach to engaging with external transformation demands.

Subsequently, in November 2003, the Minister addressed the National Assembly on the implementation of the government's programme for transformation of the higher education sector, which included restructuring plans involving mergers and incorporations. In this speech, he quoted from the Association of Commonwealth Universities consultation document, *Engagement as a Core Value for the University* (April 2001), in support of the transformation direction followed by the South African state, as follows:

*The world depends increasingly on universities for knowledge, prosperity, health and policy-thinking. Universities are thus required to become engines of development for people, institutions and democracy in general. Engagement defines the whole orientation and tone of a university's policy and practice. Mission statements, strategic planning, teaching and learning policies and research directions must evince and encourage respect for the concerns and challenges faced by society.*

By November, 2004, this notion of engagement had found its way into the UWC Institutional Operating Plan: 2004-2009, and had begun to dominate the University's own descriptive discourse:

*The Engaged University envisions a future that transcends past struggles in favour of an institution that is shaped by the congruencies and contradictions between transformation and global competitiveness, accelerated by technological advances.*

Taken together, the above phenomena of the university's adoption of the state-ordained mission of engagement and its keen participation in new knowledge generation in science for technology transfer can be viewed as critical examples of an approach to forging new relationships with the post-apartheid state.

These are underpinned by a strong commitment to compliance through zealous pursuit of policy goals and objectives.

I argued earlier that overzealous responsiveness has sometimes led to an eagerness to embrace new roles for the university in an uncritical and often undemocratic manner, to the extent that the research data will show that the university community has often been caught by surprise by pronouncements from its leadership on the adoption of a new vision (the engaged university), a new mission (moving UWC from HBU to excellence) new directions (becoming entrepreneurial), or new areas of focus (growing science and technology).

The above narrative paints a picture of a university in transition. For UWC, the most critical embodiment or symbol of this transition is its movement from HBU to excellence, or in UWC jargon, 'shedding the HBU label.' The discourse of 'movement' polarises the HBU and excellence, and has the effect of encouraging a discourse which creates false dichotomies, of teaching focus versus research-led university, of academic development versus excellence, or of undergraduate versus postgraduate focus. Certain components of these couplings are associated with the past HBU identity (teaching focus; undergraduate focus; academic development focus; community work) and others with the university's new identity (excellence; research-led, postgraduate focus; output and throughput).

A major dilemma facing the institution is negotiating this transition from historically disadvantaged and black university to one which is able to compete locally and globally with the best. The leadership of UWC has adopted the discourse of 'engagement' to characterise the new institution they hope UWC will become, but the notion of engagement, as applied by UWC, often stands in contrast to its earlier mission of serving communities of the poor and disadvantaged.

UWC's Institutional Operating Plan 2004-2009 describes the 'engaged' university as operating quite differently to the past one. It attracts more middle-class students who are able to pay their way, attracts more donor funding, serves high achievers as well as educationally under-prepared learners, and engages in high-level research which is contractable and thus able to serve technology transfer functions.

The research data will show that the values and behaviours desired by the 'engaged university' are so inimical to past patterns of behaviours and values as to engender a kind of ideological schizophrenia. This is evidenced in UWC management's constant attempts to balance multiple identities as it brokers its way forward, 'taking UWC from HBU to excellence.'

This schizophrenia is best observed when appeals are made to a past of neglect and discrimination - the historically disadvantaged blackness which thrust the university into the forefront in its province in the struggle for political change – while almost simultaneously the university's leadership appeals for an abandonment of past identity, which it claims will only hold it back and retard its development.

*This university's role in the liberation of our country will be forever celebrated in the annals of South Africa and each one of us who wears its badge and calls her Alma Mater shares in this glorious history. But our honour is not restricted to our role in struggle...*

*Now (this university) has a new mandate: to support the social and economic transformation of our country in order to secure the political freedom we have won. A key aspect of our transformation, some might say THE key to the possibility of our success as a nation, is the development of a strong learning culture in South Africa, together with the development of our capacity to preserve and disseminate the best knowledge we already have access to, while also creating new knowledge and new technologies at the highest intellectual level (From an interview with Thabo).*

The above also demonstrates the rationale behind the university's willingness to engage in the state's transformation efforts. To this end, the speaker couples UWC's past leading role in the apartheid struggle with a conceptualisation of post-apartheid transformation as struggle, offering an immediate political justification for UWC's willingness to restructure in line with national goals and priorities.

### 2.6.3 Shedding the HBU label

It is important to understand this ideological preoccupation with shedding the HBU label, since it is fundamental to understanding the nature of change in the university, the impetus for change, and the academic responses to change.

Shedding the HBU label involves more than just being able to persuade others of the new value of the institution, that it will not succumb to financial, governance and quality crises as other HBUs have done, and hence that it can survive independently – unmerged and unincorporated. In the introduction to the IOP: 2004-2009 report, a sustainable scenario for UWC is sketched out. It describes and juxtaposes three options for the future. One is UWC as Historically Disadvantaged University, another is the Global Market-driven University, and the third is the Engaged University. The first two scenarios, mere caricatures, are rejected in the document in favour of a far more persuasive description, as follows:

*The Engaged University envisions a future that transcends past struggles in favour of an institution that is shaped by the congruencies and contradictions between transformation and global competitiveness accelerated by technological advances. ..The institution offers economically viable and financially sustainable programmes, achieves excellence in teaching and learning and great heights of distinction and competitiveness in selected priority areas.*

In practice, shedding the HBU label has meant, firstly, a shift from equitable resource allocation within the institution to a managerially-led 'strategic allocation of funds' to selected areas that will attract the pecuniary attention of the state, business and industry and international partners.

Secondly, shedding the HBU label has implications for academics attempting to balance teaching and research.

Bluntly expressed, weak and academically less competent students who continue to populate the historically disadvantaged and black universities are more likely to succeed when lecturers invest more time and energy in teaching. The new 'engaged' university, however, values research productivity more than good teaching, allocating to the former greater material rewards through productivity incentive schemes, annual awards and opportunities for promotion.

Thirdly, shedding the HBU label may come to mean paying lip service to community service and social development, since this kind of social engagement earns more accolades than foreign currency.

In this regard, the IOP notes that retaining the HBU label is associated with an '*aggressive and impotent focus on social issues leading to poor relationships with outside agencies and a culture of blame and recrimination,*' while the new and engaged university adopts '*a curricular emphasis on social transformation and development, one that balances a global perspective with attention to local issues and problems.*'

#### **2.6.4. A source of change: Targeting the HBUs**

Of the original ten HBUs, two retained an independent existence, not merged nor incorporated, after the 2002 restructuring process. UWC was one of these. The others were dismantled and merged. Debt accumulated over more than 40 years, maladministration and staff demoralisation were factors leading to the downfall of many of the HBUs. It was argued that the quality of knowledge imparted in these universities was questionable, that declining state subsidies, falling student numbers and a concomitant decline in income from student fees had led to institutional bankruptcy. Inadequate library resources and the lack of facilities for staff and students within walking distance further contributed to the downfall of the HBUs.

Many of these circumstances were of their own making, but to a significant degree, many aspects impacting structural decay were beyond their control, such as the legacy of apartheid era neglect and insufficient post-apartheid redress.

By 2003, some strong proponents of state policy were arguing for the dismantling of all HBUs, reasoning that creating a new higher education landscape would require the HBUs to surrender their independent status and agree to be merged with stronger, often previously white and advantaged institutions, in order that the policy goals of creating a single, strong and unified higher education sector be realised. In attempting to persuade the HBUs to surrender quietly, Badat, then the head of the CHE, warned that restructuring the higher education landscape would entail '*pain, loss and disruption*' and that there was little to be gained by HBUs equating transformation with the provision of '*institutional redress to overcome the legacy of disadvantage under apartheid,*' as this approach would mean that '*institutional survival at all costs instead of the national interest can easily become the leitmotif*' of transformation (Badat, 2004: 23--24).

Badat continued his argument for dismantling the HDIs:

*This disadvantage, however, is not just historical. It is also related to the current capacities of the historically black institutions to pursue excellence and provide quality experiences and outcomes, and to contribute to economic and social reconstruction and development (Badat, 2004: 2).*

On another level, it could be argued that UWC was led to the inevitable conclusion that its own survival as an independent university in the post-apartheid era depended on disengaging itself from its past as a historically disadvantaged institution by observing the fate of other HBUs/HDIs in the restructured higher education landscape.

## **7. Conclusion**

In this chapter I offered an account of the history of UWC from its inception to the present time. I traced its departure from its adversarial stance towards the state's intervention in the affairs of universities during apartheid, to becoming a champion, rather than a voice of critique, of the transformation efforts of the post-apartheid state.

I have offered explanations of UWC's willingness to comply with and remain responsive to the demands of the South African state, and its desire to forge a new relationship with the state characterised by its attempts to shift from HBU to a university of exceptional quality, within the state's conceptualisation of good quality in higher education.

I have suggested that UWC's transition, and the accompanying shift in its core values and mission, have given rise to new areas of contestation and tension within the university. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 will show how this terrain of conflict impacts on academics' responses to the implementation of quality improvement processes and policies.

The next chapter will provide a comprehensive literature review, offering a basis for theorising the relationship between the state and higher education in the areas of quality and quality improvement.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Presenting the argument:

#### Literature review and conceptual framework

##### 3.1. Introduction

This review will analyse the literature on quality in higher education by first examining descriptions of what quality is and how it is frequently understood. Secondly, it will give an account of various research studies into how the working lives of academics have changed as a consequence of changes in the form and purpose of higher education. Thirdly, the review will examine policy reform and the changing relationship between the state and higher education in South Africa with regard to quality. Fourth, a notion of quality as politics (Lemaitre, 2002) in the context of the above changes will be explored, and accounts in the literature of different models of and approaches to quality assurance in higher education will be examined. Fifth, the review will explore the idea of the rise of an audit culture as a consequence of measuring quality within an accountability framework. Sixth, I will present the theory of the Evaluative State as a conceptual framework for this research, and as a construct through which to examine higher education reform in relation to the introduction of new quality regimes in universities. Finally, the chapter will conclude by examining gaps in the literature which this study intends to address.

The purpose of my research is to understand different positions regarding what quality is in higher education in South Africa, to understand the roots of these positions, and to understand how differences regarding views of quality and how it ought to be improved lead to contestation as universities respond to higher education quality policy.

Tam (2001) has argued that quality is understood differently by different stakeholders in higher education, and that this results in the employment of different internal and external approaches to monitoring and evaluating quality. She has further suggested that these multiple views also give rise to power struggles, in which different positions constantly struggle to be taken into account in various higher education quality processes.

My work in higher education had suggested that that academics in South African universities take an approach to quality which differs from that of the state and many university managers, and that these differences are related to varying perceptions of the role and function of

universities in society. Differences in views of what quality is and how it should be improved are likely to lead to conflict and resentment on the part of academics, as they are expected to implement internal and external quality policies and processes which they may not support ideologically.

Some theorists have described responses from academics to changes in higher education and the imposition of new quality regimes in negative ways. Studies by Halsey (1992, 2002), Kinman and Jones (2003) and many other writers have identified a 'sense of loss' (Bundy, 2005, p.89) amongst academics, as the imposition of new quality regimes are regarded as signaling a major change in the way universities function. Trow (1989) has described academics poetically and politically as powerless, as a result of their position in a rapidly changing higher education landscape. Other studies have demonstrated the ways in which academics have attempted to offer resistance to quality assurance and quality evaluation policy.

My own experience in a university has shown that academics, rather than behaving passively, have demonstrated various forms of active engagement with quality policies, ranging from acceptance to resistance and from compliance to internalisation (Trowler, 1997).

My research will use a definition of quality as stakeholder driven, as proposed by Harvey and Green and supported by Tam. I will also use Harvey and Green's classification of quality as excellence, fitness for purpose, value for money, transformation and perfection.

### **3.2. Defining quality**

Pirsig (1974) in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, poses the following dilemma about defining quality:

*Quality ... you know what it is, yet you don't know what it is. But that's self-contradictory. But some things are better than others, that is, they have more quality. But when you try to say what the quality is, apart from the things that have it, it all goes poof! There's nothing to talk about. But if you can't say what quality is, how do you know what it is, or how do you know that it even exists? If no-one knows what it is, then for all practical purposes, it doesn't exist at all. But for all practical purposes, it really does exist. What else are the grades based on? Why else would people pay fortunes for some things and throw others in the trash pile? Obviously, some things are better than others...but what's the "betterness"? So round and round you go, spinning mental wheels and nowhere finding anyplace to get traction. What the hell is Quality? What is it? (1974: 184)*

Doherty (1994) suggests that Pirsig's (1974) famous search for the meaning of quality through the act of motorcycle riding and maintenance, leads him to conclude not only that quality is an elusive concept but that it might be better not to define it at all. This gives rise to what Doherty (1994) refers to as the 'I-can't-define-it-but-I-know-it-exists' notion of quality.

Giertz (2001) has argued that it is no longer enough to accept a tacit understanding of quality in higher education such as the one proposed by Doherty (1994), one which is assumed to be shared by those inside higher education but which is impossible to define beyond asserting that 'we know it when we see it.' It is no longer enough, Giertz (2001) maintains, because more and more stakeholders – the state, parents, business and industry, students and society – want to contribute to deciding what quality is in higher education. And in order to be able to negotiate quality meanings, those meanings and understandings have to be made explicit and defined.

Despite the difficulties identified by Pirsig (1974), Harvey and Green (1993) have defined quality in five different ways: as excellence, fitness for purpose, value for money, transformation, and perfection. These definitions have been reworked and reconstructed by many writers, as attempts have been made to locate quality policy and practices within the Harvey and Green framework.

Lomas (2002), in a paper entitled, *Does the development of mass education mean the end of quality?* reports on findings of research conducted into the views of university senior management who were asked to rate these definitions. The notion of quality as fitness for purpose received the most support, closely followed by transformation, with value for money receiving the lowest ratings. Interestingly, in research conducted at almost the same time in South Africa, Lockett (2003) found that senior staff whom she interviewed, in this case quality assurance managers, also demonstrated preference for a fitness for purpose approach, similar to the approach she observed emerging within the South Africa's Higher Education Quality Committee.

What is it about fitness for purpose that makes it popular with university managers? Lomas (2002) suggests that this approach, upon which many quality agencies base their work, encourages institutes to adhere to their own goals and objectives by requiring them to 'say what they do, do what they say and then prove it to a third party' (Lomas, 2002).

Thus fitness for purpose appears to grant greater autonomy to institutions to determine their own programmes and goals, conferring on external assessors the responsibility only of judging the 'extent to which the processes, outputs and outcomes of the organisation are indeed fulfilling their intended purposes' (Luckett, 2003).

But Newby (1999) argues that greater standardisation (which he terms McDonaldisation) of the goals and purposes of higher education as reflected in mission statements, renders higher education institutions so alike as to defeat the purpose of quality evaluation based on diversity of mission. Such standardisation makes a fitness for purpose approach to quality attractive to institutional managers, yet ineffective in facilitating quality judgments across the higher education sector.

The transformation approach places students at the centre of quality. Tam (2001) suggests that the central aim of higher education should be to maximise students' educational and emotional development, and argues further that to be considered 'excellent' universities must bring about 'positive change' in students (Tam, 2001).

The one complicated feature of this approach is that for positive change to occur, students have to contribute significantly to their own intellectual and emotional development, a variable which cannot be incorporated in the measurement of quality.

Many theorists have questioned whether it is possible to devise a common notion of quality. Doherty (1994) questioned whether there could ever be a unified theory of quality, while Giertz (2001) argued for the necessity of developing a generic notion of quality, maintaining that a lack of consensus on what quality is makes it almost impossible to assess it or improve it.

Harvey and Green (1993), however, argued that quality cannot be considered a unitary concept, but rather that multiple perspectives of quality exist amongst different interest groups in education. They suggested that higher education's stakeholders – its students, academics, and prospective employers, all have different interests with regard to higher education and therefore pursue different notions of quality.

In their view, therefore, the concept of quality is relative; indeed, it is specifically stakeholder-relative. In terms of devising quality assessments which are sensitive to multiple perspectives, Harvey and Green (1993) suggest that:

*The best that can be achieved is to define as clearly as possible the criteria that each stakeholder uses when judging quality, and for these competing views to be taken into account when assessments of quality are undertaken (1993: 28).*

Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2002) have attempted to develop a generic model for quality in higher education, one which would allow for greater agreement on how to enhance and evaluate quality in the universities. They presented four models of quality, a Transformative model, focused on adding value to the capabilities of students; an Engagement model which emphasises student learning and highlights the role played by academics, administrators and students in quality improvement; a University of Learning model, which proposes that learning is central to all the core functions of a university; and a Model of a Responsive University, built around the idea that universities will have to be externally responsive and service-oriented to thrive. Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2002) further proposed a generic model, a common notion of quality, which attempted to incorporate complementary features of all four models.

This research will use the definitions of quality proposed by Harvey and Green (1993), as excellence, fitness for purpose, value for money, transformation and perfection, and will examine academics' and institutional managers' beliefs about quality in relation to these. I will also use Harvey and Green's notion of quality as stakeholder-relative as a way of accounting for the presence of multiple definitions of quality amongst academics and managers at UWC.

### **3.3 Academics and change**

A number of research studies have been conducted into the impact of changes in higher education on the working lives of academics (Trowler (1997, 1998), Kinman and Jones (2003), Chalmers (1998), Jeliaskova (2002), McInnis (2000), Menon (2003), Winter, Taylor and Sarros (2000) and Newton (2000, 2002a and 2002b).

Bearing depressing titles such as *Trouble at the mill* (Winter, Taylor and Sarros, 2000), *Feeding the beast* (Newton, 2000) and *Running up the down escalator* (Kinman and Jones, 2003), the majority of these studies lament the effects of these changes on academics' working lives.

Together they present a picture of a decline in academic freedom, deteriorating working conditions, an increase in meaningless tasks which consume academics' energy, and the rising negative effects of psychological stress on their well-being. The concepts of deprofessionalisation and the proletarianisation of the profession have been coined to describe a global state of despair and helplessness brought on by the implementation of quality policies in New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. Webster and Mosoetsa (2001) also entered the fray, revealing similar patterns among academics in South African universities.

Research is showing that a university career is no longer the highly satisfying and rewarding choice it once was. Academics are now regretting their career decisions, are searching for opportunities to leave the sector, and are discouraging their students from entering the profession.

Factors such as the move towards massification without an attendant increase in resourcing, intensification of state scrutiny of their performance, and demands for greater accountability, efficiency and quality (Kinman and Jones, 2003) have led to job dissatisfaction and low morale.

A shift from a hands-off type of management style to stronger control by institutional management has been identified with a move to a new managerialism (Henkel, 1997). New systems of quality assurance and monitoring, both internal and external, have resulted in increased scrutiny of performance and work (especially administrative) overload (Chalmers, 1998).

Further studies have been contributed by those researching forms of response to these changing conditions (Trowler, 1997; Newton, 2000 and 2002). Newton especially, through his use of insider research, has provided particularly riveting accounts of the responses of academics to these changes.

Rather than lamenting academics' powerlessness, these researchers have attempted to show the ways in which academic responses during implementation have served to change and remake policy. Trowler has identified four forms of response strategy: sinking, swimming, coping and active policy manipulation.

He has argued that the latter strategy especially can be associated with active attempts by academics to change policy to suit their own values and conditions. Newton too has characterised academics as ‘active makers and shakers’ of policy as they respond to, adapt, resist and ‘work around policy’ (Newton, 2000: 162).

### **3.4 Quality and higher education policy in South Africa**

#### **3.4.1 An overview of the literature**

The debate in the literature in South Africa about quality and the restructuring of higher education revolves around a number of identifiable themes. Significant overlap exists between these themes, as intellectuals grapple with the complexities of policy making and policy implementation directed towards change in higher education.

One major theme is the complexity of attempting to pursue the goals of equity and development simultaneously. Another is the impact of global dimensions or globalisation on the higher education policy making process, focusing also on the concept of massification. Together, these first two themes are concerned with identifying and analysing the forces of change, internal and external, which impacted the policy agenda and resultant forms of state action in South Africa.

The nature, form and changing role of the post-apartheid state and its relationship with the higher education sector is a third major identifiable theme. Quality assurance, and related issues such as curriculum alignment and the changing nature of the academic workplace, comprise another theme, albeit one more limited in terms of published contributions. Lastly, there exists a body of literature which documents and analyses the nature of change in higher education in the post-apartheid era. It describes policy-directed changes which had so transformed the sector by 2010 that it barely resembled the system inherited by the new state in 1994.

Within these broad themes in the literature, one can identify seminal individual contributions. These specific works served to provoke debate and shift discussion towards specific complex phenomena. First amongst them was Jansen’s unforgettable presentation on the occasion of the 41<sup>st</sup> T.B Davie Memorial Lecture at UCT in August, 2004 (Jansen, 2004).

The presentation, entitled *Accounting for Autonomy*, was later published and generated a huge amount of intellectual activity - seminars, position papers and various other publications - concerned with characterising the post-apartheid state's interaction with universities.

A second seminal work was Colin Bundy's *Global Patterns, local options?* published in June, 2005, which drew attention to the global pattern of higher education change. Bundy argued for caution, warning of the negative consequences of these global reform packages for academics and academia in different parts of the world. A flurry of responses followed his article, most notably from Lis Lange (2006) and Mala Singh (2006), both senior staff on the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of South Africa and central role players in the quality assurance reform arena.

### **3.4.2 Globalised Policy: Higher education and economic growth**

Maassen and Cloete (2004) have argued that a fair amount of consensus existed within reform efforts all over the world in the 1990s and subsequent years, and that such reform was '*strongly affected by global trends and pressures*,' an effect broadly referred to as globalisation. Lemaitre (2002) defines globalisation as a cultural, political and economic imposition and likens its effect to that of imperialism. Lemaitre argues that nations conquered by imperialist forces modern nation states have been unable to resist the rules of the market; are failing to preserve their cultural autonomy and national identities are increasingly under attack.

Bundy (2005) characterises global changes in higher education systems in the following way:

*These similarities between developments in higher education across a number of societies reflect a convergence of political and ideology more broadly. That is, the transformation of universities in all advanced capitalist countries is implicated in an epochal shift (2005: 86).*

Maassen and Cloete (2004) identified factors which stimulated these common global reform initiatives; these factors included the emergence of new globalised financial markets, an increase in the scope and variety of global communication, and an expansion of global free trade agreements.

They argued that such global changes formed a backdrop against which global reforms of higher education systems would proceed, and further, that global economic developments encouraged the common understanding that higher education funded by the state should become '*part of national development policies in countries all over the world*' (Maassen and Cloete, 2004).

The significance of the role of public higher education in economic development, although broadly accepted in the literature in recent years (Pillay, 2009), was a fairly novel idea, at least in the education policy arena in 1996, when the NCHE first expressed this link as follows:

*Only higher education can deliver the requisite research, the training of highly skilled personpower, and the creation of relevant, useful knowledge to equip a developing society with the capacity to participate competitively in a rapidly altering national and global context. The Commission has argued that South Africa's higher education system must be transformed to play this role (1996:15).*

The NCHE report (NCHE, 1996) identified a chronic mismatch between higher education's output and the needs of a modernising economy. The report also made very clear the state's position in terms of expecting higher education to contribute to national growth and international competitiveness. This early policy framework laid the basis for a subsequent articulation of principles and goals, especially those related to economic growth and development, and identified the need to increase participation in higher education in order to intensify the production of '*highly trained personpower... to produce the skills and technological innovations necessary for successful economic participation in the labour market (1996: 2).*

Early policy (DOE, 1996 and 1997) played a critical role in making a case '*for the social and public value*' (CHE, 2004) of higher education and promoting the idea that South Africa should not fall further behind than it already had in terms of its position in the global economy.

Many theorists have debated the restructuring decisions and the pace of reform adopted by the South African state. Fataar (2003) argued that globalisation, more accurately described by him as '*globally inspired processes,*' had a powerful impact on policy formulation in the post-apartheid era and compelled the state to adopt '*a more interventionist approach*' to steering the higher education system (2003: 33).

Bundy (2005) has suggested that the post-apartheid state was confronted with a need to act quickly and decisively to make up for lost opportunities for participation in the global economy. In his view, South Africa had emerged from a lengthy period of international apartheid-induced isolation. Its entry into the global arena had been delayed as a consequence, and the resultant sense of anxiety had driven the frenetic pace of state reform (Bundy, 2005).

Restructuring efforts by the state were grounded in the belief that apartheid education had limited individuals' opportunities for social and economic growth and for mobility, and in so doing had limited the contribution the country was able to make to the global economy. Policy making in all spheres was driven by the belief that the country had to become internationally competitive or face threats to its survival in the global economy (Nthoe, 2004; Webster & Mosoetsa, 2001).

Castells' (2001) arguments about the emergence of a new global economy, based on information technologies and the production of high-tech manufactured goods and services, appears to have influenced policy-making debates. The National Plan (DOE, 2001) refers to Castells as serving on the Presidential International Task Force, and its policy document quotes Castells as follows: *If knowledge is the electricity of the new informational international economy, then institutions of higher education are the power sources on which a new development process must rely* (2001: 5).

The implication of the policy discourse around economic development and global performance was that those countries which dominate science and technology research and development, dominate the global economy. Restructuring higher education for economic growth therefore depended on achieving at least three goals, those of increased participation, of increased production of knowledge and skills (in the form of enhanced graduate rates), and of growing the number of graduates in the fields of science and technology.

The extent to which policy makers accepted the globalised view of the link between higher education and economic growth and development was clear, and so was the urgency with which they approached the task of restructuring higher education to deliver the required goods. As early as January 2000, the Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, instructed his advisory body, the Council for Higher Education (CHE), to mandate a task team to conduct a review of the higher education system and make proposals for its overhaul.

The CHE's brief was to answer the Minister's provocative question: *Is higher education, will higher education be, a system for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?* (2001: 2).

The linking of higher education transformation with economic growth and international competitiveness had implications for how the state conceptualised quality.

A quality higher education system was characterised by the state in its policy utterances as one capable of efficiently producing large numbers of highly skilled and knowledgeable graduates, in the fields required by the global economy, namely science and technology, business and commerce. This gave the concept of quality a decidedly functional dimension. High quality became synonymous with the notion of an efficient and well-functioning university (CHE 2001), and improvement of quality became associated with increasing efficiency through raising outputs – the symbols of which would be a reduction in drop-out and repetition rates and an increase in retention and graduation rates (DOE, 1997, 2001, and CHE, 2001). The entry of notions of efficiency into policy discourse signified the adoption of a neo-liberal framework characterised by ideas related to global competitiveness, the need for efficiency and increased productivity and a desire to make universities serve the market. The theory of the Evaluative State as articulated by Neave and others, accounts for these changes in the relationship between higher education, the state and society in a way that explains the global and universal dimension of higher education transformation.

### **3.4.3 Quality as a steering mechanism**

The centrality of the quality concept was further borne out by the identification of quality in the NCHE Report (NCHE, 1996) as critical to shaping a new relationship between the state and higher education, within the context of transformation:

*Quality is not only an institutional consideration, but also an essential ingredient of a new relationship between government and higher education. Government is to steer the system by means of incentives and evaluation of institutions and programmes rather than by detailed regulation and legislation. A comprehensive, development-oriented quality assurance system provides an essential mechanism for tackling differences in quality across institutional programmes*  
(1996: 7).

This extract suggests that a key policy decision had been made about the future role of the state in higher education affairs: the state would steer higher education through the application of a number of tools, including quality assurance. The NCHE policy (NCHE, 1996) signaled a change in the relationship between higher education and the state. From now on, quality assurance would be central to driving the state's reform agenda.

However, the above extract suggests that, rather than invoking regulations and legislation to achieve change in higher education, a system of incentives would reward institutions for their performance, and a new national system of quality assurance would be established to monitor and evaluate such performance.

In its 2004 analysis of progress made in transforming the higher education sector in the first decade of democracy, the CHE (CHE, 2004) reiterated the role of quality assurance as one of three steering mechanisms, the others being planning and funding. This idea had first been mooted as policy in the 1997 White Paper, and had been supported by the CHE at its establishment and by the HEQC at its formal launch in 2004.

Luckett (2004) has argued that positioning quality assurance in policy discourse as a steering mechanism implies that quality assurance would become a tool for achieving the policy goals of efficiency and effectiveness, equity and responsiveness, development and democratisation. Policy discourse throughout this period stressed the centrality of the link between goal achievement and quality improvement. Goals such as broadening participation and increasing the production of relevant knowledge and skills, were portrayed as being achievable only through significant improvements in efficiency and effectiveness, both of which would become proxies for quality.

The link between quality, planning and funding is clearest at the level at which the Department of Education makes decisions regarding the size and shape of higher education institutions. The concepts of size and shape were introduced into the South African higher educational landscape as a way of talking about the future trajectory of universities and other higher education institutions. In this context, size refers to the enrolment goals and targets the state will allow universities to aspire to, and shape signifies the shifts the state expects in student enrolment which will achieve national human resource development goals.

Size and shape goals are thus currently related to the state's intention that universities should produce significant numbers of highly skilled graduates and postgraduates in the areas of science, engineering and technology (SET) and in business and commerce.

*The approved targets are designed to change the shape and size of the higher education system both in terms of enrolment and of graduates. Increased emphases have been given to SET and BUS inputs and outputs (DOE, 2007: 11.)*

Planning and funding would become two sides of the same coin. Institutional plans -submitted as 'three-year rolling plans,' operational plans or strategic plans – would have to reflect universities' commitments to increasing research output, broadening access for designated groups and ensuring graduate success, especially in the areas of greatest regional and national need, before funds would be released. The White Paper (DOE, 1997) concludes by linking public funding, accountability, strategic planning and quality assurance in the following way:

*The basis for improving accountability in higher education is making public funding for institutions conditional on their Councils providing strategic plans and reporting their performance against their goals. The plans will provide a framework for continuous improvement within institutions and a reference point for quality assurance (1997: 55).*

There was never any mystery about how higher education would be steered or the direction it would be persuaded to take. The state, through various policy statements, had promised to steer higher education through the use of detailed and prescriptive regulatory frameworks. These would ensure that the sector would in fact make a significant contribution to achieving the national goals of societal transformation, reconstruction and rapid economic development.

The NCHE, however, speaks of a new relationship between government and higher education, characterised by less intervention and more steering from a distance, in which 'quality is ... the essential ingredient' and state steering is facilitated through 'incentives and evaluation of institutions and programmes rather than by detailed regulation and legislation' (1996: 7).

In reality, the new planning, funding and quality assurance framework was underpinned by the state's willingness to steer through rewards and incentives, as well as through monitoring and evaluation, regulation and legislation.

Early higher education policy, in the White Paper 3 (DOE, 1997) and the NCHE report (1996), had made it clear that a new system of financing higher education would become the strongest lever of change. Most notably, a new goal-oriented and performance-related funding framework would promote equitable access, improved quality, enhanced student progressions and increased graduation rates as well as greater responsiveness to social and economic needs (DOE, 1997: 47).

Stated differently, the new funding framework would shape institutional responses towards achieving the central goals of increasing equity in access and outcomes, improving quality and efficiency and linking higher education activities to regional and national development needs (DOE, 2002b).

Crucially, since state funding to universities would be contingent on the achievement of strategic goals, the universities would henceforth need to supplement state funding by tapping into alternative sources of private income.

Institutions were encouraged to become proactive in negotiating contracts, establishing consultancy services and seeking donations from alumni and other benefactors (DOE, 1997). Although the state vowed not to cut levels of public spending on higher education in the immediate post-apartheid era, the sector was warned that the transformation required to achieve equity and other performance-related targets would carry a burden of additional costs. These would have to be met through accessing alternative and private funding sources.

Olssen and Peters (2005) have suggested that the promotion of entrepreneurialism was linked to sustaining economic viability and to the recognition of the role of higher education in economic growth. Slaughter and Leslie (1997) have argued similarly that, in order for higher education to serve economic growth, universities have to become entrepreneurial. They have shown that becoming entrepreneurial involves transforming institutions into organisations which are able to engage commercially, economically and competitively in response to the needs and demands of the economic sector.

South African universities, however, have not entered the entrepreneurial race on equal terms, and Subotzky (1998) has presented a cogent analysis of the challenges facing HBU attempts to embrace the concept of the 'market' university in the post-apartheid era.

Key characteristics of the 'market' university are commodification and commercialisation, a shift to strategic quality evaluation by performance indicators, and the enactment of new purposes for higher education related to economic needs and demands.

Subotzky (1998) has described the glaring and somewhat discomfiting similarities between South African education policy in the post-apartheid era and the Dawkins' proposals for restructuring higher education in Australia, both underpinned by what he terms 'neo-liberal doctrines.' I present five areas of obvious policy overlap here.

These are, firstly, belief in the power of higher education to boost economic growth. Secondly, there is the notion that institutions should become less reliant on government funding and more able to forge commercial partnerships with industry.

Further commonalities are, thirdly, that restructuring the sector is best achieved through mergers and incorporations, and, fourthly, that funding for operations, teaching and research should be awarded in accordance with goal achievement. The final coincidence is a shared assumption that subject fields such as science, engineering and technology should be funded more favourably, since skills and knowledge in these areas are more likely to advance global competitiveness.

The Education White Paper 3 (DOE, 1997) expressed the intentions of the state with regard to higher education as follows:

*Higher Education.... must be restructured to face the challenges of globalisation' and 'must provide education and training to develop the skills and innovations necessary for national development and successful participation in the global economy' (1997: 9).*

The shifts observable in higher education in South Africa are clearly not a local idiosyncrasy, but have their roots in a wider discourse of globalisation, neo-liberalism and a shift towards the Evaluative State.

#### 3.4.4 Linking quality with transformation, accountability and efficiency

*Only higher education can deliver the requisite research, the training of highly skilled personpower, and the creation of relevant, useful knowledge to equip a developing society with the capacity to participate competitively in a rapidly altering national and global context (NCHE, 1996: 15).*

The concept of quality and its improvement has been high on the agenda of policy formulation in the post-apartheid era, and has dominated policy instruments since 1996.

The earliest higher education state policy, the Report of the National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE, 1995), described the higher education system inherited by the post-apartheid government as *'fundamentally flawed by inequities, imbalances and distortions derived from its history and present structure'* (1996: 1). Subsequent policy portrayed higher education as a whole as characterised by *'fragmentation, inequality and inefficiency'* (DOE, 1997: 3). This discourse of deficiency appeared constantly in policy directed at the transformation of the higher education sector and was essentially a quality discourse. By implication, the inherited higher education sector stood accused of being dysfunctional, lacking the high standards and quality required to meet the knowledge and socio-economic needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (CHE, 2001).

Later policy reiterated this low-quality discourse (DOE, 1996, 1997, 2001 and 2002a) in a way which conveyed the urgency of the need to improve quality, by transforming and restructuring the higher education system to address the challenges of social, economic and political reconstruction and development (DOE, 1996 and 1997). The CHE in its Discussion Document, put together by the Size and Shape Task Team (2001), identified a number of *'systemic dysfunctionalities.'* These were a decline in the enrolment of new entrants into higher education; extremely poor graduation and yearly pass rates; institutional debt associated with failure to collect student fees; skewed race and gender distribution of students in various fields of study; skewed race and gender distribution of staff at different levels; extremely low research outputs; and fragile management and administrative capacity (CHE, 2001).

The enumeration of failures and deficiencies of the higher education system in the 21<sup>st</sup> century was not unique to South Africa. Olsen (2000), writing about Norway in the 1990's, identified a similar rhetoric of failure and dysfunction in Norwegian higher education reform processes. Lack of quality and of responsiveness, inefficiency and wastage were some of the common accusations leveled against universities in Norway (Olsen, 2000).

In 2001, in his preamble to the National Plan for Higher Education (DOE, 2001b), the Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, made clear the link between the need for quality and the need to transform higher education, by stating that:

*The people of our country deserve nothing less than a quality higher education system which responds to the equity and development challenges that are critical to improving the quality of life of all our people (2001: 1).*

The notion of quality in post-apartheid higher education policy was thus embedded in a discourse of deficiency. It was constantly referenced in the rationale mounted by the state to justify restructuring higher education away from apartheid-induced mediocrity and inequality towards excellence and equity.

Luckett (2003) argued further that quality came to signify both a desirable goal for the higher education system, linked as it was to the goals of efficiency and equity, and as a justification for restructuring and transformation. The position he took (Luckett, 2003) sheds light on the consistent and central presence of quality in the higher education policy framework. In a sense, in the post-apartheid era of higher education transformation, it became impossible to speak of any aspect of higher education restructuring without reference to quality and the improvement thereof. Quality became implicated in every aspect of the policy discourse, which suggested that the goals of equity, redress, efficiency and responsiveness were achievable only through institutional commitments to improving quality within a framework of accountability.

#### **3.4.5 Quality and democratisation**

The CHE, in its seminal advisory document, *Towards a New Higher Education Landscape* (2001), determined that transformation would be driven by two major forces, globalisation and the demand for social transformation, with such transformation addressing broad democratisation needs. It has been argued that the two forces driving reform, namely equity and development, would always exist in a contradictory tension with each other (Ntshoe, 2004). Higher Education policy, however, has proposed a resolution of the contradiction, by arguing that improvement in quality would allow development imperatives to coexist with demands for equity and democratisation.

Fataar (2003) has suggested that higher education policy shifted from a focus on achieving the goals of equity towards promoting those of economic development. This led to the rise of a discourse of efficiency which empowered the state to act against 'dysfunctional' institutions. The following quote from the National Plan for Higher Education (DOE, 2001) supports Fataar's contention:

*All institutions must strive for excellence...Quality and excellence are not in competition with equity/redress; they are intrinsic to the achievement of meaningful equity and the substantive erosion of inequitable occupational structures and the current distorted pattern of knowledge production (2001: 16).*

Foregrounding quality in the equity versus development debate enabled quality assurance and quality improvement to be identified as central to the achievement of these contradictory policy goals.

Further, the CHE's argument that increasing graduate output in the face of broadening expansion, or massification, was achievable only through significant quality improvement served to link quality improvement with human capital development. By implication, this conferred on quality assurance the high-stakes responsibility of actualising the goal of human resource production and knowledge creation.

The state regarded higher education as 'critical to the resolution of many of the unique and complex challenges that face South Africa and Africa as a whole' (DOE, 2001, Size and Shape), and Moja, Muller and Cloete (1996) linked this to the 1972 Accra Workshop which showed that, given the critical role of universities in economic development, they could not be afforded the luxury of autonomous decision making but instead needed to be subjected to state control in order to ensure that higher education contributed fully to economic development.

### **3.5 The politics of quality: Quality assurance and accountability**

The White Paper (DOE, 1997) first included the idea of quality as one principle amongst many that would characterise a transformed higher education system. These would include the principles of equity and redress; democratisation; effectiveness and efficiency; development; quality; academic freedom; institutional autonomy and public accountability.

While the White Paper detailed the role of planning, funding and governance in constructing a new higher education system, this particular policy paid less attention to the role of quality assurance in steering higher education. However, the pronouncements which it did make in this area, though limited, had far-reaching consequences for the future development of quality assurance systems in South Africa.

The White Paper achieved two things with regard to quality assurance. Firstly, it proclaimed higher education institutions themselves to be responsible for quality assurance. This amounted to a declaration of faith in the institutions' capacity to develop and monitor quality internally. But at the same time, it articulated the need for a national authority for quality assurance, thereby determining that quality assurance in higher education would henceforth be externally driven and monitored. The White Paper determined that a new quality assurance system would combine institutional internal evaluation efforts with a centralised process of external assessment. While the White Paper articulated these policy intentions, the Higher Education Act (1998) would later provide for the establishment of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC).

Amaral (2003) suggested that universities have always been concerned with quality, and that history it was possible to distinguish at least two historical forms of quality assessment in universities. One form was centrist and accountability-driven, in which the state had control over every aspect of university life. Amaral (2003) claims that this was the case at Paris University in the thirteenth century, where the church, through the chancellor of the Cathedral at Notre Dame, had the right to decide what should be taught and who should teach it.

The second form, referred to variously in the literature as the traditional model of quality assessment, was the English model of self-assessment through peer review, where colleagues in institutions judged the quality of their peers and academics had the right to hire and fire teaching staff (Amaral, 2003).

Trow (2000) has suggested that the traditional model of quality assessment worked and was accepted because of the trust that society conferred on academics and universities to maintain a high level of quality in their work, and to institute appropriate internal quality control mechanisms, ensuring ongoing achievement and the enhancement of high quality.

Trow (2000) argues further that universities were rarely called upon to demonstrate quality or explain their understanding of it, but rather that it was broadly accepted that 'universities embody quality' (Trow, 2000: 18), that their academics knew quality when they saw it, and that there was therefore no need to invent external criteria against which to judge such quality.

Trow (2000) further states that the preponderance of new forms of external quality evaluation by government agencies indicates an increasing level of mistrust, by governments and society, in the ability and commitment of academics to maintain and enhance quality in their work, as well as an increasing mistrust in the effectiveness of universities' internal quality control mechanisms (Trow, 2000:16).

The move from an élite higher education system to massification, created pedagogical and quality challenges as more diverse groups of learners, from different educational and socio-economic backgrounds, were granted access to universities (Scott, 2001). Mistrust in the capability and effectiveness of traditional models of internal quality control to deal with the challenges of massification resulted in the establishment of external forms of quality evaluation and control, conducted by bodies appointed by governments.

The following extract from a policy document proposed by the CHE indicates the way in which the state conceptualised the link between massification and quality:

*Numbers also affect standards. To combat the potentially adverse effects of rising enrolment on educational and academic standards, a policy of quality assurance becomes a necessity. Institutions will be increasingly accountable with regard to performance indicators that influence standards. Structures and procedures are proposed for a combination of self-evaluation, external validation and quality promotion.*

*Quality promotion will also involve the accreditation of qualifications and various forms of capacity building.*

*Increased participation, above all, means the participation of a far higher proportion of those previously excluded from higher education (2001: 4).*

Much has been written about the creation of quality assurance as a regulatory device (Morley, 2003: 15). South African policy has linked the introduction of new quality assurance regimes in higher education to two broad policy goals – to widening access and participation and to solving problems in higher education related to inefficiency and poor performance.

Scott (2001) has suggested that broadening participation in the context of inequality in schooling provision would inevitably result in an increase in the number of under-prepared learners entering universities, while the quote above indicates the state's position regarding the link between massification and quality.

The need to increase the numbers of graduates, specifically in the fields of science, engineering and technology, the need to increase throughput across all years of study and to increase retention and pass rates (DOE, 1996, 1997, 2001, and CHE, 2001) have been amongst the efficiency and performance problems identified by the state, which could be addressed through the creation of quality assurance measures.

The National Plan for Higher Education (DOE, 2001) made it clear that the state would achieve its goals for higher education through the application of three steering mechanisms, namely planning, funding and quality assurance. Luckett (2003) has suggested that this means that the state would seek to control both funding inputs and outputs through planning and quality assurance mechanisms, and in this way would '*ensure that its goals and values are ascribed to and achieved*' (Luckett, 2003: 9).

By implication, quality assurance, a mechanism through which goals and policy would be achieved efficiently and effectively, would be an essential component of the regulatory framework.

At the same time as announcing its intention to steer the system through planning, funding and quality assurance, the state made it clear that higher education institutions would be held accountable for the use of public funding, and that such accountability would require compliance with the restructuring demands of the state. An extract from the task team report on restructuring higher education, commissioned by the Minister of Education in 2000 (CHE, 2000), made the expectation of compliance and accountability clear:

*Inappropriate and defensive appeals to institutional autonomy and academic freedom in the face of the imperative of reconfiguring higher education to meet socio-economic goals should (also) be avoided. The autonomy of institutions has to be reconciled with the need to account for the use of public resources. The right to pursue intellectual and academic goals has to be exercised within the framework of complementary social goals (2000: 29).*

Finch (1997) suggested that academics find emerging accountability imperatives to be highly problematic and a threat to their authority over their subject areas. She asked the question:

*Are agencies such as funding councils, professional accrediting bodies and the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) undermining traditional academic authority vested in a deep knowledge of one's subject and replacing these with external benchmarks which derive from some other set of priorities? (1997: 147).*

Apple (2005) argues that successful steering requires holding institutions and the people within them accountable for the achievement of policy goals and targets. Quality assurance regimes would perform those accountability functions by expecting universities to provide evidence that they were taking their social responsibilities seriously. The constant production and demonstration of evidence that these institutions were performing as expected, efficiently and correctly, became a key activity in an accountability-driven quality assurance framework, one which was tied to funding frameworks that rewarded good outcomes and high quality performance.

### **3.6 Emergence of an audit culture**

Theorists like Olssen and Peters (2005), Morley (2003), Apple (2005) and Shore and Wright (1999) characterised the establishment of these conditions as the creation of an audit culture and the activities associated with measurement, monitoring and evaluation as a form of accounting and auditing of the performance and productivity not only of particular institutions but of the entire higher education sector.

Shore and Wright (1999) assert that measuring performance within an accountability framework has become a substitute for, if not a proxy for, improving quality, while Bundy (2005) has summarised the impact of audit culture in the following way:

*Good practice is measured through Performance Indicators and monitored through Quality Assurance mechanisms. Continuous Improvement defined in terms of rising productivity is the state of grace aspired to by strategic planners (2005: 88).*

Amaral (2003) asserted that change within the higher education sector is likely to occur when the institutions and the people within them act in ways which promote the achievement of external goals. Successful state-steering at a distance is achieved through what Morley (2005) terms the responsabilisation of every member of the organisation, in which each person is accountable to the organisation's achievement of targets and goals, and where conditions within the organisation are such that it is almost impossible for any member to remain unaffected by demands for change and accountability.

Similarly, Shore and Wright (1999), in providing an anthropological insight into the matter of educational change, have argued that successful state-steering from a distance requires forms of control that induce individuals and organisations to alter their own behaviour in line with external expectations. In this way, they argue that audit culture and quality assurance are critical instruments through which individuals are 'caused to behave' in ways which result in change at the individual, institutional and eventually the sectoral level.

The constant demand for the production of evidence, coupled with the demand for institutions and people within them to expose their behaviour and make their performance available for external scrutiny, through the activities of quality assurance bodies, has been likened to the creation of an ethos of policing, beratement and surveillance (Morley, 2003; Neave, 1998; Worthington and Hodgson, 2005; Shore and Roberts, 1993). Shore and Roberts (1993), in a seminal work on quality assurance and audit culture, introduced the notion of the panopticon paradigm to describe the nature of management and quality control, which they likened to acts of surveillance and policing.

The panopticon prison, first introduced by Jeremy Bentham during the late eighteenth century as a model of prison construction, and then adapted by Foucault in 1977 (Burchell, 1991) as a symbol of power and control in modern society, features a surveillance tower situated in a prison courtyard around which cell buildings are situated in such a way as to render each cell occupant constantly visible to the 'surveillant'.

Subsequent contributions to the literature around 'audit culture' (Morley (2001, 2003, 2005), Shore and Wright (1999), Worthington and Hodgson (2005) have endorsed and built on the panopticon model to characterise quality assessment and institutional management as disciplinary technologies, through which the state has restructured and achieved control of higher education institutions. Audit culture, in the view of the theorists described above, has altered negatively the nature of academic work and the conditions under which such work occurs. It has arisen out of quality assurance frameworks which function to monitor and evaluate whether higher education institutions are contributing towards the realisation of policy goals and objectives.

### **3.7 Quality evaluation approaches: Enlightenment and power**

Theorists have asked about the fate of quality where quality evaluation is embedded in state-designed accountability frameworks. Lomas (2002) asked, 'Does the Development of mass education necessarily mean the end of quality?' Huisman and Currie (2004) wondered whether accountability in higher education was a 'Bridge over troubled waters?' offering little change in the quality of education. Gibbs and Lacovidou (2004) posed the question, 'Quality as a pedagogy of confinement: Is there an alternative?'

These theorists reflect a global concern that current forms of quality assurance, which prioritise accountability rather than quality improvement, are more concerned with achieving political objectives for the sector than with improving learning outcomes for students.

Barnett (1994) designed a useful typology for the classification of quality evaluation systems around the ideas of power and enlightenment, and argued that all forms of quality evaluation could be allocated to one of the four quadrants produced when the two axes intersected.

For Barnett, the critical question regarding enlightenment was whether evaluation was emancipatory, or '*to what extent is the self-understanding of those being evaluated being enhanced as a result of the evaluation process?*' (1994: 174). Barnett further suggested that *technicist* quality evaluation was the polar opposite of an *emancipatory* approach. He also believed that power resided with those who controlled quality evaluation, so the power distinction for him was *collegial* (controlled by the academic community) or *bureaucratic* (controlled by external state agencies) forms of evaluation (Barnett: 1994).

Bundy (2005) questioned whether quality assurance in South Africa could escape the negative consequences of international forms of accountability, where audit culture was a consequence of importing global monitoring and evaluation systems that operated within the confines of accountability to state policy goals and interests.

Mala Singh, then Executive Director of the HEQC (2006), in an interesting response to Bundy's (2006) criticism of the neo-liberal and conservative origins of quality evaluation in South Africa, introduced an account of the HEQC's quality evaluation system that she argued was *technicist* in its approach, while having an *emancipatory* purpose. Relating this to pragmatism, Singh (2006) explains:

*There is no doubt that in the current environment there has been an acceleration of 'pragmatism' in the face of pressing moral and political challenges and an increase in efficiency discourses, though not all of it is necessarily driven by neo-liberal or anti-equity considerations. Efficiency can also be part of the armoury of strategies invoked to enhance equity and redress gains (2006: 67).*

Singh (2006) provided an interesting justification for the technicist or pragmatic character of the quality evaluation system of the HEQC. In her article she explained that, as a body established by the State through the CHE (DOE, 1997), the HEQC had very little choice in terms of the design of the quality assurance system, and was in fact legally bound to comply with state demands. These demands linked quality evaluation to the multiple and somewhat contradictory goals of transformation, equity and social justice, and to economic growth (DOE, 1996, 1997, 2001). Singh (2006) further argued that it was expected by the state that quality assurance would function as a steering mechanism (DOE, 1996, 2001), would achieve its accountability ends (DOE, 1996, 1997, 2001), and would be directed at achieving increased efficiency of the higher education system.

According to Barnett's (1994) classification, given the state's goals and demands for quality assurance, the HEQC's quality evaluation system would have to be *technicist* and *bureaucratic*, the 'polar opposite' in fact of *emancipatory* and *collegial*, a conclusion that Singh (2006) shares in her paper. However, Singh (2006) proposed that the South African quality evaluation system, being '*rooted in the progressive objectives of the restructuring*' of the higher education system, was by virtue of its purposes - which were transformative and directed at the achievement of equity and social justice - also a progressive and even emancipatory system.

In this regard, Singh introduces the concept of transformative accountability to counter Bundy's accusations about managerialist accountability, and argues that the HEQC's quality evaluation system, although accountability-driven, was transformative in its purposes.

Lange (2006), in the same publication, and also in response to Bundy (2006), supported Singh's argument, suggesting further that in South Africa the quality evaluation system reflected a case of the end justifying the means. Seepe (2006) echoes Lange's (2006) view regarding the means and ends of the quality assurance system, adding: *'That people agree on the same approach does not mean that they share the same ideology.'*

Taking the same approach, Lange (2006), Singh (2006) and Seepe (2006) refer to the tools and mechanisms applied by the Evaluative State in the interest of evaluating the progress made both by individual institutions and by the entire higher education sector in achieving desired policy goals. In defense of the monitoring processes adopted by the CHE, Lange (2006) argues that:

*The practise of monitoring as it is unfolding at the CHE indicates that it is possible to measure without buying into the conceptualisation of the evaluative state (2006:51).*

The next section will examine the emergence of the Evaluative State in South Africa in the context of the relationship between the post-apartheid state and higher education, and will assert the appropriateness of the Evaluative State as a conceptual framework for this study.

### **3.8. Conceptual framework: The theory of the Evaluative State**

#### **3.8.1 Introducing the Evaluative State**

The literature supports the idea that higher education has undergone significant change across the world. Common explanations of the causes of change are clear and powerful in their simplicity. Firstly, a new utilitarian view of the purposes of higher education has won out over contending traditional and liberal views (Greatrix, 2001). Simply put, the economic view of the purpose of higher education has come to dominate government and civil society attitudes towards universities. Higher education today is commonly regarded as the 'servant to the economy' (Greatrix, 2001: 13).

In the view of theorists of the accountability movement (King Alexander, 2000; Muller and Wright (1994), this new economic motivation drives the move by governments to demand greater accountability, responsiveness, productivity and efficiency from higher education institutions. In this regard, states are looking to universities to provide the human capacity and the knowledge requirements that will drive technological innovation, enhance economic productivity and facilitate global competitiveness.

Barnett (2003: 2) has described the traditional role of universities as promoting '*knowledge, truth and reason*.' Preston (2001) has taken a more economic view of the modern university's role as that of a producer of knowledge for global consumption, while Barrett (1998), in a provocative title, asks, '*What is the function of a university? Ivory tower or trade school for plumbers?*'.

The above theorists suggest that the shift from traditional conceptualisations of the purpose of higher education to more functional notions of the relationship between higher education and society has driven the pace of change in the sector globally.

Secondly, a political paradigm shift in the twenty-first century regarding the way the citizenry views government, coupled with increased calls for participatory democracy, has led to a demand by civil society and business across the world for a reduction in state control, or at least in the intensity and visibility of such control.

Thirdly, a global context defined by the need and desire to exercise financial constraint in relation to government spending of public funds has led to the dominance of cost-cutting strategies, and greater demands by the state for the demonstration of value for money in return for their investments in higher education.

Hence the three most powerful drivers of change in the relationship between higher education and state have been the result of an ideological struggle around the purposes of higher education, of shifting political paradigms and of the need to exercise constraint in state spending.

The new view of the purpose of higher education has had a huge impact on all dimensions of the relationship between the state and higher education. Not only has it asserted the demand for universities to serve the economy but it has also recast the higher education system as a

critical lever for social change, in which the type of change required is both pre-determined and stable, but also ever-changing.

If one accepts this as a fundamental principle underpinning the relationship between state and higher education, it follows that universities could conceivably be called upon to serve any number of diverse and even contradictory ends in the name of economic development and social change. An essential feature of this new relationship is the need for flexibility and responsiveness, since it is these two characteristics of the higher education sector which enable ongoing re-adjustment to changing needs and demands.

It is within this explanatory context that key concepts such as responsiveness, accountability and productivity have come to frame the discourse examining global patterns of shifting relationships between government and the higher education sector.

### **3.8.2. Key features of the Evaluative State**

The theory of the 'Evaluative State' was introduced by Neave (1988), largely as a way of describing the changing relationship between the state and higher education in Western Europe in the 1980's, and by implication, across the world.

The theory of the Evaluative State describes, *firstly*, a model of state-steering aimed at driving change in higher education in a context where the sector is regarded as the prime lever for social change.

*Secondly*, the theory posits that the Evaluative State emerged from the recognition that a key area of social change was to universalise education through massification, as a means of achieving economic growth, and, *thirdly*, that this should be achieved within the context of a decline in public spending on education. King Alexander (2000) puts this succinctly:

*The entire nature of the traditional relationship between government and higher education is in the process of significant change in stretching the public dollar to serve more students in attempting to maximise economic returns. In this new era, governments have adopted public policies advancing the democratic concepts of massification and universality of higher education (2000: 413).*

A *fourth* dimension of the emergence of the Evaluative State was the introduction of new regulatory frameworks and other forms of legislation related to all aspects of institutional activity to bring about greater responsiveness of the sector to national social and economic needs. *Fifth*, the Evaluative State was so named since a key feature was that institutional performance would continuously and meticulously be evaluated against policy goals by agencies set up for this purpose. And, *finally*, the Evaluative State would reward institutional performance financially in accordance with progress made, documented and evaluated against strategic institutional goals which supported national policy intentions.

Using an uncomfortable metaphor to describe the continuous and invasive nature of state monitoring and evaluation of institutional performance, Neave and Van Vught (1991) ask:

*Are we correct in seeing the higher education systems of the West chained, like the miserable Prometheus, to a rock with the eagles of budgetdom and intervention tearing daily at their entrails? (1991: 253).*

Can South African universities be described as being '*Prometheus bound*'? I would argue that the construct of the Evaluative State does serve to explain social reforms and indeed provides one lens through which emerging quality regimes in universities can be viewed and understood. The above discussion highlighted at least six features of the Evaluative State which, it will be argued, also characterised the post-apartheid state in South Africa as discussed in the previous chapter. To summarise here, higher education in South Africa has become a key lever for social change and economic growth; increasing participation has been regarded by the state as essential to achieving the latter; state funding per student in South Africa has not increased in accordance with student growth; and a flurry of activity in the arena of policy making has steered institutions towards greater responsiveness and accountability to policy goals.

Finally, the introduction of a new external quality assurance system, the requirement for institutional submission of three-year rolling plans and a new, performance-based funding framework have indicated the South African state's intention that the transformation and performance of the higher education sector should proceed in line with the state's expectations. What follows is a more detailed exploration of the above-mentioned and other key features of the theory of the Evaluative State, and its emergence in South Africa.

### **3.8.3 The Evaluative State: Higher education, human resource development and economic growth**

Two major and related sources of change in higher education in Western Europe have been linked in the literature to the emergence of the Evaluative State. Firstly, economic growth generated the need to raise skills levels, especially in the areas of science and technology; hence the need for higher education to produce highly skilled workers for the new knowledge-based economy. Massification was achieved as larger numbers of young people were encouraged to enter universities. Given this new role in human resource development, higher education subsequently became the driver for economic growth (Neave, 1988).

Secondly, governments' reluctance to fund rising costs generated by massification saw a reduction in state spending on higher education. Neave has argued that the need to increase participation in higher education, coupled with the state's determination to cut spending in this area, generated a particular set of circumstances that demanded a quite different form of state intervention in higher education.

Policy goals and framework targets were designed to be reached through the exercise of new systems of resource allocation. In other words, institutions would be funded only on the basis of having fulfilled certain criteria; these were related to efficiency (doing more with less), productivity (turning out the desired graduates and research outputs quickly), and quality. The state in this period never intended to fund all costs generated by institutions. Rather, under-funding achieved the goal of forcing the sector to become more responsive to external pressures. The market, which institutions had to serve to ensure their continued survival, embodied social demands and the needs of industry and other partners with whom contracts could be negotiated to fund institutional activities which matched their priorities.

Thus, massification and budget costs, as described above, were two elements which effected a major transformation in the higher education sector; they did this by bringing to bear new pressures related to increasing demands for efficiency, productivity, quality, accountability and responsiveness.

#### 3.8.4 Remote steering and the exercise of control

Two fundamental shifts characterised the emergence of the Evaluative State in Western Europe. Firstly, the shift to strategic evaluation saw a heavier emphasis on quality and accountability, coupled with a shift from input control to what Neave has termed *a posteriori* or product control. Secondly, a move towards remote steering by the state was linked to a drive towards self-regulation and institutional autonomy (1988).

Neave (1988) points out that the Evaluative State, rather than being planned and intentionally engineered by powerful elements within government, was defined by a set of relationships between state and higher education that developed over a period of time and as a result of a series of state-led responses to a variety of circumstances.

A range of economic, social and even ideological conditions demanded that the state take action, largely through the promulgation of policy and regulatory frameworks, in order to ensure higher education's response as a sector to changing conditions and circumstances. Neave holds that it was these varied responses, rather than the implementation of a grand, bureaucratically-conceived master plan, which resulted in the emergence of a particular kind of relationship between the state and the higher education sector.

The theory of the Evaluative State thus described attempts by governments in Western Europe, beginning in the latter half of the 1980's, to steer higher education in particular directions and towards the achievement of specific, if shifting, policy goals.

What emerged at this time was a form of state-steering that began to rely on systems of incentives and processes of evaluation. These were designed to reduce the need for constant legislative enactment to make sure that the higher education system continued to serve the changing needs and priorities of governments and states. State-steering of this kind ensured that the higher education system was positioned over time to respond appropriately and continuously to changing societal conditions. Inherent in this movement was a re-conceptualisation of the purposes of higher education. The function of the universities was now linked to the needs of the labour market and to the technology, skills and knowledge needs of the growing economy.

Maassen (1997) remarked that steering from a distance did not imply an absent government, but rather that the state designed the framework within which institutions were expected to act autonomously, in the sense of having the freedom to decide on the best course of action to achieve the state's policy goals. Dill has argued that the basic principle of the new management models for universities was *'to better align control with accountability by delegating to public agencies greater authority over inputs and decisions about resources'* (Dill, 1998: 371). Hence the link between remote steering and self-regulation - states devolved the responsibility for detailing the behaviour required of the sector to institutions in order to achieve the outputs required by government (Maassen, 1997). The Evaluative State has continued to promulgate broad policy guidelines along with funding frameworks and other regulatory mechanisms to attain its policy goals, while at the same time control over universities has been achieved less through bureaucratic regulation (Maassen, 1997) and more through a focus on shaping the products and output of universities.

### **3.8.5 Evaluation and accountability**

Maassen (1997) has argued further that universities have accepted the move towards greater institutional autonomy in exchange for providing the Evaluative State with more information, more frequently, about the quality of activities conducted in teaching and in research. For example, in South Africa, the provision of subsidy funds to universities has become contingent on the achievement of goals such as increasing graduate success and increasing research output through publications and successful postgraduate completions. The state relies on the regular submission of information from universities regarding these and other products and outputs in order to judge whether performance has been acceptable as measured against output goals and targets.

The increasing provision of information about the quality of academic activities has enabled routine, regular measurement and evaluation of the quality of performance, rather than educational provision, and quality evaluation has become the lever of accountability of the Evaluative State. Henkel (1998) has identified the development of evaluation processes within the policy context of the shift towards the Evaluative State, and argues that:

*..there has emerged in some countries a public theory of evaluation as an instrument of public accountability and rational management: that it is possible to make authoritative evaluations, to convert them into quantitative measures, to use them as the basis of accountability and, in some cases, resource allocations and to be assured that these steps will produce better higher education (1998: 291).*

Neave (1989, 1995 and 1998) has similarly argued that the Evaluative State was characterised by changes in the use, form and frequency of evaluation. Governments before had always engaged in some form of evaluation as an exercise in making universities accountable for public funding, but this sort of evaluation was characterised by Neave and others as routine verification, conducted less frequently and in the context of maintaining higher education in a steady and stable state. The transformation of higher education and its steering by the state to ensure that it became a lever for social and economic change, required new relationships between government and higher education.

These would revolve around the increased prominence of performance measurement and evaluation and the emergence of a new focus on quality control. To this end, quality has been associated with the achievement of policy goals and objectives, and the role of quality assurance agencies has been associated with the evaluation of the performance of universities against key state priorities and goals.

King Alexander (2000) has suggested that the movement towards what he terms performance-based accountability to the achievement of national priorities, has in fact meant the exercise of greater rather than more limited state control. The Evaluative State has become more actively involved in higher education, and has done so directly rather than remotely. In the words of King Alexander (2000):

*..it is clear that the nature of the state's relationship with higher education has evolved from one of authoritative oversight to one of active involvement in financial arrangements and economic decisions (2000: 247).*

The post-apartheid South African state has resorted to the use of funding frameworks to exercise steering and state control. Neave (1995) has argued that funding frameworks provide for indirect and remote state control through the provision of rewards for output achievement.

Others have maintained that the exercise of state control through funding frameworks which govern the distribution of research income and teaching output funding, reflects a far more direct form of state steering (Scott, 1989; El-Khawas & Massey, 1996; Cave, Hanney, Henkel & Kogan, 1997; King Alexander, 2000). Whether remote or direct, the new relationship between state and higher education globally has been characterised by greater control of the former over the latter. In the words of Salter and Tapper (1994):

*After decades of prod and nudge politics, of wait and see, the state has acquired powers which mark the qualitative shift in its relationship with the institutions of higher education. It is now in a position to orchestrate change on a scale and in a manner which knows no precedent (1994: 1).*

### **3.8.6 The Evaluative State, managerialism and the market**

The Evaluative State has not relied exclusively on performance measurement and rewards to control the activities of the higher education sector, but has also introduced the concept of competitive markets as an added means of steering universities in the direction required.

The state has encouraged institutions to compete with each other for additional forms of earmarked and priority-related state funding, through additional competitive research contracts administered by its research councils and research agencies (Dill, 1998). Indeed, funding cuts have compelled institutions to pursue these additional and alternative revenue generating routes, along with increasing their activities in pursuit of what has come to be known as third stream income. Business and industry, science councils and private donors have become the new market for funding opportunities and a shift towards greater entrepreneurialism in universities is discernable, as research contracts are vigorously pursued and knowledge generation is directed at the needs of new business partners.

Distinctly different forms of institutional management emerged in the wake of new pressures and priorities experienced by higher education institutions. Neave and Van Vught (1991) have argued that a new managerial approach to institutional management developed in response to the state's drive for greater efficiency and productivity.

In South Africa, as in many other countries, an ethos of contractualisation (Neave, 1998), understood as the increasing reliance on contractual funding arrangements, predominated as institutions were rewarded for compliance and punished for recalcitrant behaviour.

The idea of block funding for academic activities receded into the distance and was replaced by a framework of subsidy funding, one which required ongoing negotiation between institutions and the state over the goals and objectives to be reached in return for financial rewards.

In this regard, Neave (1998) has argued that the system of rewarding institutional performance has become a powerful lever driving change in higher education:

*Contractualisation is reckoned to be not only a most puissant lever bearing down on 'implementation lag' – obduracy can be subject to chastisement and trusty servants given their due desserts. It also involves a fundamental revision to the formal status of the university. If one cares to dwell upon it for a moment, contractualisation puts an end to the idea of the university as a service **to** the State and instead recasts it as a public service of which one of the funders and supporters **happens to be** the state (1998: 276).*

According to Maassen (1997), new goal-directed forms of management were required, aimed at ensuring that universities fulfilled policy goals, often quantified into performance indicators. Financial and other rewards were bestowed on condition that institutions performed satisfactorily against externally-articulated performance criteria. The need to negotiate and manage a variety of contracts with the state, agencies of the state and other third parties, a growing emphasis on effective planning as a pre-condition for public funding, and pressure to provide strategic information on demand – all these called for new and foreign forms of institutional leadership.

Managerialism in universities began to reflect corporate leadership models. Features such as new systems of line management and the increased appointments of consultants tasked with driving outputs and managing contracts began to characterise management in higher education institutions.

*Primus inter pares* (the first among equals) elections of academic leaders were gradually replaced by appointments of Vice Chancellors and Rectors as executive managers, and Deans and department heads as academic middle managers.

In concluding the discussion of the Evaluative State in Western Europe, Neave and others have argued that the Evaluative State emerged as a response to governments' reconceptualisation of the purpose of higher education and the formulation of a new role for the sector, one contributing to social and economic development and transformation. Higher education was tasked with meeting national and regional needs through the development of human capital and satisfying the knowledge requirements of economies where competitive growth was based on securing technological advantage.

And the system needed to be steered, through institutional compliance with planning, funding and quality regulatory frameworks, in the direction of achieving these goals and priorities.

### **3.8.7 The Evaluative State emerges in South Africa**

In my study, I examine the effects of change in higher education in post-apartheid South Africa on institutions, as well as academics' perceptions of the impact of these on their working lives. I chose to focus on the implementation of quality assurance policy as a point at which tensions and contestations are revealed, as academics' views of quality and the purposes of higher education come up against the state's agenda for the transformation of universities in South Africa. Restructuring higher education to meet national and global needs resulted in upheavals that were intensely felt but minimally understood by those '*at the chalkface*.' (Webster & Mosoetsa, 2001). And the demands for equity, redress, effectiveness and efficiency, the new principles underpinning higher education delivery, exerted new pressures, compelling academics to become (somewhat reluctantly) agents of change.

The difference between the emergence of the Evaluative State in Western Europe in the 1980's and in South Africa in the post-apartheid era was essentially a difference of pace and intensity. Change in the form of state-steering in South Africa was rapid rather than evolutionary, and involved a hybrid model of steering through both legislation and the simultaneous design of frameworks which defined incentives, targets and goals, as well as the systems for evaluating institutional performance against these. Rather than choosing to steer higher education through a system of measuring and rewarding performance, as opposed to using legislative enactment, the South African state committed itself to achieving change in the sector by both means, through both legislation and the constant evaluation of performance.

In a very short period of time all of the activities the institutions engaged in both on a daily and a long-term basis - teaching, research, community outreach, planning, funding, governance and quality assurance – almost simultaneously felt the impact of external intervention.

Interviews with university academics and senior managers for this research revealed the huge impact of these interventions on people's working lives and the new sources of stress and strain that academics and other staff had to manage on a daily basis.

Early post-apartheid policy (DOE, 1996; 1997 and 2001) stated clearly that government would steer through incentives and evaluation and that quality would become both a key principle for transforming higher education and the basis for a new relationship between government and the sector (NCHE, 1996). Not only was the drive to efficiency becoming a new and powerful indicator of quality but external quality assurance processes became the point at which 'national priorities were operationalised,' through the evaluation of performance against policy goals and through the measurement of institutional outputs desired by the state (Neave, 1994).

Control over the outputs of the sector was exercised by the setting of benchmarks, performance indicators, targets and objectives by the state in major areas of institutional production.

Teaching outputs were evaluated in terms of graduate numbers, time-to-degree and pass rates, while research outputs were measured according to article publications, project completion and post-graduate success. Institutions could be rewarded for efficiency, effectiveness and productivity in these areas by the allocation of state funding, while positive external evaluation awarded status and the promise of self-regulation and conditional autonomy.

This is the way in which the literature described strategic evaluation as a component of state steering in the Evaluative State. It is also the way major South African higher education policy documents in the post-apartheid era, namely the NCHE (1996), White Paper 3 (1997), and the National Plan for Higher Education (2001), variously described the role of planning, funding and quality assurance in steering higher education.

### 3.9 Conclusion

Through this literature review, I have presented an argument which suggests that higher education policy reform has significantly changed the way in which universities function, by introducing new purposes, roles and requirements, for higher education.

This fundamental reconstruction of the idea of the university, and the patterns and practices of academic work, has had tremendous impact on the professional lives of academics and other university workers.

I have argued that the new utilitarian view of universities, coupled with the determination of governments to control and steer universities in order that they may serve new functions, has resulted in the emergence of the Evaluative State. The notion of quality has become politically contested, and the adoption by the Evaluative State of a particular view of quality as fitness for external purposes has spawned new and conservative practices in universities. The practices of managerialism, the growth of audit culture, and an increasing in performativity have signified a shift towards greater political control over the behaviours and activities of academics and university managers alike. In this context the domain of quality assurance and quality evaluation has become a new site of ideological struggle.

Arguments have been made for the possibility of employing the conservative tools of the Evaluative State towards progressive goals associated with transformation, equity and social justice in South Africa (Singh, 2006; Lange, 2006). Singh and Lange have argued that the progressive goals employed by the South African state, namely the pursuit of equity and democracy, justify the use of an accountability framework, which they understand to be conservative, for evaluating quality in universities.

In their view, adopting quality evaluation technologies associated with the Evaluative State is the only means of monitoring the progress made by the higher education sector towards equity and democratisation. In the case of UWC, however, accountability to the Evaluative State has stimulated the development of a new entrepreneurial, market-directed focus, at the expense of the pursuit of progressive goals associated with redress and social justice.

This study will attempt to account for the impact of the Evaluative post-apartheid state on the transformation choices made by one university, which has been persuaded and cajoled into valuing strategic goal achievement above all else. The research will shed light on the ideological struggles waged by academics as their views of the purpose and function of universities, and their roles within them, confront the demands and requirements of the Evaluative State.

Although attempts have been made in the literature to account for the declining attraction of the academic profession and the pervasiveness of a sense of loss and powerlessness amongst academics in the context of rising quality assurance demands, very little research has directly linked the experiences and behaviours of academics to the machinations of the Evaluative State.

A second gap in the literature is the lack of research on academics in South Africa. Only a few studies (Lockett, 2003; Webster and Mosoetsa, 2003) have been conducted into the experiences of academics and university managers in the context of higher education change. Substantial research across academic positions, disciplines and institutions is needed, and unless we provide good accounts of the impact of the Evaluative State in South Africa on academic practice, policy makers will continue blindly to import global practices into higher education policy, and remain oblivious to the negative consequences they might have on the academic project.

A third gap is the dearth of studies into the conceptions academics have of quality. There are a few accounts that scratch at the surface, but these have often been aimed at slotting views into Harvey and Green's five definitions of quality.

My research interest resides in discovering whether alternative conceptualisations of quality exist in universities as South Africa grapples with addressing the full range of knowledge challenges of the twenty-first century.

The next chapter accounts for the methodology decisions of this study, provides a rationale for the research strategy, including data collection and analysis, and examines the design limitations of the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Controlling for quality through design

#### 4.1 Introduction

This study used a single case design with embedded units of analysis (Yin, 2003). Data collection and analysis were done through qualitative techniques; the study was exploratory and insider research was employed to uncover actors' meanings and understandings in their natural setting.

The case study focuses on a single site, the University of the Western Cape (UWC), where I have observed that academics implementing a new quality regime often find the processes they have to comply with burdensome and a constraint on the performance of their academic responsibilities. My experience in a quality assurance unit at UWC has suggested that academics find these new demands a distraction, and feel that compliance with quality policy has happened at the expense of quality improvement.

The problem identified is deeply connected with the institutional context. Improving quality at UWC occurs in a context where most students enter the university educationally disadvantaged and academically under-prepared. Results of the 2009 National Benchmark Tests Project (NBT) Pilot, which cannot be presented here as the NBTP agreed that institutional results would not be made public, indicated that students entering UWC scored well below the benchmark for university entry level proficiency in mathematics, quantitative literacy, and academic literacy. UWC has embarked on a trajectory of quality improvement and change designed to shift the institution in the twenty-first century beyond the limitations imposed by its apartheid origins.

This study explores the ways in which academics at UWC engage with the new state-led policy around quality assurance and investigates the impact of policy implementation on academic work at the university.

UWC is one of only two historically disadvantaged universities in South Africa (there were originally ten) which have remained in existence sixteen years after the end of apartheid.

Although it was not chosen as a site of study specifically because of this history, my research was enriched by investigating UWC's particular context. In this regard, the following question echoed in the background during the study and directed my attention to the context within which academic work occurs: How do historically disadvantaged institutions' aspirations in the post-apartheid era impact upon academic practice and quality evaluation?

UWC is a historically disadvantaged institution which has oriented itself towards a transformed future. It has expressed its aspirations in this regard in revised mission and vision statements. The research problem arises out of contestation around the notion of quality, as academics' views conflict with the quality improvement vision of institutional management and with the quality views and requirements of the post-apartheid state.

Understanding the context of the particular case is essential to comprehending the nature of the conflict, since quality improvement has become a far more complex aspiration for UWC, an institution in transition. At the time of this research, the university was attempting to bury the label of inferiority conferred by the apartheid state. While continuing to serve its historically black constituency, it is at the same time propelling itself towards a future of national and global competitiveness.

#### **4.2. Research questions, propositions and sub-questions**

The research question for the study was as follows:

*How do academics in a historically black South African university in transition engage with and implement internal and external quality assurance processes and policies?*

I designed three sub-questions to focus my attention on different aspects of the main research question. Through these, I set out to capture different aspects of the problem that I wished to address through my research. The three sub-questions were as follows:

- How do academics' views of quality differ from those embedded in state policy and those promoted by university managers?
- How do these competing conceptions of quality relate to academics' attitudes to the implementation of quality assurance policy and practices?

- To what extent does the state's focus on routine and strategic quality evaluation engender tension and conflict between and amongst academics and university managers?

I approached the study and its research question with some initial ideas regarding what I expected to find. These were not hypotheses to be tested by the data, but were framed to guide the inquiry, to direct my attention to the existing problem and to provide a foundation against which to reflect the ultimate findings of the case. It was intended that the process of continuous reflection between the original propositions and the research findings emerging from analysis of the data would contribute to the development of credible explanations of the phenomena being studied.

I devised four research propositions. Firstly, that the high level of prescriptiveness imposed by the Evaluative State in the areas of quality, planning and funding diminishes academics' freedom to make decisions and to be innovative. Secondly, that demands for compliance with quality assurance requirements frustrate academics' efforts to improve teaching and learning in historically disadvantaged universities. Thirdly, that these aspirations, articulated in mission and vision statements, are often not known to academics and sometimes conflict with their beliefs and practices. And finally, that historically disadvantaged institutions' aspirations for excellence and competitiveness often conflict with national policy goals and intentions.

These propositions reflected observations I had made during my work in quality evaluation at UWC, and arose out of my perception that academics there were extremely frustrated by the new quality assurance demands. These were often largely administrative and time-consuming, for example those associated with modularisation and external moderation. I also sensed that academics experienced tremendous anxiety and some anger when confronted with quality measures, such as internal reviews of departments, which involved scrutiny of their academic work. This anger was often directed at the people, like me, who were tasked with running the reviews.

During these reviews, academics often appeared perplexed when reviewers asked them questions that required them to relate their work with students to UWC's mission of being an engaged university.

My research propositions were therefore designed to capture these multiple dimensions, specifically the frustration and anxiety associated with quality assurance demands and the confusion which seemed to exist with regard to the university's post-apartheid mission. I had many times listened to the university's Rector speak passionately about UWC's drive for excellence and its potential for greatness, but there often appeared to be an undertone of disappointment with the new state in his conversations. The final hypothesis, that historically disadvantaged institutions' aspirations for excellence and competitiveness often conflict with national policy goals and intentions, aims to capture the essence of what appears to be a dilemma facing UWC, that of an HBU engaging in a struggle to become an institution of quality.

### **4.3 Researcher proximity**

I approached this research fully aware that my position as an insider would provide both benefits and disadvantages. I had worked at UWC as an academic for eleven years, and then, after a break of four years, returned to take up an administrative position in which I was centrally involved in quality reviews of academic departments. This work entailed arranging departmental reviews and preparing a report of findings and recommendations. Academics often entered the process with much trepidation and reports were often not well-received by reviewed departments.

I was concerned that I might be associated with a quality assurance process which involved close scrutiny of academic processes, an activity that was often resented by academics in reviewed departments. To illustrate my dilemma, I quote one academic who volunteered for the study by answering:

*Yes, fine. But have you not already 'done' me?*

I entered the research process fully aware of the disadvantages of conducting research in a setting in which I was a familiar figure to interviewees and where I was associated with the particular quality assurance roles and functions in UWC described above.

There is much debate in the literature around the notion of researcher proximity (Flyvbjerg, 2006), defined as closeness to the site or to the topic under investigation. Many argue that the case study method, requiring as it does immersion in the research site, is more prone to researcher bias.

The researcher's ability to bring to the case personal experience and in-depth knowledge of the context and the problem has been identified elsewhere as an advantage of researcher proximity. However, this strength has also been construed as a limitation; some have argued that proximity could compromise objectivity and promote verification bias, that is, the tendency for the researcher to find overwhelming support for the research propositions. In summarising this debate, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) conclude that research is strongest when researcher experience is maximised, but that this in itself raises doubts about objectivity.

Two issues are pertinent to insider research. One involves the tacit insider knowledge of the researcher, while the other concerns the relationship between researcher and subjects. A researcher's tacit knowledge may encompass an awareness of the internal politics and jargon of a setting, resulting in shared meanings and understandings between researcher and subjects. The drawback of such shared meanings is that the researcher may be led to make false assumptions, miss important information or misinterpret data, especially during interviewing (Rooney, 2005).

In this investigation, extreme care was taken to avoid asking leading questions which would suggest that I was seeking particular kinds of responses. To limit the possibility of incorrectly pre-empting participants' meanings on the basis of assumptions about our shared experiences in UWC, I asked probing questions about the circumstances and situations referred to by the interviewees. I was aware that familiarity with the context and the problem could lead to my reaching hasty conclusions, without confirming the actual meanings and understandings the interviewees intended to convey.

Secondly, a professional relationship between researcher and subject may result in the subject offering information or explanations that it is hoped the researcher will approve of or expect to hear.

I was very aware of this limitation during the research and took care to distance the investigation from my normal university responsibilities. This was achieved by avoiding any discussion about academic reviews of departments. The omission of such reviews from the scope of the research could be seen as a major gap, but this loss had to be balanced against the threat to the credibility of the research. This was shown to be a clear possibility during the first two or three interviews conducted.

Discussion of the academic reviews in these early interviews resulted in some discomfort both for the interviewees and me, and I was aware of the participants shutting down or withdrawing during such discussions. After these first few interviews, I removed all questions from the interview guide relating to academic reviews of departments.

Issues of trust and confidentiality are relevant to all research, but may become particularly significant during insider research, with the added fear that confidential information could be communicated by the researcher to colleagues with potentially negative consequences for participants. I therefore presented each interviewee with a document explaining the steps I had taken to ensure the confidentiality of any information they might share, and to assure them of their anonymity in the report and that any information they shared could not be traced back to them.

A major advantage of insider research is that interviewees are more likely to relax, feel more comfortable and talk more openly with researchers who are familiar to them (Rooney, 2006). I certainly found this to be the case, as long as I avoided discussion of matters associated with my professional role in the university. Fortunately, my work in UWC was restricted to involvement in departmental reviews; eliminating these from the research scope seemed to facilitate an easier flow of discussion during interviews.

Rooney (2006) has presented three cases of insider research. She describes the cases, including their strengths and limitations, and ponders whether, in the process, the researcher has compromised validity. Her conclusion is simply that the questions of validity directed at insider research should really be asked about all research and that researchers should always be called upon to demonstrate the practical steps they have taken to reduce the impact of personal bias.

#### **4.4 A qualitative approach**

The decision to engage in qualitative as opposed to quantitative research is essentially a philosophical choice and a principled one. In other words, the choice of a research approach is usually value-laden and governed by the particular view of the world held by the researcher.

Many writers have argued in support of the idea that the choice of research methods is governed by epistemological and ontological assumptions, that researchers commonly select research methods on the basis of their understanding of how knowledge is created and of their position with regard to the nature of social reality. This view implies that researchers are drawn to qualitative methods specifically because of their interest in understanding the context in which action takes place, in their individual experiences of phenomena and in their perceptions of reality.

The underlying epistemological approach is that human action is governed by context - influenced by structural conditions as well as by the context's constitutive practices, norms and values. Thus in order to understand human action, one has to study human behaviour in the setting in which it occurs (Marshall and Rossman, 2006).

Denzin and Lincoln's (1994) definition of qualitative research has been widely accepted as foundational in describing the philosophical underpinnings of this form of research, as well as for identifying related approaches, purposes, types and techniques.

*Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials, case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional and visual texts ... that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives (1994: 2).*

Given the importance of seeing action in context, qualitative research is characterised as an approach to studying behaviour in its natural setting, as a way of contextualising and interpreting human action. Its philosophical underpinning is phenomenological, valuing attempts to understand behaviour from social actors' points of view.

Particular types and forms of research, such as case study and ethnography, have been encouraged for their potential to encompass all the above characteristics of qualitative research. Qualitative data analysis identifies patterns and themes in the data, research findings present insider views on an observed problem, and techniques are selected in so far as they fit the problem being investigated (Parkhe, 1993).

#### 4.5 The case study approach

This research uses a single case study in the sense that one university has been selected for the study. In-depth interviews were conducted with seventeen academics and six institutional managers. Each of these participants might be considered as a case on his or her own within the single case design; attempts have been made to understand each participant's perception of the reality of policy implementation.

Yin (2003) has argued that case study is an appropriate research strategy under certain conditions, namely, when contemporary events are to be studied, when the research will benefit from the use of techniques such as direct observation and interviews with persons engaged in the event, and when the research questions are best addressed through the examination of multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003).

Other scholars have identified additional conditions favouring the use of the case study approach. Eisenhardt (1989) has argued for the use of case study when the research seeks to understand the dynamics present within individual settings. Others have insisted that case study enables in-depth study, allowing for large amounts of information to be generated from multiple sources of evidence, and that such in-depth study enables deeper clarification of the research problem for readers through the presentation of 'thick description' (Tellis, 1997).

It is clear that case study offers researchers what other strategies such as survey research and experimental designs do not – the opportunity to study events or phenomena in the moment or as they unfold, at close proximity, and from the perspective of those whose behaviour is being studied.

Finally, it has been argued that case study is the better research strategy when accounting for the context is essential to unraveling a problem. In this regard, the following statement by Yin (2003), motivating for case study as a means of linking context and problem, is particularly pertinent:

*A case study is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (2003: 13).*

In the case of this research, the context and research problem are critically linked in the sense that the problem can only be understood to the extent that the researcher provides an explanation for its roots in a specific context. Hence, the behaviour of academics around policy implementation in this case is mediated by various structural and contextual conditions created by, amongst other things, this university's historical status, its future trajectory, and its ongoing engagement with the post-apartheid state's agenda for transforming higher education in South Africa.

While UWC's management has invested in a vision of a future which demands that the university shed its past identity (and to this end has adopted the slogan *'From HBU to Excellence'*), many academics identify with the components of UWC's mission which celebrate service to the historically disadvantaged – the students and the community. At times, these two views of the university's present and future collide, producing tension and conflict around notions of service, of community, and of quality. Tension and contestation around views of quality and how it should be improved at UWC impact academics' responses to the implementation of post-apartheid quality policy. Thus, the particular institutional context is critically linked to my research problem, making the case study approach an appropriate choice for this study.

#### **4.5.1 Justification of single case design**

Yin (2003) has motivated for the use of single case designs by describing three specific conditions under which this choice can be justified. The first rationale is when the single case represents 'the critical case in testing a well-formulated theory.' Here Yin chooses to regard the single case as the equivalent of a single scientific experiment.

Secondly, he maintains that a single case study can be justified when the case is unique and there are no other commonly-occurring cases like it. Finally, he argues for the single case when it represents a situation which is not normally accessible to other researchers, which he names the 'revelatory' case (2003: 40-42). He does, however, add that these circumstances are not exclusive, and that further arguments could be made for adopting the single case design.

Yin has argued that multiple case design is better suited to the purposes of replication than single case design, in the sense that multiple case design, like multiple experiments, allows hypotheses to be confirmed (or contradicted) and accepted (or discarded).

However, such replication logic is associated more closely with positivism, and has been found to be less appropriate for interpretive research (Atkins and Sampson, 2002: 100-101). Researchers like Atkins and Sampson (2002) and Klein and Myers (1999) have motivated for case study research outside the confines of positivism and the demands of replication, and have attempted to link case study to an interpretive paradigm rather than to a neo-positivist one.

The rationale for this single case design is more consistent with an interpretive case study, in which cases are selected not on account of the kinds of results the researcher predicts will be found, but rather because of an interest in understanding a problem through intense observation of the phenomena being studied. Eysenck (1976) has argued for single case design in the following way:

*Sometimes we simply have to keep our eyes open and look carefully at individual cases – not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something (1976: 9).*

The selection of this particular design arises out of Yin's (2003) prescription that single cases should be unique, extreme or revelatory, and is based on the conjecture that UWC represents a truly unusual case, in terms of its characterisation as a higher education institution in transition.

I have chosen to study a historically disadvantaged university in transition as it attempts to transform itself, and its perceptions of itself, from an institution in which quality was compromised by years of deliberate under-resourcing and neglect by the apartheid state. This transformation process has been fraught with ambiguities and tensions, related firstly to the university's efforts to 'shed its label of historical blackness' while continuing to serve a black student body, and secondly to attempts to engage constructively yet critically with the post-apartheid state while remaining mindful of its previous role as a vigorous opponent of state intervention.

A further rationale for selecting a single case design is its potential to best achieve the objective of the study, namely, to uncover and examine the greatest possible range and variety of academics' views, behaviours and responses to the implementation of quality policy. My research will probably show a wide range of views amongst academics of what quality is, of the purpose of higher education, and what their own role in a university ought to be.

Flyvbjerg (2006) introduced the concept of maximum variation to guide the selection of smaller numbers of cases. He suggested that the careful selection of three or four cases which appear very different on one dimension, such as organisation or location, could aid the collection of the greatest possible quantity and variety of information.

Flyvbjerg (2006) intended this principle to be applied to multiple case selection, but I would argue that a single case could contain elements of maximum variation when significant differences on a number of dimensions can safely be assumed to exist across multiple respondents. I expect to find a significant range of beliefs and behaviours with regard to quality and policy implementation amongst academics at the university under study - as wide a range in fact as one would expect to find amongst academics at any other institution in the world.

Academics at UWC come from all over the country and from all over the world. Some have been here for a very long time, and others for only a short while; many have been in a university environment for more than three decades while some have only started to build experience in higher education.

Academics from various disciplines in humanities, natural sciences, health sciences, economics, law, dentistry and education are gathered here, and it is fair to assume that maximum variation must exist amongst such a diverse population at UWC, as at any other higher education institution.

A final rationale for adopting a single case is that this design allows for depth of focus, and will therefore facilitate meaningful learning about the problem being investigated. Dissertation research has its own limits and boundaries – including those of time and resources – and I believe that a multiple case design would have fewer gains than a single case design; more would be sacrificed in terms of depth of investigation if more sites were included in the research design.

Babbie and Mouton (2001) have motivated for prolonged engagement as a way of achieving credibility, suggesting that researchers should stay in the field until data saturation occurs. I believe that to do justice to the site and achieve credible findings, a large amount of data needs to be collected from a wide range of people; this will ensure that the research generates a sense of the variety of the responses and perceptions.

Doing two cases would reduce the possibility of prolonged engagement in any one site, thereby spreading the research too thin and reducing the thickness of the case description.

#### **4.5.2 Issues of validity**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed the concept of 'trustworthiness' for qualitative research, to encompass credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability - concepts that roughly substitute for internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity. They argued that:

*The basic issue in relation to trustworthiness is simple: How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of? (1985: 290)*

The literature on case study research has focused on a number of threats to the trustworthiness of this form of research and the problem of generalisation has received particular attention. Many have discussed the difficulty associated with generalising from a case or cases to an entire population, while others have argued that there is little point to doing research if the findings cannot be widely generalised. It has been mooted that single case study designs in particular have even less potential for generalisability beyond the particular case.

One response to these criticisms of case study findings has been to emphasise the importance of studying cases simply for their value as individual cases, without expecting the findings to shed light on any other cases or situations. In this view, generalisability is not a relevant issue. Stake (1994) has identified three different types of cases, arguing that *intrinsic* case designs are of this nature, in which a case is studied simply to understand a particular situation, as opposed to *instrumental* case designs where generalisability is an aim; in this a case is studied in order to understand a general issue which is likely to be manifested in other cases.

Other responses have been to redefine the notion of generalisability in a way which challenges the notion's embeddedness in statistical design and quantitative research. Theorists such as Yin (2003) and Smaling (2003) have formulated interesting alternative notions of generalisation, more appropriate to qualitative research design.

Analytical generalisation (Yin, 2003) proposes the idea of generalisation to theory rather than to other cases. It stresses the importance of early theory identification and development during the research design process. Such prior theory, when supported by the findings from specific cases, then becomes the means of generalisation, providing the lens through which new cases can be examined. In Yin's view, replication of findings across multiple cases is an essential element of analytical generalisation, presenting the means through which theoretical propositions can be tested and then either confirmed or contradicted by evidence from more than one case. He has argued further that the potential for replication makes multiple case designs stronger than single case designs since findings can then test propositions and generate theory across cases.

It can be argued, however, that replication logic, when strictly applied, shifts the focus of analysis away from generalising to theory to a form of generalisation to other cases, so that the process begins to resemble traditional cross-case generalisation within a positivist paradigm.

Smaling (2003) offers an alternative notion, that of analogical generalisation, which is less embedded in a positivist paradigm and involves identifying dimensions of the studied case which could 'ring true' across other cases. In this view, case study research should be so documented and described as to allow the reader to identify similarities and differences between the studied case and other cases. Thus cases are not selected because they are representative of the population, but rather for the possibility that the findings will 'ring true' for other cases.

From the above discussion it is clear that the researcher's view of the relationship between theory and case study data will determine the appropriate form of generalisation of the findings. In this research, I have described the theory of the Evaluative State as the vehicle through which generalisation will occur. It is intended that this theory will guide the research design and the data collection, allowing the findings which emerge to reflect back on the initial theory, its propositions and assumptions.

It is also intended that the description of the case study, including its design features and findings, will facilitate analogical generalisation in the sense that readers should be able to identify similarities and differences between UWC and other higher education institutions with which they are familiar, thus rendering the findings and theory globally meaningful.

Moving beyond issues of external validity, Kvale (1995) introduced the idea of quality craftsmanship to describe ways of checking throughout the research to ensure the internal validity of a study. He defines (1995) validity as the extent to which the study investigates the phenomena intended, and argues that validity goes beyond the issue of methods to include the ethical integrity of the researcher and the quality of the craftsmanship of the investigation.

Kvale (1995) further identifies tactics for continuously checking the credibility and reliability of research findings as they emerge. Amongst these are:

*...checking for 'researcher effects, triangulating, weighing the evidence, checking the meaning of outliers, using extreme cases, following up surprises, looking for negative evidence, making if-then tests, ruling out spurious relations, replicating a finding, checking out rival explanations and getting feedback from informants (1995: 6).*

Kvale's verification tactics were particularly useful as a checklist for internal validity for this study, and further discussion below will elaborate, where appropriate, on the use of some of these techniques.

## **4.6 Data collection**

### **4.6.1 The unit of analysis**

The primary unit of analysis for this study is drawn from academics at UWC, and the research will examine the impact of quality policy implementation from the perspective of their lived experiences. The unit of analysis is a group of people rather than an individual, and institutional managers have been identified as a critical sub-unit of analysis.

Yin (2003) has suggested that when a case has more than one unit of analysis it should to be deemed an embedded case study rather than a holistic one, which has a single unit of analysis.

The rationale behind specifying a second unit of analysis, or more precisely, a sub-unit, involves broadening the scope of the investigation in order to elicit a deeper understanding of the case under study.

Identifying a second unit of analysis focuses the research on the critical role of institutional managers in creating the conditions and circumstances, or the context, within which policy implementation occurs.

An embedded design extends the inquiry to include an examination of additional elements, and focusing on a sub-unit (institutional managers) alongside a primary unit of analysis (academics) provides an opportunity for broader analysis and for deeper insight into the case, its context and the research problem (Yin, 2003: 46).

#### **4.6.2 Data collection techniques**

While agreeing that the differences between qualitative and quantitative paradigms exist at the level of epistemological and ontological assumptions about research, theorists have differed on whether the techniques for collecting, coding and analysing the data should be associated with the research approach or whether they should be regarded as neutral and value-free.

Bryman (1984) has argued for the separation of a consideration of techniques or methods from paradigmatic choices about research approaches. His argument differs from those of many other writers who have separated out and categorised techniques and data collection methods strictly according to specific research paradigms.

For Bryman (1984), techniques are neutral to the extent that interviews, document analysis, surveys and participant observation can serve quantitative research equally as well as they do qualitative research. The only proviso governing the choice of technique should be its fit with the research question. The latter view is based largely on Trow's earlier conviction that 'the problem under investigation properly dictates the methods of investigation' (Trow, 1957, quoted in Bryman, 1984).

The selection of data collection techniques for this study has been informed by the above discussion on the relationship between paradigm and methods, and techniques have been selected according to a sense of how they fit the research questions which focus on academics' perceptions of the impact of change in higher education on their working lives. Further, it was decided that techniques such as interviewing and observation were more appropriate for qualitative research attempting to explain the complexity of human behaviour and uncover the meanings of human action.

Data collection techniques for this study are interviewing, document analysis and observation. Table 4.1 below elaborates on these.

**Table 4.1**

**Data collection techniques for this study**

1. Academics and university managers were interviewed.
2. Policy documents relevant to the South African higher education system in the post-apartheid era were analysed, with a focus on those relating to quality assurance and state steering in the context of the transformation of higher education.
3. The university's policy documents in relation to quality assurance and with regard to its mission and vision for transformation were examined.
4. Observations were conducted during internal academic review processes and during external audit.

Semi-structured individual interviews which allowed the participants to speak freely were planned, and a set of guiding questions were formulated to provide general direction for the conversations and to secure the kind of information sought. Two different types of interviews were conducted, with different guiding questions and areas of focus.

Interview Type A: For academics

Interview Type B: For managers at the university

The interviews were conducted to obtain information from academics and university managers about their opinions and beliefs regarding quality in education, the source of their beliefs, their notions about the relationship between the state and higher education, and their impressions of how conflicting opinions impact on quality evaluation.

Kvale (1995) has proposed seven stages in the research process for interview investigations: thematising or theorising the study, designing the sample and instrument, interviewing, transcribing, analysing, verifying and reporting.

This study followed a similar interview investigation process, and the following section will discuss some of the limitations and checking procedures within this process.

#### **4.6.3 Sample selection**

There were two distinct phases in the interviewing process. Interviewing began in April 2007, and fourteen people were interviewed between April and August 2007. Due to pressure of work, I only returned to interviewing in June 2008, conducting eight more interviews during this second phase. The focus in this phase was on interviewing managers at the university, five of them being interviewed during June 2008. Three more academics were also interviewed during the second phase.

An interesting feature of the two phases was that the 2007 interviews were completed before UWC experienced its first external audit by the Higher Education Quality Committee. Very few academics were involved in preparation of the self-evaluation report for this audit, but many linked the audit to more intense demands around record-keeping and increased administration associated with teaching and assessment. I was able to engage academics in interviews around their perceptions of potential audit outcomes and on their emotional and behavioural responses to pre-audit demands.

The audit took place during September 2007 and on my return to the field in June 2008 I found that no written feedback on the external audit had yet been received from the HEQC, although some verbal feedback was given to senior managers on the last day of the September 2007 audit. This allowed me to talk with managers during June 2008 about their expectations of the audit outcomes.

The interesting aspect of the timing of the two phases of interviewing was that the first phase captured academics' perceptions and expectations of the audit experience and its outcome. The second phase, while being retrospective to the audit, captured managers' perceptions of what the possible outcomes would be for UWC, after having gone through the audit process and having received some verbal feedback, but no official report, from the audit panel.

#### **4.6.4 The sample and triangulation of perspectives**

It was my initial intention that the sample should represent the diversity of academic staff at UWC. To this end, I wanted the sample to balance gender, age and years of employment at the university. It was not my intention to have disciplinary representation, but I did intend to interview academics from various faculties. I decided to first invite respondents from the academic community; from that initial sample I would decide on the next stage of selection.

Regarding access, permission was first sought and received from the Registrar of the university, this being the established procedure when conducting research at UWC. Then an e-mail was sent to all academic staff on the server list in April 2007, calling for volunteers to be interviewed on the topic of the 'implementation of quality policies in universities and the effect of these on the learning and working environment' - I quote from the original e-mail.

Academics from five faculties responded – nine from the Community and Health Sciences faculty (hereafter referred to as CHS), eight from the Faculty of Natural Science (hereafter referred to as Science), seven from the Economic and Management Sciences faculty (hereafter referred to as EMS) and three each from the Education and Arts faculties.

The group of academics eventually interviewed was predominantly made up of people who had volunteered for the study in response to my initial e-mail request for participants. It is fair to assume that these respondents had a particular interest in the subject. E-mail responses confirming their participation contained expressions of interest such as:

- *It's an excellent topic for a PhD, if I may say so. Good timing too.*
- *Good idea!*
- *I will participate with pleasure.*
- *In one sentence, it means more paperwork and hassle imposed on us researchers!*

- *I would love to talk to you because I do have some serious questions about it.*
- *I must warn you that I have some very critical views about the unprofessional way we are being treated here.*
- *We are particularly 'hit' by quality assurance audits so you might find our faculty particularly interesting.*

These responses alerted me to the possibility of the research findings being skewed as a result of participants sharing a particular view of quality policy implementation. As a cautionary measure, I interviewed just five of the above group, the ones who were available at the time of interviewing, and then six more who had volunteered but had expressed no opinion about the topic in their e-mail responses. One of the respondents in this latter group had commented:

*I'd like to participate but I may not be aware of these 'quality policies', and hence I may not have any views about them.*

The rest of the academic sample was established through the use of the snowballing technique. I asked academics from the CHS and Science faculties who came from the first group to suggest other academics in their faculties whom I could interview and who thought differently about quality policy implementation to the way they did.

Through using the snowballing technique in this way and consciously including a diversity of perspectives in the sample, some measure of triangulation of academics' views about the topic was achieved. Arksey and Knight (1999) have suggested that triangulation involves obtaining data from a wide range of different and multiple sources; they propose the following with regard to achieving a sample reflecting a diversity of opinions:

*Rather than just gather data from one particular group with an interest in the study, you could seek out the views of several sets of stakeholders and, in that way, introduce a comparative aspect (1999: 21).*

The relationship between the sample and the population was not designed to be a representative one, so in that sense the sample was not required to mirror differences in the population with regard to age, years of academic service, gender, disciplinary background, or type of employment contract.

However, the strategy of selection was aimed at achieving a relevant range of people in relation to the entire population at UWC in order to secure sufficient variation in the data - hence the attempt to include people who were known to have different opinions about and approaches to quality policy implementation.

At one point during the interviewing, I decided to focus my attention on the CHS and Science faculties because preliminary findings suggested that these two faculties had taken different approaches to quality implementation, compared both to each other and to the other faculties where academics had been interviewed, indicating that the experiences of academics in these two faculties were likely to reflect different approaches to quality policy implementation.

The other three faculties, Arts, Economic and Management Sciences, and Education, were not as marked by difference as the CHS and Science faculties appeared to be during this phase. Nevertheless, I found that, taken together, all the academics interviewed for the study reflected a sufficiently wide range of perceptions and behaviours with regard to quality and policy implementation in the university.

To summarise the academic interviewees: seventeen academics were interviewed, eleven of whom were female and six male. There was a wide variety in their years of employment at UWC. Three had been there for fewer than five years, most had been employed for more than ten years, while four had served for more than twenty-five years.

The fact that the majority of academics interviewed had spent ten or more years at UWC could be viewed as either a strength or a limitation of the sample. The advantage was that lengthy employment at one university could offer the benefit of insight into the impact of higher education change over time on the institution, while the weakness was that time often lent bias to people's views. In other words, long-serving academics might have become accustomed to a particular view of what constituted academic work and would be more likely to resent new demands, framing them perhaps too readily as an imposition and a distraction from performing their core activities well. The potential for long service to become either an advantage or a hindrance will be examined and accounted for when explaining the findings.

In terms of the interviews with managers, these were conducted with three members of the university's senior executive, one of whom had volunteered for the study, while I approached the other two directly with requests for an interview. Two senior managers in the quality and academic planning divisions of the university were also approached and agreed to be interviewed. The executive members were chosen because of their links with the university's academic project, while the two other managers were natural choices since they occupied senior positions in the quality assurance components of the university's work.

#### **4.7 Data analysis**

Interviews were transcribed as precisely as possible and then computer software, Atlas-ti, was used for coding and analysis. Seale (2006) has suggested that the activity of coding involves placing like with like, thereby allowing the researcher to identify patterns of similarity in the data. Coding is a serious activity, since decisions taken at this stage have consequences for the quality of data analysis (2006: 306).

I designed an interview protocol structured to elicit data about interviewees' views on quality, on quality assurance processes in the university, on the purpose of a university education, on the role of academics in universities, on how conditions in the university had changed in the last ten years, on the role of the relationship between the state and universities, and on their impressions of the HEQC Audit for which the university was preparing at the time of the research.

My first two interviews were conducted on a pilot basis. I approached the early interviews with a sense of testing whether the questions I was asking would elicit the data I needed to address the research questions of my study. For this reason, from my list of volunteers, I approached two people whom I knew well and whom I knew would not object to a second interview, if this were required. The pilot interviews were a tremendous learning experience.

By analysing my questioning style and interviewee responses with the help of my supervisor, I was able to identify my tendency to lead interviewees to answers I was hoping for, my habit of referring too often to my own experience at the university, and a tendency to pass subtle judgments on interviewees' responses.

Fortunately, the experience of piloting gave me the chance to correct these habits of questioning which otherwise might have led to validity compromises through the influence of personal bias, based on my years of experience at UWC.

I recorded interviews and transcribed many of them myself, but also employed three people to do the transcribing for me. In the interests of protecting the identity of those interviewed and ensuring confidentiality of information, I employed people who had no links with UWC or with higher education, except for the fact that they had obtained undergraduate degrees at universities other than UWC.

I designed a protocol for the transcribing process, indicating the symbols and abbreviations I wanted them to use, for example, to indicate that a section of the interview was inaudible, that the transcriber was unsure of what he or she had heard, or to indicate a pause, and its length, in the conversation. Analysing the transcriptions of the pilot interviews revealed the complexities of punctuation - that the act of deciding where a comma, a colon, a new sentence or a new paragraph were to be inserted was in itself an act of data analysis which had an impact on the meaning of the words spoken. The transcribers were therefore instructed that I would insert punctuation into the text after reading and then listening to the transcribed interviews.

The transcribed interviews were coded using Atlas-ti software, which enabled me to group responses into cognate codes. These codes would form the basis of the categories finally constructed, through merging or linking codes into categories, or constructing categories out of groups of codes. The first themes I designed emerged from the literature, from my own experience in the university and from my initial hypotheses. These initial themes changed a number of times. An exercise I found useful was to list every code and category on a separate piece of paper and then to shuffle them around, physically grouping them together, moving them from one group to another, ranking them in order of importance to the research, and grouping them in terms of similarities and differences. After a variety of permutations, I eventually reached a thematic construction which reflected what I imagined I was seeing in the data.

#### 4.8. Peer debriefing

A useful tool in the data analysis process was the interaction I had with an independent researcher, a critical friend, Sandy, who had done a substantial amount of research into universities and policy implementation, both nationally and in the Western Cape. We met a few times while I was conducting interviews - I was engaged in data analysis during interviewing and data transcription - and we also met during my process of grouping and categorising the data. I discussed my puzzlement over the data and the meanings I attributed to it, and she prompted my analysis by asking useful questions such as:

- Are the coding categories answering the research questions?
- How do you explain the contradictions you say you are finding in respondent's discourse?
- Are the things you expected not coming up?
- How would you explain the differences in views between the leadership and the academics? What does each group care about?
- What kinds of tensions are emerging? Why do academics feel burdened and frustrated?
- What are the dangers and benefits to having diverse notions of quality in this university?
- What has astounded and surprised you?

The notes of these discussions served as a useful record of my ongoing process of reflection and data analysis and, given my immersion in the site, the role of the critical friend in reflecting back on my ongoing interpretation of the data contributed towards ensuring the trustworthiness of the data.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined peer debriefing in the following way:

*It is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind (1985: 308).*

The usefulness for my research was that peer debriefing allowed me the opportunity to test and defend my analysis of the data, through establishing whether Sandy regarded it as a reasonable explanation of the views and behaviours of the participants.

My views of higher education and the behaviours of academics and leadership had been shaped by my experience of working at UWC. The experiences shared by Sandy about her research into the behaviour of academics and leaders at other South African universities broadened my perception and enriched my reflections about the relevance of the findings of this particular case. Smaling (2003) introduced the concept of analogical generalisation to refer to the usefulness of case study research which allows readers to identify similarities and differences between the case being studied and other cases. The discussions with Sandy gave me the opportunity to identify features of the analysis of behaviours, views and responses of leaders and academics at UWC which both resembled and differed from Sandy's research findings derived from her study of other South African universities.

The immediate outcome of the process of inductive analysis of the data is reflected in the three tables of codes, themes and categories, in the Appendix to this study. The tables are presented, broadly, in relation to the research question and the research propositions of the study.

#### **4.9 Limitations of the study**

It was decided to opt for depth rather than breadth of information in interviewing. I spent between one and two hours with each interviewee, covering the same ground through the use of a specific interview guide; at the same time, I allowed for flexibility, probing to clarify the intentions behind the words used by the interviewees. The questions were mainly open-ended, but with two closed questions, one about the time interviewees had been at UWC, the other about details of the quality assurance work they were involved in. One question was both open and closed, in the sense that it asked interviewees to choose from a set of definitions of quality the ones which resonated most with their thinking and then to explain their choice.

Dissertation research has to set clear time and sample boundaries if it is to be completed within a reasonable period. It is accepted that setting such boundaries may result in an incomplete or even biased view of the impact of a quality regime on academic staff.

Depth of information was achieved through focusing the interviewing on two faculties and by describing in detail the implementation processes followed in each.

This research will not claim that its findings about academics' views and behaviours are representative of the views and responses of the academic population in South African universities as a whole. At most, the research findings will either confirm or contradict the propositions formulated at the start of this study. In the end I will be able to present findings which address the impact of quality regimes of the Evaluative State on academic practice in one university. Through thick description, readers will be encouraged to identify similarities and differences between the realities of quality policy implementation in UWC and other universities.

#### **4. 10 Chapter summary**

This chapter provided a justification for selecting case study method as a research strategy, and for the decision to use single case design for the investigation. The sample design and data collection methods were described and data coding and analysis procedures were discussed. Design limitations were addressed through the identification of appropriate strategies to promote internal and external validity, credibility and trustworthiness.

In conclusion, the chapter identified limitations mainly connected with single case design, and with threats to validity associated with the effects of research proximity. The discussion also described threats to external validity and proposed alternative notions of conceptualising generalisability. Further, it attempted to demonstrate that the severity of these threats can be reduced through applying checking procedures constantly during the investigation, to achieve a form of validity associated with 'quality craftsmanship'.

Chapters 5 and 6 provide a description and interpretation of the data, achieved through the analysis according to the themes and categories presented in the attached Appendix.

Chapter 5 presents data associated with academics' and institutional managers' views of quality, while Chapter 6 gives data largely related to the responses and behaviours of academics with regard to the implementation of quality assurance policies.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Reporting on the findings of the research

**What are the different conceptions of quality and quality assurance amongst stakeholders in higher education in South Africa?**

#### 5.1. Introduction

This chapter reports on the findings of the study as they relate to different understandings of quality amongst academics and university managers. It focuses largely on quality as fitness for purpose, as transformation, and as 'value-added'. Different notions of quality as excellence are also explored. The purpose is to present a broad range of understandings of quality, as held by academics and institutional managers.

#### 5.2 Talking about quality

I approached this question in interviews in a rather indirect way, believing that asking a number of quality-related questions would reveal richer and more nuanced data about people's understanding of quality than simply asking interviewees, "What is quality?"

Core interview questions related to quality were as follows:

*When we talk of trying to improve quality in higher education, what do you think we should be trying to improve?*

*In trying to assess the quality of an institution, what should we be focusing on or what should we be looking at?*

*Would you say that quality in this university has improved, stayed the same or declined during the time you've been here?*

*What makes it easy or difficult to achieve quality here?*

*Among the definitions of quality found in the literature, such as value for money, fitness for purpose, transformation, and excellence, which of the following definitions resonates the most with you? Explain why.*

The last question listed here was accompanied by a description of definitions of quality, as adapted from Harvey and Green (1993). The range of data was more than satisfactory. I was able to get interviewees to discuss Harvey and Green's quality typography, but only after having elicited their own views of quality, unhindered by academic discourse.

The views on quality which emerged fitted fairly neatly into Harvey and Green's definitions of quality as fitness for purpose, excellence, transformation and value for money, although they were described and named differently by interviewees. For example, the notion of quality as *fitness for purpose* grew to include conceptions of quality as sense-making, as mission achievement, as multiple responsiveness, and as building a better society. Data analysis demonstrated that all these were variations on the theme of fitness for purpose. This was just one example of the richness of interpretation which emerged within single categories of quality definition.

The data revealed conceptions of quality which were both unexpected and fascinating. At first, I was rather reluctant to classify these within Harvey and Green's existing typology, wanting to retain them as quite independent and new categories. Conceptions of quality such as authentic dialogue and engagement, as value-added, as social upliftment and as serving the public good were exciting and new to me, and I was keen to hold onto them as separate categories. Further analysis, however, revealed that in fact they served to expand upon the concept of quality as transformation. Interestingly, the data which emerged around transformation extended the concept to include personal as well as social and political transformation. This realisation offered sufficient compensation for my having to abandon the creation of new definitions of quality.

Harvey and Green's (1993) definitions of quality provided both a framework for exploring how academics, managers and senior managers in one university conceptualise quality and a means of unpacking conceptualisations of quality amongst these groups. What follows is an account of the data, which is presented within themes that problematise and elaborate on formal categories of quality such as excellence, fitness for purpose and transformation.

These reflect tensions and debates within this university relating to the intersection of past values with new ones and the problem of applying standardised measures of quality across institutional contexts in South African higher education.

At a deeper analytical level, the data reveal the existence of different understandings of quality at UWC. These varied descriptions of quality by academics and managers suggest the presence of a powerful philosophical and political tension, one that permeates all aspects of university life. This tension is played out within competing discourses of quality – academics appear to favour a conceptualisation of quality which is context-bound and internal (quality as fitness for purpose and transformation), while university managers endorse a view of quality which is externally-directed and driven by the pursuit of rewards and gains (quality as excellence and value for money).

An analysis of the data will shed light on the phenomenon of institutional transformation. In doing so, it will suggest that institutions effect change with great difficulty and often at great cost. The data will show that tensions around quality are a proxy for contestation over institutional identity, and reflect a struggle for power between academics and managers for the right to determine the post-apartheid identity and purpose of the university. These tensions also reflect a struggle for the right to define what quality is, how it ought to be measured and managed, and, ultimately, how the institution ought to be judged and assessed.

Furthermore, apparent contradictions and ambivalence in the discourse of academics and managers are themselves evidence of a university in transition, as opposed to one existing in a steady state, engaged in transformation over a lengthy period of time. In this context of transition, old historically-bequeathed identities coexist and conflict with the university's new aspirations. These in turn were forged in the course of responding to and pursuing rewards from various powerful constituencies, chief amongst them the Evaluative State, making the discourse inconsistent and contradictory within and across layers of the institution.

### **5.3 Views of quality: Fitness for purpose and transformation**

A rough classification of the interview data around definitions of quality demonstrates that most of the academics interviewed chose fitness for purpose as resonating most with their own view of quality. Secondly, an overwhelming majority of this group selected quality as transformation as their second definition of choice. The overlap of these choices invited a closer examination of how these quality concepts were understood.

This scrutiny revealed, firstly, that views on fitness for purpose related purpose overwhelmingly to the university's mission, rather than to external goals and policies. There were, however, a few exceptions. Most notably, academics in disciplines with links to professional bodies in areas such as health, as well as those with an interest in training students for specific occupations in industry, related purpose to the learning outcomes expressed in the qualifications or directions pursued by their students.

The congruence between understandings of fitness for purpose and transformation could be accounted for by the extent to which respondents chose to identify with transformative elements within the university's mission. Stated differently, most academics interviewed for this study valued those elements of the university's mission which they believed reflected a commitment to transformation in a number of areas.

In their view, these transformative elements were embedded in aspects of UWC's mission, in particular those which promoted the expansion of access as a step towards achieving social justice, and those which foregrounded community engagement as a means of pursuing an agenda of social development and even of social change.

### **5.3.1 Equity versus excellence in the institutional mission**

The current mission statement of UWC is a long and convoluted one, marked by attempts at negotiating different positions regarding the direction the university's post-apartheid transition should take. It could even be argued that the university's mission reflects the different purposes and functions of universities in general, both nationally and globally. Its mission statement reveals contradictions and incongruities.

Discourse around the pursuit of equity coexists with aspirations towards excellence. Both local and global contexts are acknowledged as shaping identity, while development goals are articulated alongside a language of global competitiveness. The following extract from the mission statement illustrates this view:

*The University of the Western Cape is a national university, alert to its African and international context as it strives to be a place of quality, a place to grow from hope to action through knowledge. It is committed to excellence in teaching, learning and research, to nurturing the cultural diversity of South Africa, and to responding in critical and creative ways to the needs of a society in transition. Drawing on its proud experience in the liberation struggle, the university is aware of a distinctive academic role in helping build an equitable and dynamic society.*

While the actual mission refers in vague and ambiguous terms to aims related to serving both equity and development goals, this study shows that the mission in use amongst academics is a very simple one. The latter characterises UWC as a university where community engagement is central to its activities, and as an institution committed to broadening access towards the attainment of social justice. One interviewee, Caroline, a professor, articulated this bluntly and somewhat cynically, “*UWC has a mission to uplift the previously educationally disadvantaged.*” I say cynically, because she proceeded to suggest that UWC’s ongoing attempts to uplift the previously educationally disadvantaged precluded the possibility of the institution ever being a place of quality.

The complexities of unravelling distinctions between the various missions in use are further demonstrated when one considers that members of senior management of the university interviewed for this study have a somewhat different view of the university’s role. Thabo’s understanding of UWC’s mission is shrouded in descriptions of visions and aspirations of excellence which involve ‘*producing large numbers of students with great ability,*’ while Rafieck attempts to detach the concept of engagement from its associations with marginalised communities by reconfiguring the notion of partnerships (previously used mainly in the context of disadvantaged communities) to foreground those associated with business and industry.

Some of the tensions between these different positions are described by Bulelwa, a senior academic, as she reflects on her struggle with the competing demands of excellence and equity:

*I watched a movie yesterday by this American woman, Molly Blank...and I cried..... We were discussing entry level requirements the day before in our faculty, and I’m kind of ambivalent. On the one hand, you want to attract quality students. On the other hand there was a sentence in there (the movie) that really hit me. It said, ‘Mongamo was the best student at Oscar Mpetha High School but yet his results were not good enough for UCT.’ Now there are so many Mongamos at UWC. How do you give them those opportunities? So in that sense, giving opportunities to people - for me that is part of the public good.*

The conversation around quality as fitness for purpose must be grounded in an understanding of contestation and the relationships of power between academics and managers, as well as between their ideas about what universities are for.

In linking fitness for purpose with quality as transformation, academics demonstrate the power which, although limited, they retain in determining both the goals and outcomes of a university education. From their perspective, UWC will continue to operate into the post-apartheid era, drawing on a mission which values equity above certain notions of excellence and which foregrounds development in a local rather than global sense.

Simply put, embracing a commitment to the transformative elements of the university's mission is translated by many academics into a political stance. This includes broadening access to include the poor and educationally under-prepared – a social justice orientation – and a conceptualisation of engagement which defines communities as those previously oppressed and still marginalised. Senior managers, on the other hand, keen to shift the university towards entrepreneurialism and global competitiveness, embrace a very different mission, one characterised by a discourse which values excellence, efficiency and the need to strengthen profit-driven partnerships.

The management of the university has adopted the notion of UWC as an 'engaged' university as a way of signaling the transitional space between the diametrically opposed purposes and functions encapsulated in the current mission. The 'engaged university' thus attempts to detach the concept of engagement from its development context, while defining the parameters for transition from HBU.

UWC's Institutional Operational Plan (2004-2009), prepared for the Department of Education with the aim of demonstrating future sustainability in an effort to secure recapitalisation funding from the state, articulates the notion of engagement as follows:

*The Engaged University envisions a future that transcends past struggles in favour of an institution that is shaped by the congruencies and contradictions between transformation and global competitiveness, accelerated by technological advances. At the Engaged University these tensions are balanced to make a number of trends discernible. The institution offers economically viable and financially sustainable programmes, achieves excellence in teaching and learning and greater heights of distinction and competitiveness in selected priority research areas. Equitable access opportunities are available to students on the basis of ability and potential to succeed. This sustainable growth scenario is most probable, plausible and favoured by the university.*

The above quote suggests a mission ascribed to by institutional managers. It embraces broadening access, but only on the basis of educational ability and students' potential to succeed. This view contrasts with academics' beliefs that UWC should also continue granting opportunities to those who lack strong educational backgrounds, and whose success largely depends on academics' willingness to expend the extra time and effort required to help them succeed. Most of the academics interviewed located broadening access squarely within a social justice framework - hence their determination to make a difference through making opportunities available to those who, as a result of poor schooling in the ghettos of South Africa, were least likely to be admitted to any other local university, and who were most in need of the personal and social rewards that could accrue from a university education.

### **5.3.2 Fitness for purpose, transformation and the power of context**

Newton (2007), in presenting lessons learnt about quality, notes that "*quality is not a 'blank sheet': context and circumstance impact on our intentions*" (2007: 20).

Context and circumstance appear to have a strong influence on how quality is understood at UWC, especially in the case of academics who have been at the university for many years and who disclosed that their values and beliefs drove them to take up positions there and to remain, despite lower salaries, high teaching loads and more burdensome administrative loads than those experienced at many other universities.

Don describes the values that have kept him at UWC for more than 30 years:

*I would not be here at UWC if I did not believe it was hugely important for South Africa to be taking the people it has and moving them as fast as it can be done to being able to be confident participators in global society... I am deeply committed to that and that's why I landed up here...when I could have had a number of other really quite classy appointments. I was offered them and I said, No. I wanted to be here because I felt if I was going to stay (in South Africa) this is where I needed to be.*

Don illustrates the view of a number of interviewees, who suggested that their choice to remain at UWC, despite the employment conditions and infrastructural constraints, was motivated by a personal desire to intervene positively in the lives of young black people,

The particular notion of quality as fitness for purpose, adopted by academics like Don, is characterised by commitment and accountability to a particular interpretation of the mission of the university, namely its socially transformative purpose.

In the view of many interviewees, UWC's uniquely developmental mission of providing access to designated and disadvantaged groups and so helping fast-track black and working-class students to access and succeed at higher education, enables a number of transformations – those of personal, economic and social upliftment,

Lee, an academic for 27 years in the Science Faculty, describes UWC as an '*engaged university that tries to uplift people.*' Further in the interview, he echoes Don's sentiments when he says:

*I'm here because I like working with students as well as the research side. Research is exciting. You've always got something to stimulate you and I like working with students. I particularly like being at UWC because you see students coming from squatter camps and going into good jobs, eventually, and to me that's very rewarding. For that reason, I've stuck it out and I probably will not move now because of my age. But I have had the opportunity to move.*

Lee's view of quality, like Don's, appears embedded in the personal gratification of witnessing and participating in a transformation which has moved large numbers of students out of a lifetime of poverty.

Other interviewees similarly identified with the mission of social and personal upliftment. Many cast the university's role as that of taking young people out of township shacks and transforming them into successful senior employees, serving both the public sector and large companies. Albert, a science professor, characterises UWC's social justice role in the post-apartheid era in the following way:

*Many years ago we ... were forced to train teachers only because .... jobs were not that available to black people. But now recently there have been many more opportunities and we want our students to be able to take up positions in those directions, in banking and insurance, marine and coastal management, forestry, and many more positions that require high levels of mathematical expertise ... We want to prepare our students for those markets.*

Albert's appreciation of UWC as serving a social justice mission, and his conceptualisation of the transformative dimensions of accountability, permeates other interviewees' understandings of quality, and may explain why a majority of respondents felt that the notion of quality as 'fitness for purpose' resonated most with their thinking.

The data reveals a fairly common perception that such a mission should be supported almost as a matter of principle, that it is almost sacred, with academics performing service associated with higher education as a 'public good'. Quality as fitness for purpose thus comes to be equated with a notion of quality as mission-directed, measurable by the extent to which this aspect of the mission is achieved.

#### **5.4. Quality as transformation: acknowledging the value added**

The notion of quality as transformation is inextricably tied up with the notion of quality as fitness for purpose in the minds of those who value the transformative elements of the mission-in-use. When one then considers the characteristics of quality as transformation which emerge in the data, a number of interesting variations emerge. This section will explore the notion of adding value in relation to transformation.

Harvey (1997), in discussing the value-added dimension of transformation, argued that:

*Value added is a measure of quality in terms of the extent to which the educational experience enhances the knowledge, skills and abilities of students. A high quality institution would be one that greatly enhances its students. Oxbridge may produce some 'brilliant' first class graduates, but having had brilliant school leavers in the first place they might not have added very much (1997: 138).*

Harvey and Green's view that quality should be measured by the extent to which institutions add value in relation to the educational quality of their intake found wide support amongst academics.

The interviewees' discussions of the notion of quality as value-added often reflect strong disappointment that the current quality measurement system, applied through the state and its agencies, consistently fails to take account of the value-added dimension of quality at places like UWC, and that the exclusion of the value-added aspect from the quality count serves to undervalue the most central achievements of the university in empowering its students. Harold, an academic in the Economic and Management Sciences, describes the dilemma of evaluating quality for the purpose of comparing institutions without taking into account value added as a relative dimension of quality.

*If we were to compare ... our institution with others, we have to look at the net benefit of what occurs while a student is studying here and earning a degree. And that makes it so much more difficult to assess whether we are a quality institution compared to rival institutions around us. If we start with an average of D students and they end up being competent C's, and the other side started with B's and ended up with B's, we have added more value relative to them. You have to look at the resources we have – intellectual resources, input, student resources and the physical resources ... You have to look at how much value we add relative to our resources.*

While Harold recommends that measures of quality should include some means of assessing the intake and exiting quality of students in relation to institutional resources, Lee remarks on the enormity of the task required to achieve this kind of transformation, one which he feels is undervalued in relation to other quality indicators:

*We start with student material that's so much lower ... and there's more pressure to pass students. Subsidy is now more linked to passes than to bodies. And if we're going to remain an engaged university that tries to uplift people, and I believe we should, then we cannot expect the same pass rates as universities that are far more selective in their intake. We'll certainly try, but it's hard to fill in the background.*

Lee argues for a measure of quality that does more than reward the teaching output of universities by conferring state funding pegged to pass rates and throughput. He echoes the frustration felt by many academics who feel their efforts towards student development will remain undervalued in a context where quality is measured largely by the use of efficiency indicators such as pass rates and throughput.

The discussion of the transformative quality of the student experience centred around the university's achievement in relation to the quality of the student intake, and characterised the academic's role of teacher and mentor as key to the improvement of quality. It appears that UWC's 'students' are central to the approach to quality favoured by the academics interviewed, and it can be expected that their notions of how quality ought to be improved will similarly revolve around this critical factor.

The data revealed that a commitment to quality as transformation led many interviewees to conceptualise the ethos of UWC as one reflecting a serious commitment to teaching. This is understandable, given that the task of adding value is framed by academics as demanding extraordinary investment in teaching and in mentoring educationally under-prepared students. The scale of this investment in incoming students was articulated in language that spoke of *'picking people up from where they are,'* of *'mopping up,'* of needing to *'build students' self-esteem,'* and of needing to *'convince them that these challenges are for you and you can take them up.'*

UWC students were portrayed as having taking a beating, as it were, from the school system, from society, and even, in the case of transferring students, from other universities. New students were described as vulnerable, lacking in self-confidence, nursing injuries to their self-esteem and even, as Albert suggested, to their basic humanity, when they arrived. There was a sense that they needed to be coaxed both into learning and into being at university. A number of academics described the nature of the student intake at UWC and the great responsibility they felt towards the students:

Albert described UWC's most vulnerable students as follows:

*We receive so many students who ... lack self-confidence. I think that is one of the things that we build here that is different from what people achieve elsewhere. You intake the students and they come from a background where ... the parents are illiterate. I'm not talking about first generation graduates. I'm talking about kids... who maybe grew up with their grandmother and there is illiteracy at home and they come here and it is a major step forward for them. They come here and are insecure and one has to assure them that, 'Look, you have a right to be here. You have a place here and these challenges are for you and you may take them up.' So we bring them from very low down up to where they can shine after three years.*

Louise echoes the sentiment that the value-added dimension which the university provides, expressed in the personal and academic transformation of students, is empowering for both academics and students:

*We pay academics poorly compared to any other institution, and yet people still want to be here. There is something that happens here at this place between students' first year and their final year that makes them change. I've seen it so many times. A very insecure person comes in here, and at the end of that day the person is cracking a genome here... This is world class research and those were students who were not supposed to make it.*

The quality of the student intake at UWC was largely recognised by the academics as being less than optimal in terms of what is required for success at university. Academics believed that, through their efforts, through a strong focus on teaching and academic development and intense personal interactions with students, UWC was able to graduate students of suitable and even exceptional quality. They expressed their frustration when quality evaluation focused on efficiency indicators and failed to measure the value added by UWC. This was especially so in comparison with other institutions that were able to produce better results, having chosen to work with students who were far better prepared for higher education.

#### **5.4.1. The public good as value-added**

An interesting dimension of quality as transformation was provided by a number of interviewees, who argued, implicitly, that the recipients of a university education should be alerted by their mentors to the political need to ensure that society in general should benefit from their university education. The notion of public good refers here to the purpose and benefits of a university education.

In the view of some academics, the role of education should be to equip graduates with the knowledge and skills required to contribute to society, to social change, and to promote and enhance the well-being of others. The view of quality as public good therefore goes beyond notions of transformation as personal development and upliftment.

In introducing the concept of quality as promoting 'public good', Bulelwa raised the interesting 'paradox' of quality as adding value, when she said that:

*I think about what excellence is ... You can have somebody who is a high achiever but who actually doesn't function well in society or the world of work. But you can be excellent in terms of that traditional definition. For me, that well-roundedness is about...the moulding of a well-rounded citizen. Somebody who ... is tolerant, who is critical, who is compassionate, who contributes and wants to contribute to society and the well-being of society in whatever field they find themselves in and where the public good plays a part...I think in South Africa tertiary education is a luxury and having been given that opportunity I think you should contribute towards the public good in some way.*

Bulelwa suggests that the definition of quality as value-added, although clearly residing within a broader understanding of quality as transformation, also incorporates other elements, most notably that of quality as excellence. Harvey and Green (1993) label this dimension of quality, Excellence 1 (Exceeding High Standards).

This paradox of defining quality as value-added is explained as follows by Harvey and Green (1993):

*Quality as transformation involves a curious paradox because it is also equated with the exceptional. Empowerment and value-added notions of quality lead us back to Excellence 1, to 'doing the right things well.' For an excellent institution is surely one that adds most value to the student or empowers the student for life after college (1993: 25).*

The contradiction referred to by Harvey and Green, and hinted at by some interviewees, resides in the use of the concept of excellence in defining quality. While excellence is largely associated with the exceptional, in what has elsewhere been termed 'gold standard' or 'zero defect,' excellence also refers to 'doing the right things well.' In the reality of UWC, and probably that of many other institutions, doing the right things well, such as granting access to students ill-prepared for university, often stands in opposition to achieving exceptionally high standards of academic performance.

This contradiction in the discourse of excellence is explored by many interviewees. Nina, for instance, argues for a reconfiguration of the notion of excellence to include a conceptualisation of 'public good' which incorporates values such as caring for and promoting the well-being of others:

*To me, excellence is if an institution puts a person out there who has the knowledge and has the skills but also has the added dimension, something that you can't measure. That ... (I translate from Afrikaans here) there is more to the person than simply what they are able to do and..... what they know. It's another dimension, not surpassing by being better at what you are supposed to do, but ... being enthusiastic and feeling and caring. It's about getting a person out there who doesn't want to just earn money and get the big car but wants to make things better for whoever is on the receiving end of their services.*

Harold elaborates on the notion of public good by suggesting that a quality education should be one which produces graduates who are able to think critically and challenge the social order:

*I believe that ... if education is to be of value then it must prepare you... to become a change agent in society, who is more effective because of what I teach, and can help our economy operate differently. We should be training people to be change agents by educating people to become activists who can cause trouble in society.*

The following comment by Harold follows immediately on his remarks that relate quality to producing intellectual activists.

*What worries me about this university is the absence of debate about anything – that's what I said earlier about becoming more and more conservative – the progressives have abandoned us and we have a whole new ethos in this place.*

Harold laments what he views as UWC's retreat from its earlier position as 'Home of the Left', leading the struggle for democracy through intellectual and other forms of activism. He further describes what he terms a trend towards conservatism emerging at UWC, and identifies the absence of debate as the key indicator, contrasting this strongly with the university's outspoken critique of government during the years of struggle.

Subscribing to a notion of quality as public good, as described in this section, appears to symbolise a desire to re-assert the idea of UWC as contributing to social transformation.

The academics referred to in this section interpreted 'public good' as developing citizenship, encouraging social critique, and promoting social activism. They thereby linked quality as transformation to a political understanding of the role and purpose of a university education.

#### **5.4.2. Contesting the value-added**

The data revealed diverse opinions amongst academics and managers alike regarding the impact of the student intake on the academic project. The above discussion of quality as value-added has highlighted the argument that it was precisely this, the characteristics of the student intake, which provided the unique richness of engagement UWC was able to have with its students. Others, however, felt strongly that the academic standing and quality of UWC was being compromised by the ongoing commitment to students such as these.

Interestingly, some interviewees felt that the University of the Western Cape had been stereotyped with regard to its intake for far too long, and that it needed to break from this public image of itself as the university which admitted those who were rejected by other institutions. University managers in particular worked hard to persuade the public, the state and donors that UWC excelled at more than just granting access to the educationally disadvantaged.

The debate around UWC and its niche as a university which excels at inclusion is essential to understanding contestation within the university, between those, mainly academics, who are happy to be associated with the pursuit of equity through promoting access and inclusion, and those, mainly senior managers, who prefer to portray UWC as having the potential to be regionally, nationally and globally competitive, able to attract and graduate amongst the best students both in South Africa and the world.

Jack, a senior administrator, attempted to construct an argument for the need to locate the university's aspirations towards excellence within the reality of the quality task confronting academics:

*Excellence to me has to mean in relation to ... the range of students we have at UWC, not in relation to some other students that we wish we had or that other people have... Our excellence has to be based on the relationship that we have with the actual students that we are dealing with. Obviously within that there are debates about minimum standards for admission and those are ongoing debates. But it's the quality of the engagement with the actual situation that must be part of our definition of excellence.*

Jack suggests that 'doing the right thing' requires that the university recognise, and work to improve, the quality of its current students, who reflect a specific range of academic capabilities, rather than defining quality in aspirational terms alone.

Albert speaks passionately about his work with under-prepared students, and is somewhat critical about attempts within UWC to downplay this particular aspect of its identity:

*Some people think that the university wants to portray itself as a Mercedes Benz when it is actually more of a Corolla. But my view is that ... we can actually be proud of what we do ... We turn people who might otherwise have been outcasts into huge successes... You want to be recognised as an institution, and it's simple. You just look at where these kids come from. They come with a very basic Matric pass, they come from... economically backward and deprived homes and they leave here... and get appointed into top jobs that demand high levels of skills.*

The comments by Jack and Albert should be viewed in the context of UWC's preparation of its self-evaluation report for the HEQC's 2007 institutional audit. The self-evaluation presented a portrayal of the university as a place which was able to attract students of exceptional quality. Many academics argued that the depiction of UWC's quality as exceptional failed to reflect the reality of its student population, and instead focused on the aspiration or promise of future quality.

Albert's reference to two makes of motor vehicles, one quite ordinary, the other outstanding, suggests that denying the reality of its students serves to negate the university's real achievements of quality.

While some academics argued that UWC's understanding of quality should revolve around the successes of its educationally disadvantaged students, others felt that accepting unprepared students had a negative impact on the achievement of high standards. Caroline expressed her view of this debate as follows:

*I would go for excellence but I know that's not politically correct here. I feel, let us know when someone has passed something that they are satisfying those criteria. Not that they've had six chances and a back door thing to get in and continuous evaluation. But what I think is happening here is fitness for purpose. Because UWC has a mission to uplift the previously educationally disadvantaged.*

I probed Caroline's conceptualisation of the relationship between fitness for purpose and excellence, by asking:

*Do you think you can do that, uplift the previously educationally disadvantaged, while maintaining excellence?*

Caroline responded by arguing for a notion of excellence that was related to high standards, but in her view was out of reach of most UWC students:

*No, you can't. 'Cause those students can't do research, for example. You can get them to a certain level but if you're going to sit with them doing research, you'll be writing it. So that's not excellence. And they don't speak well, so they can't go on an international forum.... Well, I fail those who I really battle to understand. But a lot of people don't, so they won't reach excellence.*

While Jack and Albert argued for a redefinition of the concept of quality to include the value-added, or the transformations achieved under challenging circumstances, Caroline bemoaned the impact on quality of accepting under-prepared students:

*I think the actual standard of the students has dropped ... you're including people who you wouldn't have included 10 years ago, and you're encouraging them to pass, so in that way the quality has dropped. And I think it's inevitable. Because you're starting off with something that's of a lower level. You can improve that level, but you can't make it as good as if you chose a much higher level to start with.*

I quote at length from Caroline's interview since she expressed a view so divergent from the rest. She was the only person who problematised the mission of UWC and declared the university's mission-directed notion of quality as working against the achievement of quality as excellence, arguing that the two notions of quality - as fitness for purpose, or the achievement of equity, and as excellence - in that situation and in that place were so incommensurate as to make them completely incompatible.

Although her expression of the tension between fitness for purpose and excellence as conceptualisations of quality is very memorable, it alerts one to aspects of the data which suggest that many interviewees experienced discomfort with the notion of quality as excellence. Some problematised excellence and its association with externally-devised standards of performance and questioned the suitability of the concept for UWC's particular situation and context.

## 5.5. Quality as moving from HBU to excellence

Harvey and Green (1993) identify a number of different understandings and approaches embedded within the notion of quality as exceptional. First, there is the traditional notion of exclusiveness and élite quality, usually associated with the view that quality needs no pinning down – one knows it when one sees it. Second is the notion of quality as excellence, or as exceeding very high standards. Thirdly, there is exceptional quality seen as exceeding minimum standards.

Central to the understanding of quality as exceptional, in all three ways described above, is an acceptance of the idea that at some level standards exist, and that in the case of a good university education these are immutable, universal and objective - hence the 'gold standard' approach to quality, against which standard institutional performance can be measured, enabling comparisons across different institutions (Harvey and Green 1993).

The HEQC and the DOE of South Africa tried exceedingly hard in these first few decades of quality assuring institutions to rationalise an approach to quality measurement that involved standardising quality assessment across all universities, irrespective of their history, context or circumstances. All universities are now measured by the same rule, with benchmarks, performance indicators, targets and other standards of performance applied equally across the entire terrain of the higher education system.

Is it possible? Can it work? Could we have a uniform system of quality assessment in South Africa? This question was central to the conversations of many interviewees, as they grappled with often contradictory ideas. UWC's desire to be regarded as one of the best universities, both in South Africa and in Africa at large, jostled with the opposing notion that it was 'madness' to expect the university, given its history of neglect by the apartheid state, to perform comparably with universities which did not share that history.

Thabo, a senior executive manager, sums up the contradiction and dilemma faced by the institution as it positions itself to take up the challenge of transition, from historically disadvantaged institution to excellence:

*Now when I look at the national framework with respect to their expectations of higher education institutions, I find it quite appalling because I would have thought... that there would have been a far greater understanding of the differences between these different institutions in this country. They've got a benchmark of at least 80% first year passes. How can we possibly have UCT and Stellenbosch and UWC and Fort Hare on the same benchmark? It's craziness and it shows an absolute lack of any kind of understanding of the reality of the struggle that they claim is our greatest triumph.*

Yet earlier in the interview Thabo spoke of UWC as needing to compete on an equal footing with all South African universities:

*Speaking about this university and the role it must play in this country.... It must shine. It must contest with those historically white institutions on their own terms, not in terms of, 'Well, we're a poor historically black institution.' We must say that because of our energy, just because of who we are ... we'll play that game with you ... whatever it takes.*

The position described by Thabo became more serious and moved beyond the confines of mere rhetoric on the occasion of the presentation to the university of the DOE's official profile of UWC, prepared for the institutional audit and designed to contextualise the work the audit team performed during this assessment process.

At that time, senior managers in the university made public their dissatisfaction and took exception to the DOE framing UWC throughout as a historically disadvantaged institution; I quote Don:

*When they came to see us, they said, 'We are so interested because you are the first of the historically black institutions that is going to be investigated.' So we said, 'Can we say right away that we don't see ourselves as an HBU... for these reasons, and we ask you to take this seriously... They were a bit shocked ... And they got a profile drawn up and the profile did exactly what we feared. It just placed us in relation to HBUs... The notion of quality which is needed in South Africa... is... how is this place doing in relation to Stellenbosch University and the University of Cape Town... That notion was not there.*

Elsewhere in this thesis I use the word schizophrenia to describe the nature of this contradiction in a way that frames the inconsistency as a case of ongoing identity construction. An institution in transition, at least in the minds of its leadership, UWC vacillates constantly between two portrayals of itself, one as historically disadvantaged, and hence entitled to diverse forms of compensation, and the other as a successful university that has been able to 'ditch' its HDI label and enter a new race for excellence.

Thabo insightfully hints at this schizophrenic identity when he likens the dilemma to that of the three kings in T.S. Eliot's 'Journey of the Magi':

*People in this university find themselves in an invidious position because in a sense they're almost like T.S.Eliot's Magi. They're leaving the one and they're making contact with the other, but they're still part of the one that they are leaving ... as they move into a new space. And how do they hold onto their linkage to the one while moving into whatever else the demands may be? And so you are by definition in contestation with your culture.*

Conversations with senior managers hinted at an ongoing struggle to find a resolution of certain inconsistencies, related to the university adopting different representations of itself to suit different circumstances. In this regard, its claims to excellence were directed at gaining attention and attracting rewards (Wangenge-Ouma and Langa, 2010), while claims to a past of neglect as an HBU were directed at obtaining compensation and special consideration. At times, the university asserted its right to be regarded as equal in quality to HWU's, and at other times it demanded that quality judgements make allowance for its history as an HBU.

#### **5.5.1. Excellence as aspirational**

Adopting the notion of excellence as aspirational, as UWC's leadership tends to do, signals to the more cynical a notion of quality that is not yet quite as it should be, although the university would like people to believe that it is indeed capable of making the leap towards the exceptional. Legend has it that one member of the 2007 HEQC audit team, in a meeting with a group of senior management at UWC, expressed her annoyance at the continuous articulation of the aspirational and declared something along the lines of, '*Stop telling us what you hope to become. Tell us about the quality of this institution right now.*'

Senior executive managers interviewed often articulated the aspirational dimension of quality as excellence by drawing analogies with game-playing and other sporting metaphors. Some spoke of 'knowing the rules of the game,' others talked about 'being in the race,' and some referred to quality in post-apartheid higher education as being a race with 'new starting and end points.'

Thabo used the example of preparing a team to participate in world-class soccer to compare the notion of world-class soccer demanding the exceptional with the process UWC would need to go through to achieve excellence:

*There is a thing called world cup level soccer... you recognise it by looking at teams that play there. If you wish to play at that level you must understand what the world cup soccer culture is ... and you must aspire to it ... and you must do what is necessary to acquire it ... The challenge is to ask oneself ... what are your aspirations? Having asked and answered that question, you now ask, 'Where are we relative to what we believe our levels of competence with respect to this aspect of our lives ought to be?' And how do you know that? Well, look to see who in your estimation is playing the game at those levels and see where you are relative to them. And then if you still aspire to be with them, ask, 'What is the space and how do we fill the space?'*

Thabo used the metaphor of playing a game to demonstrate his view that the institution needed to identify its quality goals, and then act to ensure that it reached these goals. His rhetoric suggests a subtle understanding of the game-playing that is associated with making claims to excellence which often do not reflect the institution's reality. At the same time, his use of language seems to reflect a pragmatic hope that casting excellence as aspirational in this way could serve to inspire real quality improvement.

#### **5.5.2. Tracing the roots of the aspirational**

The notion of excellence as aspirational was described by some interviewees as emerging at a particularly troubled time in UWC's history, during the period from 1998 to about 2003. Briefly, the DOE's 2002 report on restructuring the higher education system through mergers and incorporations (DOE, 2002a) recommended the merger of UWC with the neighbouring technikon, a move signaling that the university would cease to exist beyond the apartheid era.

Jack, who joined the university a few short years before the release of this report (CHE: 2002a), traces UWC's difficulties back to 1999, when all higher education institutions were called upon to submit strategic planning documents, called three-year rolling plans. UWC's submission simply did not make the grade, resulting in a huge pressure on the institution to improve or face closure.

Jack explains:

*There was a real sense that the university had to change, that it was just so second rate or third rate in so many areas of its activity... In 1999... we started working on the three-year rolling plan and the strategic plan for the university. I went to a workshop around this planning process ... and all the HDIs were there. There was a sense that HDIs were a problem, that they were places of poor quality, that they didn't know how to do things. The focus of the discussion was the rolling plans which had been submitted by this institution. It was widely believed ... that UWC's was the very worst out of all the rolling plans... That people had just strung together bits and pieces cut and pasted from documents... It was a sense that we had to stop being an HDI and we had to actually become a decent university or else we were going under. And the possibility of going under was very real. There was a sense that if we continued to submit documentation like that to the DOE that we would have no future ... they were taking that as an indicator of an institution in a very bad state.*

The notion of an HDI in trouble entering the twenty-first century provided a challenge out of which arose, under a new Vice Chancellor, a formulation of the future 'aspirational trajectory' of UWC. It was not a description of the university's reality at the time, but what emerged from this 'hugely dispirited institution' after 2002 was 'a story of its future that was so dazzling. .... that they (funders and the state) caught the story... that here is an aspiration that must be supported' (From Thabo's interview).

In the same way that the 'dazzling story' emerged from the narrow escape from closure, so this reprieve had an impact on quality, as Kenneth, lecturer in Political Studies, recalls:

*These concerns (the increased activity around quality assurance) have spread across South Africa and UWC is just going with the tide. The advantage of it ... is that it puts beyond all reasonable doubt the quality of our exit standards and degrees if we do get any sneers or put downs... from the ivory towers of UCT, Stellenbosch, Wits, Pretoria and so on. And the famous merger report of 2002 has suggested ... that there wasn't so much a need for UWC to compete with two outstanding universities as neighbours ... but I think in fact that has had the opposite effect. It has kept UWC on its toes and the fact that our toughest rivals are the closest universities to us has made us more mindful...that you've got to deliver the goods.*

In 2002, UWC was able to persuade the state, through appeals to its potential for excellence, that it should be allowed to continue to exist independently. Kenneth hints at the predicament which resulted from having won a reprieve, that UWC would be required to demonstrate unequivocally to the state and the public that it deserved to be regarded as a university of quality. The implications of this obligation for academics, especially with regard to quality assurance processes and their expectations, are examined in the next chapter.

### 5.5.3. Problematising excellence

One way of problematising the notion of quality as excellence was proposed by Jack, who argued for the existence of a pluralistic notion of quality, one which would be cognisant of the reality of the student intake while not excluding the possibility of excellence:

*We are operating in a country which is the most unequal in the world...The question then is ... how are we responsive and who are we talking about? Excellence is not an abstract, ideal notion... It's saying, in that context, what is excellence? It's saying ... we are going to respond as well as possible to the situation that we are faced with. But ... there is no reason why we cannot have individuals who do achieve the highest ranks of excellence measured according to international benchmarks...We won't though have the mass of our students or staff attaining that kind of excellence .... That is impossible. But we can have a broad notion of excellence where we deal in the best possible manner with the situation that we are actually faced with. That's a notion of excellence to me. And it does mean we've got to live with that spread ... the minimum standards and the high end as well.*

Louise, a Science professor, echoes this view, but from the perspective of the academic, as she describes quality as excellence and quality as 'mopping up' almost as two sides of the same coin:

*The kind of student who comes into this university – they say it's about excellence – (but) it feels like you're mopping up all the time. Traditionally we have serviced the student who does not do that well at school. They get in here and generally people see it as a mopping up exercise. But then... something unlocks for that student and they do very well and go out to do research and they excel. You get that happening and this is where the excellence and the mopping up sort of work hand in hand. It's not just about mopping up... It's when the students get the right support they do well. So there's an element of mopping up there but there is also an element of excellence that's emerging from that.*

For some academics, it is not enough to acknowledge that quality as exceptional should not be the only definition of quality pursued by UWC. Instead, they further reject the idea of the university buying into a standardised notion of quality as 'gold standard', arguing that such an act would be accompanied by great loss, the surrender of core values, and a dilution of the social justice dimension of UWC's historic mission.

Susan, a visiting professor in the Arts Faculty, believes that UWC's move towards adopting the excellence and standards approach to quality (Harvey and Green, 1993) will challenge and ultimately destroy UWC's historic identity as a critical agent of social change:

*There's lots of misunderstandings around the word quality. If I walk around this campus I see so many interesting people doing interesting things...I'm surrounded with people who can actually profoundly change the country... And I find it pathetic (treurig) that we are being despised by other universities because we are not there with them and they have made these standards, when in actual fact the work that is being done here is so much more important than anything they can dream of.*

*And I find it a great pity that before 1994, this university couldn't give a damn about what Wits and UCT and Stellenbosch thought about this business of excellence. This was a university that said we're part of a community and our focus is this community. After 1994, suddenly now the new government has totally bought into what the grand universities have said quality is.*

*And because there's a formulation in this country of what excellence is and there's a place where excellence is being measured you can actually do nothing but now also strive for that. And I know that there have been a lot of things that have been given up by this university as a result.*

Susan views this transition with a sense of loss and thinly-disguised anger, but with an acceptance of the inevitable, realising that UWC has little choice but to compete with other institutions against external standards of achievement.

These standards are largely measures of performance output determined by the state, and include areas such as research output through accredited publications and teaching output measured by student success and time to degree.

## **5.6. Concluding words**

The data has indicated that a range of different views about what quality is and how it should be improved exists at UWC, especially in relation to working with students. Different opinions about academic standards, admission requirements and the quality of graduates were expressed by interviewees. My own sense is that these issues of quality and its improvement, including student quality, are thrust into stark relief in situations of quality evaluation.

This applies in the case of internal academic reviews, but even more so when academics from outside the institution serve on review panels, as for example during the crucial 2006 external audit, conducted by an HEQC-appointed review panel.

To illustrate this point, I present below a discussion held during the HEQC audit in a session about quality. As a member of the university group called into this audit session, I was able to observe the discussion and also attempted to make notes, as accurately as I could under the circumstances.

In this exchange, two rather difficult questions about quality and standards were asked by members of the HEQC audit panel:

**HEQC Question:**

*A concern with throughput is evident in your university's self-evaluation report...Have you considered improving ... selection criteria for admission?*

**UWC Respondent:**

*We talk about it all the time. We talk about equity as well as merit. We look at the intake – for example if the number of African students is down, then we look at it from that perspective. This is a complex issue that is monitored all the time and debated annually and we look at the demographic profile of students. Admissions impact on professions. If we go on merit, we can end up with only white dentists. We understand these equity issues – and there is a tension about this in the university. Making those choices requires intervention. We take those that qualify, not just those with As and Bs (in the school-leaving exam). We see ourselves as serving broader society.*

The respondent reveals the tension at UWC between those who prefer a notion of quality which is embedded in the pursuit of equity and those who pursue a context-free notion of quality as excellence, in terms of high standards.

The HEQC's questions convey their reservations about whether quality indeed exists at UWC, and the second question casts doubt on the usefulness of accepting multiple understandings of quality.

**HEQC Question:**

*There seem to be different definitions of quality - as excellence, as fitness for purpose etc in the university. It must be difficult to juggle all perspectives into the system. How do you do it in practice?*

***UWC Respondent 1:***

*We have taken continuous improvement and high service delivery as our common definition of quality and we measure against that.*

***UWC Respondent 2:***

*We need different notions of quality. If we only take excellence, we leave things out. There are minimum standards that are expected and we do check on those. Quality is for everybody.*

The questions put by members of the audit panel were challenging ones, asked as they were from the perspective of those who saw excellence through the standards-based lens. The discomfort and even annoyance felt by the respondents was palpable, as was the scepticism with which members of the audit panel received the responses. Indeed, the issue of multiple definitions of quality existing within the university was one which the panel found highly problematic and which was referred to at length in the Audit Report.

More importantly, the responses of the two UWC staff members, both quality managers, reflected the existence of competing positions with regard to quality even at the level of quality management, where some uniformity of approach would usually be expected.

This research has shown that on an almost daily basis people in the institution are confronted by diverse views of quality. Different levels in the institutions' hierarchy are associated with different notions of what quality is and how it ought to be improved.

Later discussion will reinforce the fact that academics and managers, for the most part, prefer different views of quality, and that this serves to account in large measure for the emergence of tension and conflict around quality policy implementation within the University of the Western Cape.

Finally, I think the following quotation by Susan identifies the presence of the political in quality and quality assessment, echoing Morley's (2003) sentiment that the norms and common-sense understandings often associated with the business of quality serve to disguise how power works.

*I would re-define excellence... or ask questions about who is defining excellence. For me excellence lies in what you can contribute to make this a better world... I mean, I can sit here and write a very good poem that three people would understand and it would change their lives and it would be an excellent poem, which has its place. But all my life I've said that even if I write one poem that helps someone at a political rally for three seconds to feel... pride in himself, it's just as valid as a poem that survives hundreds of years. So, I think ... one should not be vague about what excellence is. You should ask questions. Who defines excellence? And you should campaign for the right that you may define what excellence is for your university, in your country, in your area.*

Some interviewees attempted to identify the constituencies in higher education in the post-apartheid era that possessed the power to decide what the 'gold standard' of quality would be. The neighbouring historically white institutions, UCT and Stellenbosch University, were often referred to in a way which suggested that the quality concepts embedded in their experiences and practices had come to dominate the state's idea of quality. UCT and Stellenbosch University were framed by interviewees as historically well-resourced, sought after and able to select high-performing students, mainly from families who understood the value of a university education and who had sufficient resources to finance their children's education.

Understandably, many of those interviewed expressed their frustration that the state expected UWC, which continued to attract the poor and under-prepared, and still struggled with the historic deprivation of resources, to measure up to the same standards.

The following chapter will present further findings by addressing the following sub-question:  
How do competing conceptions of quality relate to academics' attitudes towards the implementation of quality assurance policy and processes?

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Reporting on the Findings of the research**

#### **How do competing conceptions of quality relate to academics' attitudes towards the implementation of quality assurance policy and processes?**

##### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter will explore academics' approaches and responses towards the implementation of quality assurance policy and processes at UWC and will link these to their views of quality and their understandings of how quality ought to be improved. In so doing, it will explore and seek to understand the breadth of their responses to implementing quality assurance measures, as they range from compliance to resistance. The analysis will also seek to explain ambivalence in the academics' responses, manifested in individual discourses about quality assurance, often shifting between seemingly contradictory positions and approaches.

This exploration will shed light on the tensions and contradictions within universities as they respond to national demands and pressures, and will locate the behaviour and actions of university managers within the interplay between conflicting imperatives – those of the state and those of other constituencies it must serve.

This section will also highlight the ways in which power shapes action, and in so doing shapes notions of quality and how it ought to be improved. In one sense, the state wields power to move the higher education system along its intended trajectory. It does this by making demands on institutions to act and respond in particular ways, using financial rewards and penalties to achieve the intended transitions and transformations. In another sense, individual academics wield significant power in shaping the institutional response to quality demands, by either facilitating the response required or acting to hinder the implementation of proposed strategies through applying resistance techniques.

The chapter will continue to explore the phenomenon of change, shedding light on universities in transition, by focusing attention on the historically disadvantaged institution or HBU and its propensity for change or willingness to transform in response to demands from the state.

It will also examine the contradictory impulses within such an institution, which at times are able to jettison change efforts and slow down transition.

An attempt will be made to create a framework for understanding academics' responses, one that takes account of the contextual factors, both internal and external, as well as current and historical, which condition academics' responses to the implementation of quality assurance measures. The analysis will further theorise the actions and behaviour of university managers in a way that acknowledges the power of the state to shape university responses to its demands.

## **6.2 Approaching responses to quality assurance demands**

During the long interviews, both academics and university managers were asked to address this chapter's focal question, *What changes in the university environment have you experienced over the past five years or so that have impacted your work most?* With few exceptions, the responses saw the introduction of quality assurance measures at UWC as embodying a set of significant interventions, destined to shape the university's post-apartheid existence and alter the daily experiences of university work for both academics and managers.

Other related questions delved into interviewees' understanding of the reasons for an increase in quality assurance activity at UWC and attempted to characterise individual responses, approaches and behaviours towards the implementation of these policies and measures. An attempt was also made to elicit from interviewees a sense of the breadth and full range of responses amongst academics to the requirements and demands of quality assurance implementation.

The data revealed a range of responses, including minimal compliance, non-compliance, various forms of resistance, total compliance, and instances of manipulative compliance.

The analysis will identify a range of factors that determine academics' responses; these include institutionally-specific contextual factors, such as the nature of the university's student intake and the academics' understanding of the institution's history and mission.

Critical to framing academics' responses are factors such as their conceptualisation of quality, their educational ideology (Trowler, 2001), their view of the purpose of a university education, as well as their political stance towards the post-apartheid state and its identification of priorities for higher education.

The study focused on that aspect of higher education change that was concerned with quality and quality assurance. The data will inform an understanding of academics' responses to the implementation of internal quality assurance measures, as well as offering some account of responses to a national quality audit.

### **6.3. UWC's quality assurance system**

The quality assurance system referred to in this research involves all the internal institutional interventions designed to assure quality, including those of quality policy, quality measures and mechanisms, and the functions of quality committees. In the main, academics and managers focused their discussion on the quality assurance of the academic activities associated with teaching, while references were made to quality assurance associated with research output. Quality assurance of teaching included activities and measures related to the requirements of three university policies – the teaching and learning policy, the assessment policy, and the moderation policy. The first two policies were designed and written by the university's Academic Planning Unit, while the third was prepared by the university's Quality Manager. In addition, many references were made to the work of quality committees, such as the academic planning committees of faculties and of Senate, and also to the higher degree/postgraduate committees of faculties and Senate.

Academics focused their attention in discussion on those quality assurance initiatives and interventions which had the most significant impact on their work. In their view, major change had been wrought by, firstly, the demand that all curricula in the university be modularised and designed around programmes, as decreed by the teaching and learning policy, and secondly that curriculum planning, and hence teaching, proceed within an outcomes-based format, as directed by both the assessment policy and the teaching and learning policy.

Thirdly, the moderation policy required that all final-year courses, named 'exit level modules', be moderated, in accordance with the new quality assurance policy framework, by external academic experts, and that the findings and views of the external peers about the quality of both student performance and the curriculum be presented to the relevant faculty and to the Senate.

Much discussion ensued in interviews around the new technical mechanisms introduced to enable the recording functions of the quality assurance framework, namely the new system for recording student marks, the Marks Administration System. And finally, regarding those aspects of quality which impacted academic work the most, academics identified the increased focus on throughput, both as a teaching output imperative and as an inescapable pressure on them to produce research in accredited journals, that is, to increase research output, as twin pressures that were felt most keenly.

Analysis of the data will proceed by focusing on those aspects of the quality assurance policy demands which represented the most significant impact on the daily lives of the university's academics. Quality assurance requirements and initiatives around modularisation, outcomes-based education and the curriculum alignment demanded by these initiatives will be discussed, as will new demands created by the university's moderation policy and the considerably greater focus on the achievement of output indicators. Other incidental quality assurance matters and interventions, including the functioning of various quality assurance committees designed to regulate implementation, will be discussed in an emergent fashion.

The main focus of this section will be on accounting for three broad categories of academics' responses to change, namely *non-compliance*, *surface compliance* and *full compliance*.

A further focus will be on examining academics' orientation towards implementation, concentrating on data which suggest that academics find quality assurance demands burdensome and frustrating; the data reveal that the feeling of being unnecessarily burdened applies to all dimensions of academic responses, including those who refuse to comply, those who feign compliance, and those who comply completely.

## **6.4. Explaining non-compliance**

### **6.4.1. Refusal**

Anderson (2008) defines refusal as a range of responses, including forgetting, outright refusal to comply, protest, delaying, and avoidance through ignoring requests and requirements. This study found that academics' responses reflected some elements of Anderson's (2008) typology of resistance strategies. I will attempt to explain non-compliance by reference to the complex and often overwhelming requirements of quality assurance processes.

Igor, a Science professor at UWC, introduced the concept of non-compliance as refusal, when he described his head of department's behaviour as 'abrogating his duties' through non-provision of required information. The context referred to was related to new demands arising out of the university's moderation policy, which, amongst other things, required departmental heads to access information from academics in their departments regarding external moderation reports for final-year modules. Heads of departments were required to summarise the content of moderator reports in an integrated report on moderation findings. These reports were then sent to a senior academic given the responsibility of preparing a composite faculty report on moderation to be submitted to the university's Senate Academic Planning Committee for reporting purposes. This system of compiling moderation information was complex and tedious, and depended on the cooperation of academics at various levels. The reporting structure was convoluted, starting with the receipt of the externals' comments and concluding with the tabling of these at the highest internal governance structure, the Senate.

Igor, who had been employed at UWC for 36 years at the time of this research, describes the complex system of information gathering to generate these reports. Interestingly, his description came in response to my request that he elaborate on a comment he had made earlier about expecting academics to respond to 'unnecessary things':

*Question: You said there are lots of unnecessary things required...*

*Yes, there is. The head of department has to send in information ... and he gets told to provide the information for the next day... He needs staff members to give him the information from each individual examiner and they have also got to do it within six hours. But people have other things to do.*

*They can't come at the last minute as so often is the case, and require a huge amount of information and at the end of the day nothing happens to that information... And it is very frustrating for the head of department, because he can't do his job unless we do ours. And so there is a knock-on effect, and if one or two staff say, 'Listen, I have got lectures the whole morning. I have a practical this afternoon. I can't get you the information. Sorry,' then what does the head of department do? People may think he is abrogating his duties and it is not the case.*

Igor provides data on the frustration felt by departmental heads and academics alike, who both appear to be refusing to comply, by not providing the information requested to the relevant parties by the set deadlines. He also hints at the frustration felt by academics who are expected to provide information and reports which appear to serve no discernable purpose, and he labels these requirements as burdensome and 'unnecessary'.

Louise, also a Science professor, commented on refusal or non-compliance, in response to my question:

*Question: What would you say makes it easy or difficult to achieve quality here?*

*I think personalities, mostly, because people are really good at understanding policy... they just choose not to implement or pay attention. For example, they don't pay attention to your e-mails when you ask for things... I think it's got to do with them not being able to always access the information from their subordinates... The forms that have to be completed by the departmental chairperson and the external examiners' report forms, sometimes they don't get these back, you see. So, instead of telling us that for these modules they didn't get it back, they panic. Prof K, for example ... panics and then he does nothing. So it's not that he doesn't want to comply. He is overwhelmed.*

Louise and Igor's comments shed some light on the complexity of refusal as a form of non-compliance.

In Igor's case, some academics' possibly real refusal to comply with the moderation requirements resulted in advertent refusal by their head of department, who was then compelled, by the absence of information, to ignore the quality assurance requests.

Louise ascribes the behaviour of Professor K to his being overwhelmed by the requirement to comply, in the face of non-cooperation of other academic staff members.

It is interesting to note the intersection of various elements of non-compliance, as described by Anderson (2008), in these examples. The non-compliant behaviour of academics, in the context of demands for information, reflects intersecting elements of outright refusal, the ignoring of requests, delaying, avoidance and protest, in a way that makes it difficult to distinguish one form of refusal from another.

Louise later introduced a discussion on the growth of managerialism and the decline of academic freedom into her interviews, arguing that some academics are digging in their heels and refusing to comply from a sense of outrage at these changes.

*Never have we been regulated, from what I can see, like this before. I remember... a speech that the previous Dean of Science gave on academic freedom...I remember what he said and I tend to think that there isn't such a thing any more ... because we've been regulated. How can we have freedom ... within a regulation framework? And there is more accountability. You are monitored, you are tracked, you are evaluated....and it has a huge impact on the way in which business is not usual any more ... for higher education because universities are accountable... It's clear that things are being governed much more strictly...I don't even think the Rectors have any real power any more.*

*Perhaps that's why they've adopted the whole system of managing universities like businesses... The shift from what we had before, from the sort of academic freedom we had to a managerial system ... that is a consequence of the regulations happening outside. They had to change the model by which they manage the institution. I think it doesn't gel well with academics and some of them are still refusing to comply. They are going to retire refusing to follow the new rules. I'm sorry but we have to ... or we have to leave... I don't think that we're going to get away from it.*

Louise links refusal to a decline in academic freedom, increased regulation and demands for accountability, and an attendant shift in institutional managerial approaches.

Her concluding statement suggests reluctant acceptance of the changes resulting from these shifts and also points to the inevitability of these changes, given the rise of state regulation and accountability.

#### 6.4.2. Resisting encroachment

One key finding of this study was that academics were consistent about vigorously defending the boundaries, as they defined them, of academic work. Theorists have suggested that academics have a distaste for tasks they see as falling outside the parameters of academic work and that they are '*likely to resist erosion of valued aspects of their work*' (Anderson, 2008: 252).

This study similarly found what appeared to be disdain for activities which did not fall within the clear boundaries of 'academic work', as defined by academics. These boundaries served to exclude, or treat with contempt, any tasks or activities that were broadly administrative in nature, or that were associated with mundane and often technical pursuits. I used the term 'encroachment' here – the academics persistently defended their academic turf, and resisted attempts by managers, colleagues and others, to 'encroach' on their boundaries. These boundaries appeared to possess dimensions of both time and space – universities were places where academics did certain kinds of work, including disciplinary work and other activities deemed appropriate in terms of the academics' conceptualisations of such boundaries.

Emma offers an explanation for resistance to change amongst academics in her faculty:

*I think the easy answer is that change is always hard for everybody and there will always be resistance to change. I think people in this faculty are incredibly overburdened and overworked. I don't think we have the luxury of time to spend on these things. If people choose to do research it is often in their specialist areas, not in education... So I think it has to do with resistance to change. ...People are resistant to do things that take time - administrative and technical tasks that take more time.*

Emma's explanation of non-change in her faculty serves as an account of academics resisting encroachment. In this case, she argues that academics choose to conduct research on their 'specialist' areas; hence expecting them to research their own teaching practice comes up against a defense against encroachment. The defense of academic turf seems closely associated with academics' attempts to jealously guard their time and resist wasting it on what is regarded as extraneous activity.

In this regard, Igor believes that academics' time should be spent on activities that belong within these clear academic boundaries:

*I think academic staff are here to lecture and to transfer knowledge over to students, to be involved with student affairs in so far as it relates to their courses, and then for research. We are expected to do research because if we need money to go overseas on conferences then it is our research outputs that count...And if we don't produce then we don't go. So there is a fine balance about spending one's time best. So therefore we don't need the unnecessary extra work – that's an imposition, and it is essentially not ... part of why I am here.*

An element of self-interest, as evidenced in Igor's reference to doing what is required to generate funds for going overseas, is sometimes observed in academics' decisions on how to carve out time and how to determine the boundaries of academic work. Profitability is a significant motive, and many academics inferred that their time was best spent engaged in activities that would earn them the most financial rewards, accolades and credits towards promotion and advancement.

#### **6.4.3. Non-compliance and awareness of opportunity costs**

Louise identifies the pressure on academics to generate research publications and produce successful postgraduate students as one of the profitability factors encouraging academics to think carefully about how they spend their time:

*I think it also has to do with workload ... It does compromise quality because they are so busy with their teaching. It's not the research that suffers, because that they do research in their own time, they must still deliver on their research. In ... the Science faculty, we doubled our research output since 2005. Something had to suffer because we certainly didn't get more staff. And ... maybe the teaching did suffer because in 2006 we had a large number of modules with lower than 50% pass rates. So we have to connect those things. And ... people ... ask, 'Where can I get the most credit for promotion? ... What am I going to put my time into? I'm going to publish and I'm going to present at conferences. I'm going to produce postgraduate students because certainly teaching is not working out well for me.' So that's what they do and that is where quality can suffer.*

Louise makes a tentative link between a decline in quality and the choice by academics to focus on aspects of academic work that are better rewarded, when she implies that a decrease in pass rates may have been related to an increase in research output.

Kackman and Wageman (1995) have written extensively on the opportunity costs associated with quality assurance efforts. Susan and others have identified costs associated with both emphasising research and the rewards that could accrue from it, exerting pressure on academics to publish or perish. They have suggested that the costs associated with these efforts could eventually impact the quality of teaching and other components of the university's core business.

The University of the Western Cape is attempting to position itself as a research-led institution, as part of its efforts to demonstrate that it is a place of exceptional quality. Further, the state has shifted to a performance funding framework for the provision of research funding. In the past, the university received block funding for research. Recently, UWC was warned that in future research, subsidy funding would be granted only for research output achieved. In the meantime, it has been granted research development funding, equivalent to the funding gap between what it should be earning through its research output and what it is earning. In the wake of the state's warning that it will soon withdraw research development funding, the university has embarked on a massive campaign to increase academics' research output through publication (in accredited formats) and graduating postgraduate students.

In the following quote Ruth, a departmental chairperson and Science professor, expresses the dilemma of being faced with too many demands at once, and particularly highlights the opportunity costs embedded in the new tasks associated with administering the quality assurance system:

*In some cases additional things are created and it's just uploaded as something extra that a person has to do ... You get to a point where you just cannot cope any more. ... They must also know that by moving some things down ... you get to a point where your plate is just too full to actually do justice, to do anything properly. And then you have to start ... selecting ... the most important things that I'm paid to do. Most probably as a lecturer you'll decide, I have to lecture, so I have to prepare, so those would be my important things that I will do first, and then I can start doing all the add-ons.*

Ruth hints at a phenomenon which was referred to by a number of other interviewees, namely the increase in administrative work that has resulted from an increase in quality assurance activities. This was described by some as management (suggested by Ruth's use of 'they') shifting new and even existing administrative responsibilities to academics. It is likely that what is being experienced is related to an increase in tasks associated with gathering and reporting quality information.

It is also possible that the additional burdens associated with increasing quality assurance practices and demands have simply been inserted into the traditional scope of academic work. Ruth suggests that passing on these burdens to academics as a requirement of their jobs engenders the need to prioritise academic work by focusing on those things worth attending to, while not doing justice to other, possibly equally important academic tasks.

#### **6.4.4. Non-compliance and mistrust**

The data suggests that refusal is one form of resistance to managerial demands of the quality assurance system. When one considers the functions and form of the quality assurance measures in place at this institution, it is clear that one thing these measures have in common is the emphasis on reporting.

According to Kenneth, *'everything has to be made explicit,'* and more importantly, everything has to be made public - in one way or another intense scrutiny is applied, often by non-academics as well, to aspects of academic work that were previously assumed to be the domain and responsibility only of the academics concerned and perhaps their disciplinary heads and Deans. In terms of moderation, past practice underscored a collegial relationship between external moderators and the academics whose courses were being scrutinised, and the outcome of moderation exercises was regarded as a largely private matter between the relevant parties.

Under the new arrangements, academics are required to report to academic heads, Deans, Vice Rectors, other academics and quality management staff on the professional deliberations between themselves and their peers, and to make public the recommendations and criticisms peers may offer. The same applies to quality measures such as course evaluations, previously a private matter between academics and their students. Academics in the past chose whether to heed any of the advice and reflections offered by their students. Now they are required to report on and provide evidence of the criticisms of students and account for the actions taken in the light of student feedback.

In the past, academics were entrusted with full responsibility for ensuring the quality of the academic project, but recent years have seen a shift to a form of quality assurance based on accountability and transparency and marked by mistrust of academics by institutional managers and the state.

What appears to be mistrust on the part of university managers, the state and its agencies about academics' ability to continue providing programmes of high standards, could also be read as doubt about the academics' willingness to behave in ways that will accelerate the pace of transformation of the higher education system.

This mistrust is reflected in demands for more and better record-keeping, for documentation of all aspects of academic work, to facilitate monitoring and surveillance of such work. Some academics have welcomed these changes as providing greater structure and regulation of their work, while others have bemoaned these changes.

Amy expresses a more positive view of new monitoring requirements:

*I think the quality assurance mechanisms in place have been good. They have ... kind of regulated things so it makes it less up to the ethos of particular departments or individuals. So that has been good. Things like course evaluations, for example, which have never really been mandatory or taken seriously. So you have some people in the department who would do it because they want to improve their practice but it was never mandated or never regulated but now I think it's far more part of practice.*

Amy suggests that mandating certain behaviours, like requiring academics to report and act on students' evaluations of the quality of teaching, has the effect of improving quality. Her view of the positive effects of quality assurance regulations resonates with Anderson's (2001) view that *quality audit can be good for you when it is done well* (2001: 1).

Harold suggests that the planning and record keeping requirements which accompany the introduction of quality assurance systems reflect an improvement on past practices:

*My own sense is that UWC would do no planning and no record keeping different from 10 years ago if the Department of Education did not require these things.*

*Question: Would that have been a good thing?*

*No, we were stumbling around in the dark then. I think management by ideology was the modus operandi when I got here - you were assumed to be on the team - but we didn't have systems. Even though the system now is not productive in terms of implementation, this has to be an institution that is accountable to who funds it, whether taxpayers or students - for providing education in a structured way. This was not the case in the past.*

Harold refers to UWC as 'stumbling around in the dark' in relation to the lack of systemised quality assurance measures, and suggests that demanding accountability results in improving quality. He argues further that in the past it was incorrectly assumed that UWC's academics, motivated by a belief in social justice, would always act in the students' best interests by providing a quality education.

Kenneth offers a more negative perception of the impact of quality assurance than that offered by Harold and Amy, suggesting that rising quality assurance demands have created new burdens associated with a focus on monitoring and surveillance:

*There has certainly been a huge burden of increased bureaucracy and paperwork. Everything that was implicit before has now got to be explicit - written down and typed up. I think that's the main change.*

Kenneth, Harold and Amy suggested, in various ways, that mistrust of academics' commitment to improving quality resulted in demands for accountability that mandated certain quality assurance practices related to planning, record-keeping and reporting on measures such as course evaluations. While Harold and Amy believe that the regulation of academics' behaviour in this way resulted in quality improvement, Kenneth believed that the major consequence was an increase in monitoring and surveillance, through the expectation that implicit efforts to improve quality be made explicit and open to scrutiny.

#### **6.4.5. Non-compliance and invoking professional boards**

I asked Harold, a professor in Economic and Management Sciences, to comment on what he saw as the range of academic responses to quality assurance requirements in his faculty:

*I don't know whether the quality assurance through the Committee for Higher Education is more important than the quality assurance through professional bodies in the way that a lot of people operate. When you talk about quality assurance to industrial psychology and accounting people, the CHE and the university system do not register on their radar schemes. What does register is the requirements of their professional boards. I don't know to what extent they're looking at the interface between those two. To the rest of us that is completely opaque, like a disciplinary secret. I've always asked ... 'Will the Board approve this?' They always say, 'The Board won't approve it.' I've said, 'Just show me the specs and I'll work through ... them.'*

Harold's interpretation that the refrain, '*The Board won't approve it,*' reflects a stubborn refusal to change, echoes Anderson's finding that some 'academics noted that the professional bodies accrediting their courses could be usefully invoked in a less confrontational form of refusal.'

In Harold's view, some departments sheltered behind the requirements of their professional boards, as a form of refusal to comply with new university quality assurance requirements. Interestingly, in other interviews, some of the key champions for change in line with the university's quality assurance requirements actually invoked the requirements of some professional boards to engender compliance in their faculties, so that one factor, namely the role of professional boards, could be harnessed to either aid or hinder effective implementation.

#### **6.5. Explaining surface compliance**

There seem to be at least two forms of surface compliance. One involves academics going through the motions of minimum compliance - having identified what is minimally required, they proceed to comply without any real engagement with the change required. An example of this was the HEQC's requirement that faculties create assessment committees to engage with issues around assessment.

Minimal compliance saw the creation of such committees without any real interest in engaging in pedagogical debates about the relative value of different assessment methodologies and strategies for student learning, and instead became a place where pass rates were reported and briefly discussed.

Amy describes the workings of the Faculty Assessment Committee as an exercise in minimal compliance, as follows:

*I think academics kind of comply. I don't think it's really taken seriously. There is an assessment committee and it's not really looking at deeper issues around the quality of assessment. It becomes ... just a structure dealing with marks, marks administration. There's seldom debate ... More recently there's been a debate around ... the use of MCQ questions, which came out of a review process in one of the other departments and out of that (name) organised a workshop on multiple choice assessment. But there's very little of that kind of debate and dialogue around deeper issues around assessment.*

Amy's interest in engaging in debate about assessment and teaching and learning contrasted with the attitudes of other academics, who were happy to attend assessment committee meetings, but had very little interest in discussing the relative benefits for teaching and learning of adopting one assessment strategy over another.

Hence the establishment of a faculty assessment committee became an exercise in minimal compliance, where faculties could demonstrate that they had put in place the quality assurance structures required, without expressing a commitment to improving practice through dialogue and debate.

The second form of surface compliance, slightly different in intent from the first, involves academics pretending to comply, but in fact engaging in a form of game-playing. An example of this is participation in the exercise in restructuring curricula around programmes, which were composed of outcomes-based, often cross-disciplinary, modules.

Game-playing with regard to modularisation requirements meant that academics did what was required without restructuring the curriculum in a meaningful way. They simply broke down their current curriculum into dividable parts, allocated credit units to these, called them modules and rephrased module topics into outcome statements.

Harold described this form of compliance with curriculum change in the following way:

*Management department people are compliant – they do not challenge the system. Their modus operandi is, this is the new way of doing business, and they do it. We had a debate about a 15-credit module for first year. I put forward a proposal ... and sent to the department a draft module descriptor for a new first-year module and we had a meeting of relevant people and it was going to happen. The question was what to put in the module descriptor. After an hour the thing was over. The feeling was, 'We'll do the details later – we're not fighting about policy issues if it's not getting in the way of what we do.' They're not interested in talking about the academic stuff.*

*I think a lot of academics don't care about it as long as someone doesn't peep over their shoulder and interfere with what they're doing in their courses or complain that graduates out of that module don't know this or not being able to do what they should be able to do as a reasonable expectation.*

Surface compliance through game-playing in the way described by Harold appears to have arisen out of a very pragmatic approach by academics to dealing with the many changes in education policy they were faced with.

Change-overload has been identified elsewhere as leading to surface compliance and game-playing. Harold suggests that, when confronted by diverse pressures for change, academics at UWC pick their fights, and choose not to debate or challenge interventions if they are able to implement them with little modification to the way they have always done things.

## **6.6. Explaining full compliance**

### **6.6.1 Performance funding driving compliance**

Many interviewees referred to student pass rates as being the driver of subsidy income and responded that they felt this pressure keenly, in the sense that it had become academics' responsibility to take whatever steps were necessary to encourage student success and improve performance against this efficiency indicator. There was a sense, moreover, in which academics felt aggrieved that the state had failed to make allowance, by enforcing a funding formula around these kinds of performance indicators, for institutions which accepted educationally disadvantaged students.

Thabo became passionate when expressing his disappointment at what he regarded as the state's failure to take account of the context of the HBUs:

*When I look at the national framework with respect to their expectations of higher education institutions, I find it quite appalling because I would have thought at least from (the Minister of Education) ... there would have been a far greater understanding of the differences between these different institutions in this country. So they've got a benchmark at 80% first-year passes. How can we possibly have the (HWIs and the HBUs) on the same benchmark? It's craziness and it shows an absolute lack of any kind of understanding of the reality of the struggle that they claim is our greatest triumph. It annoys me when they make generalised statements like higher education is suffering with 40%, 50% first-year drop-out rates. Given what is coming through to us they shouldn't be surprised at all. They should wonder at the numbers that we are actually getting through.*

Thabo, a senior manager at UWC, suggests that benchmarking student performance across the higher education sector is unrealistic.

Notwithstanding this appreciation of the impossible task presented by the state, UWC's managers continue to encourage academics to improve quality, in line with efficiency indicators, by increasing pass rates.

Lee expresses his irritation at the system of performance funding, and the focus on pass rates as indicators of quality:

*Of course there's also more and more pressure to pass students. I know that has affected some other departments, I don't think it's affected our department. Subsidy is now more linked to passes than to bodies, and if we're going to remain an engaged university that tries to uplift people, and I believe we should, then we cannot expect the same pass rates as universities that are much more selective in their intake. We'll certainly try, but it's hard to fill in the background.*

Again, Lee and others appeal to a sense of fairness, by arguing that the state should make some allowance for UWC's commitment to delivering on the goal of broadening participation, by being prepared to work with under-prepared students, instead of expecting it to perform at the same level as other universities which '*are more selective in their intake.*'

Many academics expressed their frustration at the quality costs incurred by institutions through subsidy-related throughput pressure, and I quote Carol who describes the negative impact of such pressure on quality:

*We want quality assignments, students don't have PCs at home, but students can't get computer bookings because the computer labs are full. Should the state not be giving us the funding? The funding is received as throughput. A major issue is, do we just work for throughput because then we can compromise quality, because 'I must pass my fourth years as funding in three years will be affected by that fourth-year pass rate.' So now you're pushing to pass them to get the funding, but that student is perhaps not the quality we should be pushing through.*

*State funding may be skewed and jeopardising quality. It's always on my mind that if I want to fail these students now then I have four students short for the Masters, so I let them redo the assignment, and help them here and there ...*

Carol suggests that performance funding encourages decision-making about teaching and learning that is less related to the pursuit of quality student graduates and more to the pursuit of financial rewards from the state. She also refers to the context of students' reality and wonders how high standards of quality can be expected from an institution which faces critical challenges, where achieving quality often hinges on the university providing basic needs, such as computer access, for its students.

In order to understand compliance at UWC, it is essential that one consider the impact of the application of performance indicators on a complex situation in which the institution is under pressure to be seen to be improving at many levels. This leaves academics, as mediators of student performance, little choice but to play the quality game and make the effort required, or at least be seen to make the effort, to facilitate the performance needed to sustain the institution.

Academics are under pressure to perform and to account for their behaviour in improving quality in the institution.

In the following quote, Louise described what she viewed as a new interest amongst Science academics in teaching and learning matters:

*I was asked to come last year to talk to a first-year Maths lecturer. He was concerned because students couldn't even use a calculator to add two fractions. Then as we investigated the matter, the Dean thought it was an ability issue. What it turned out to be*

*was that the student was not doing homework... For that lecturer it was making sure that people knew, like getting off his chest that, 'Hey, we do focus on the problems.' There is that kind of reaction coming up.*

Louise suggested that previously these academics had displayed little inclination to engage with these issues, but were suddenly determined that the Dean and senior faculty should bear witness to their efforts to address issues of student learning. Louise's comments suggest that academics, in engaging with teaching and learning problems, were less motivated by the desire to actually improve quality than by the need to demonstrate the efforts they were making to improve quality.

The research has revealed that UWC has chosen to direct its quality assurance system strongly towards the practices and processes of teaching and learning, in order to improve performance in this area and hence avoid losing state funding. In line with this decision, academics have been faced with a barrage of quality-related interventions and innovations directed at curriculum change.

## **6.7 Curriculum change through modularisation and alignment**

Outcomes based education (OBE) has been introduced at UWC as a means to improve student performance, thereby increasing pass rates and throughput and earning the university more money from the state. The introduction of OBE has been supported by a range of initiatives, chief amongst them modularisation, which involves the fragmentation of curricula around smaller, measurable outcomes. Constructive alignment, another significant initiative, has become standardised in some faculties as a preferred pedagogical approach within outcomes based education. Constructive alignment involves the alignment of content, teaching methodologies and assessment against outcomes.

Initiatives such as these have been supported by a range of internal quality policies – an assessment policy, teaching and learning policy, and moderation policy. Evidence collection, with reporting and recording of quality-related information, has assumed new relevance, arguably because it enables inspection by heads of departments, deans, and internal review and external audit teams.

Responses to this new quality environment have been varied. Academics have objected to spending huge amounts of time and energy negotiating the minefield of new quality assurance requirements, while the very nature and character of academic work itself has changed in accordance with the demands of this new environment. Despite these upheavals, many academics have embraced the focus on teaching and learning, believing that the quality assurance measures introduced have the potential actually to improve quality.

#### **6.7.1 Embracing the quality assurance of teaching and learning**

Despite the earlier focus in this chapter on non-compliance and resistance, this research also found a significant trend amongst academics at UWC to identify with and endorse new quality assurance measures. Academics who felt this way applauded the effect of quality assurance on improving teaching and learning, through compelling a more heightened consciousness of learning issues, and invoking reflective and critical consideration of curriculum choices.

Emma supports the view that quality assurance processes often stimulate critical reflection and engagement with pedagogical matters.

*It's about getting people to engage with things like education theory, with things like what really happens when students learn and what is good learning. Is it good learning to sit and listen to a lecture for an hour or is it good learning to use some of what you hear and have to apply it to a small group activity? ... Yes, it is to get people to start engaging more with educational theory, to put it bluntly, and improve it. ... What I'm trying to achieve is to get people to bring how they offer learning opportunities closer to what students bring with them and are capable of engaging with it, so it is to try and close that gap.*

Emma attempts to describe academics' responses from the perspective of one driving quality assurance implementation, and records her efforts to actively link policy implementation with reflection towards improvement. Academics like Emma have bought into implementation on account of its potential for improvement,

Sandra similarly believes that the value of quality assurance lies precisely in its potential to improve quality through inviting critical reconsideration of practice:

*I think quality assurance is not only asking you to show that you're doing the right thing, but also to show you how to perhaps do something better. So in that sense I think it is the self-reflection part of the quality assurance that is actually good.*

In addition, there was also some feeling that the standardisation of methods and practices was a desirable innovation, bringing much-needed order and clarity to matters related to teaching and learning.

Lee supports the standardisation of interactions between students and supervisors, and the ease of monitoring which results from regularising these relationships:

*I am working in the postgraduate committee and there we are quite serious about quality, and one of the things we have imposed on ourselves is this MOU. We have voluntarily taken on more work to ensure that there's good quality, that it's easier to monitor and to manage the interaction between students and the supervisor. Whenever there is any kind of misunderstanding or conflict then we have a document from which to work. Our meeting is about quality, checking for quality in the research proposal also.*

Many academics felt that the quality assurance processes, underpinned by demands for accountability and transparency, were long overdue at UWC, and expressed broad acceptance of regulating and monitoring activities, as being essential to the achievement of quality.

Further, Nina believes that the quality assurance activities she engaged in contributed to her personal and professional development:

*There was definitely in the last ten years for me a huge amount of improvement in the quality. There were more formal structures introduced with academic planning, and the appointment of an academic planning officer – people that you could use as a resource. But for me, for my own personal development, was the whole process of going through the NQF and SAQA. That was very specific for me, there was a lot of development in that regard because suddenly you had to think about outcomes, what are you doing, how do these courses connect with one another? That I think was definitely a huge improvement in the quality.*

The data also showed that those academics who had a strong interest in pedagogical matters and education theory, alongside their disciplinary interests, were more likely to embrace quality assurance initiatives around teaching and learning, most notably those involving modularity, curriculum redesign and the effective alignment of teaching, learning and assessment practices against module outcomes.

#### **6.7.2 Ambivalence: Compliance as burdensome, despite the benefits**

The data also indicate the existence of a degree of ambivalence amongst those who support measures directed at improving teaching quality and output. This ambivalence is related to recognition of the need to improve and an acceptance that quality assurance measures, by regulating certain practices, may have a positive impact on quality. At the same time, compliance is accompanied by frustration at the often unnecessarily bureaucratic and administratively burdensome nature of this new preoccupation with quality assurance.

Tom describes the quality assurance of teaching and its links with quality improvement in this way:

*Teaching has improved ... I do think at the end of the day the faculty keeping forward a focus on improving the methodology, being more precise about what you do, specifying your learning outcomes, challenging you to ... set questions in ways that are aligned with what you are trying to teach and to set assessment methodologies which are variable ... I see a general improvement in that. I have a much greater sense of confidence that people are aware of the parameters that are being set now, and are coming more and more into line with an appreciation of being more scientific in their teaching methods... I would say there's an improvement actually, on that front, definitely.*

However, later in the same interview, Tom dismisses the move to improve teaching by aligning outcomes, assessment and delivery as 'administrative management of teaching.'

Tom complains about the burden of being so explicit about practice:

*The big thing that I've found is that you've got to actually put another 40% of your time into teaching, because of the requirement to specify everything... We've got to have clear outcomes specified and each teaching utterance has to be linked to a learning outcome. In addition to that you have to prepare model answers, because it's got to be exact about what you're asking for.*

*You can't ask a set of questions and see what comes out. It's got to be much more anchored against the learning outcomes. So I find this sort of administrative management of teaching becomes a more demanding task. And then the requirements that ... that your assessment processes are much more precise. So you have to give written feedbacks on assessment forms, and those feedbacks have to become more promotive of the person's thinking. So you've got to pose questions, and if I think back to when I was taught, people would just tick it off. 'Good enough, 75 out of 80, nice bit of work.' This won't suffice any more.*

The apparent contradiction expressed by Tom, who vacillates between support and critique, is not uncommon amongst academics, and is related to their sense of wanting to do the right thing by the students, while feeling aggravated by the bureaucratic requirements of these measures, reducing the intent of improvement measures to serving the functions of monitoring and surveillance.

Like Tom, Amy first applauds the pedagogical benefits of introducing modularisation, describing this requirement as 'a spur to change':

*I suppose modularisation is partly a state trend. ....We ... had to re-arrange degree courses into programmes and my sense of this faculty is that a lot of that was really an exercise in maintaining the status quo and just rearranging it in different templates.*

*There were one or two occasions, certainly in our department, when there was a sense of doing things differently. It did actually... on one or two occasions, provide a ... 'Well, everything's changing so let's look at what we're doing.' So it was a chance to really rethink what we did. It wasn't just a rejigging of the old stuff. There were times where we introduced new courses, or introduced an innovation, at a time when we were going to have to redo all our module descriptors anyway, so we said, 'Let's think if we want to do something different.' So it was often a spur to change, to do things differently in our department.*

Later in her interview, Amy contradicts her statement of support for modularisation by bemoaning the introduction of unnecessary regulations and requirements, such as the invention of templates, which constantly change, for providing module descriptions:

*I think modularisation has produced another layer of bureaucracy and for department heads it has been quite exasperating when you've got your module descriptors and now there's a new template... There was a lot of trivial stuff that took up people's time as well, which made people feel that this was just an exercise, a bureaucratic exercise. It was an opening for innovation but there was also a lot of extra bureaucratic work in getting your template into the latest version and so on.*

The interesting aspect of Tom and Amy's views is the presence of contradictory statements. Amy appears to be a keen supporter of curriculum change but then proceeds to express her exasperation at the way in which such change is driven in the university.

One way to explain the apparent contradiction is by reference to the dilemma created as efforts to standardise and prescribe approaches to teaching and the curriculum result in greater control over what academics do in their classrooms. It seems as though gaining control over teaching has become a means of addressing the one quality matter UWC struggles with most – the quality of student output. Given the punitive nature of performance funding, where, according to Lee, '*Subsidy is now more linked to passes than to bodies*,' UWC management seem to operate from the premise that controlling the input of teaching should result in greater control over the output, namely student passes and graduation throughput.

Quality management of teaching at UWC ultimately serves to open up academics' classroom practices for inspection. Hence the burden of curriculum alignment - the descriptors, templates, files and reports that facilitate scrutiny - often obscures the benefits of quality improvement.

### **6.7.3 Compliance: aiding accountability and transparency**

The driving force for curriculum change at UWC is accountability. Academics at UWC are being held accountable for student performance and for improving efficiency of output. The idea of accountability is being conveyed to academics as a duty of responsibility towards their students. Many academics, driven by a desire to see their students succeed and prosper, appeared to welcome these curriculum change efforts.

Consequently, many of them were amenable to implementing new quality assurance practices, such as curriculum alignment, and were easily cajoled into engaging in demanding and oppressive processes.

Emma, a crusader for curriculum alignment in her faculty, explains what this process requires and in so doing inadvertently identifies aspects of the curriculum change approach that facilitate control and surveillance:

*My proposal (to the faculty) was that everybody look at teaching and learning in all of their programmes ... It was prompted by the modularisation process where the faculty was asked to do module descriptors where they had to describe the outcomes. That was the first step... Each staff member is ... compiling a module file and the module file's compilation is guided by a module descriptor.*

Emma adds that, at her insistence, academics are expected to complete not one but two different module descriptors, for each module taught:

*...the UWC module descriptor which the quality manager uses ... for capturing data, and one ... we call the quality assurance module descriptor which goes a lot further ...it also requires of staff to describe their assessment criteria and their assessment tasks.*

Emma then describes further complex requirements, which involve a description of teaching methods and up-front declarations of assessment strategies. These are followed by evidence collection - of students' work, marks achieved and feedback provided.

*A report is prepared, providing 'reflection on the teaching and learning over time ... and then they have to file the students' evaluation of the module and their reflection of that and the action plans that emanate from that that they want to build into future modules.'*

Alice, a department head in Emma's faculty, supports the ideas of accountability through transparency associated with this approach to curriculum change:

*There is no other way to ensure that, for example, assessment tasks are aligned with exit level outcomes and with what is happening ... You don't see what is happening in the classroom, so unless you get ... pieces of somebody's work where they have given feedback to the students ... and you have got their own reflections, then you are unsure about what is happening and you can't offer any advice. So I do think that it makes people more accountable.*

In Alice's view, quality improvement demands that academics' classroom practices be exposed, to facilitate monitoring their practices for improvement.

A second notion of transparency, which benefits the students, is described by Avis (2000), who supports the alignment of the curriculum against outcomes for more egalitarian reasons:

*The concern is to render transparent the 'secret garden' of curricula and assessment. By using learning outcomes to describe the desired results of educative programmes it becomes readily apparent what these are, the ways in which these are assessed and thereby attained. The hope is that transparency will enable learners from non-traditional backgrounds to compete on the same terrain as the privileged. Learning outcomes render visible what traditional learners already know about education and assessment procedures acquired through cultural capital gathered during schooling and the resources of their families.*

Ironically, Caroline supports the ideas of transparency and explains why curriculum alignment against outcomes is required at UWC, and not at other universities. She supports Avis' (2008) description of the effect of such an approach in providing equitable opportunities:

*With the low-level students here at UWC, we take it on more strongly because then you've got some indicators as to what the student is doing. If you have a very good student coming they can sit and tell you so much and clearly are in charge of themselves and what they're doing. You don't really have to worry, 'Well now, can they conduct an interview?' because you can see by the way that they talk that they could.*

Caroline's almost mocking tone suggests that, had UWC been more selective in its intake, it would not have been necessary to engage in curriculum restructuring around learning outcomes.

Tom expresses his support of the increased transparency associated with this approach, but also declares, somewhat cynically, that *'there are no surprises in the pack of cards any more.'*

*It's asking for more transparency in what you are teaching, why you are teaching it, what you expect from it. ... Assessment methodologies have to be much more aligned with what you are teaching and why you're teaching it. And students also need to know exactly what they're being assessed on and why... So I find that there are no surprises in the pack of cards any more. It does make it a little bit easier for students actually, because I do get the sense that there's less room for the creative student who takes things further than what's specified... But it's a double-edged sword ... a double-edged sword.*

On the one hand, Tom supports the idea that alignment of the curriculum against outcomes is a more egalitarian means of enabling under-prepared students to succeed. However, his description of the approach as a ‘double-edged sword’ hinges on its propensity to promote a technicist orientation to teaching:

*There is now increasing pressure to bring (teaching) into alignment with ... learning objectives... specifying exactly what courses are teaching people to ... be competent in .... to be much more ... manualised in the teaching organisation. I have some problems with that ... When you were a child you had paint by numbers ...and if you weren't particularly talented or capable you could still paint by numbers. But there is a massive gap between that and the person who is the spontaneous painter who does a creative painting. And I feel that learning has become learn by numbers, and I understand the need to specify, but I find that it's a little bit straitjacketing of teaching. I find there's a requirement to be so premeditated in what you are teaching ... it's a little bit like learning a technical skill. I think it does make you a bit of a mechanical teacher ...*

Tom seems to suggest that the attempt to prescribe an approach to the curriculum was valued by those, like Nina, who preferred direction over idiosyncrasy, but was not easily accepted by academics, who, like him, preferred spontaneity and creativity in the classroom.

Finally, the curriculum alignment process adopted, as described by Emma, can be seen as an attempt to capture the modularisation process in order to serve accountability requirements. Specifying learning outcomes, teaching methods, assessment strategies and detailing how reflection and course evaluations will benefit quality improvement, appeared to promote transparency while enabling inspection of academics' previously concealed pedagogic practices.

## **6.8. Compliance: UWC in transition**

It is clear from the research that pressure on academics to comply with external demands for quality are largely internally-driven and fuelled by the university's preoccupation with proving beyond any doubt that it is an institution of quality.

Elsewhere, I have accounted for the transition from historically disadvantaged institution, and argued that UWC's very existence depends on its ability to persuade the public and the state that it is a quality university.

The Rector might refer to this as an ‘*aspiration towards greatness*,’ but another way of explaining it is that the university’s survival as an independent higher education institution into the future requires the abandonment of the HBU label and a shift to demonstrating resoundingly that it is a place of quality.

Kenneth, an academic in Political Studies, captures the dilemma of having to accept the increased pressure associated with demonstrating quality as unavoidable and essential, while being burdensome and an irritation:

*There is a huge burden of extra work...There is a lot more paperwork gobbling up hours of one’s time ... linked to the invention of higher degrees committees and their concern that proposals for theses of masters and doctorates be the top standard. This is part of all the new mechanisms coming in. Quite a few persons at UWC have been over-defensive about the standing and reputation of UWC with the historically advantaged universities of the country. So it is a matter of professional pride to them to prove beyond reasonable doubt that there is nothing second class about UWC. Sometimes I think they’ve gone over the top in that ... in a way that other universities haven’t. But in the end you’ve just got to get on with the job ... the rest is just whining over coffee...*

*The famous merger report of 2002 suggested that ... perhaps there wasn’t so much a need for UWC to compete with two outstanding, top universities as neighbours. But I think in fact that has had the opposite effect. It has kept UWC on its toes and the fact that our toughest rivals are the closest universities to us has made us even more determined. You’ve got to deliver the goods. And it’s very clear that UWC has delivered the goods in a way for example the other HBU’s very often have not.*

Many instances of academic ambivalence towards quality assurance demands can be explained by reference to the dilemma Kenneth has described. Having chosen the route of demonstrating that it is an institution of worth, the university has had to throw in its lot with the state and embrace quality assurance demands, and even behave overzealously towards them, the impact of which is felt by the academics ‘at the chalkface’ (Webster and Mosoetsa, 2001). Kenneth describes this dilemma, identifies the problem it poses for the academic, and then dismisses the complaints about unreasonable quality demands as ‘*whining over coffee*.’

### 6.8.1 Compliance and a new relationship with the state

The decision by UWC's management and Council to transform the institution appears to have had two implications. One component of the transition involves 'burying the label of HBU or HDI,' while the other is centred around the crafting of a new relationship between UWC and the state.

The complexity of the changing relationship was best summed up by one of the senior executive members on the occasion of a meeting with potential funders, when he said:

*In the post-1994 period, UWC has worked at becoming a university that supports government and doesn't fight it.*

Having won the battle with the previous apartheid state, the focus at UWC is now on building its relationship with the new state.

This stance seems motivated by political and economic considerations. I approached this research with some curiosity and the desire to understand, given UWC's previous history of resisting the state and its demands, how and why it has become a university which has chosen to comply with the state's attempts to steer the higher education sector in particular directions.

Bulelwa, a professor of Education, believes that *'compliance has muted the voice of criticism'*. Resistance to external demands during a previous era has been replaced by an overzealous demonstration of willingness to support the new state's efforts to regulate the sector and to rein in higher education institutions.

An earlier analysis identified UWC's precarious financial position as driving its propensity to comply. A closer examination of the data around academic responses also reveals that this supportive and conciliatory approach towards the state, shared by institutional managers and many academics, is a strong factor in motivating compliance. One explanation of this orientation is that academics in the university have come to regard the state as acting legitimately in the post-apartheid era, and consider the new state's priorities to be legitimate and worthy of their support.

Amy describes her and her department's efforts to engage with and support state policy, and elaborates on the ways in which academics at UWC introduced curriculum innovations in support of state policy:

*I remember engaging with national policy. I remember when the White Paper on Higher Education came out which must have been in about 1997. I remember as a department we looked at it and it does talk a lot about higher education being not just preparation for the workplace... That really was also a time when I was thinking a lot about higher education in terms of 'What does it mean?' and just thinking about that in terms of government policy... That was a time in our department when we thought about ... what does it mean to be preparing students for the workplace? It means that we need to be ... building in more workplace skills.*

*In physics traditionally there's been very little focus on reading and writing and accessing texts. We kind of pulled that in more explicitly. And there was more of a focus on producing students that were critical. In fact at that point we introduced an environmental physics stream focusing very much more on environmental issues. The first-year courses always had a strong focus on societal issues. So I'm thinking how that really was an example of government policy and how we really did in the department engage with some of those ideas.*

The idea of UWC becoming an institution that supports the state and does not fight it, is evidently shared by many academics, and Amy's description of her department's efforts to implement state policy is a strong example of this.

Caroline saw the university's identification with national priorities, together with its lack of financial independence, as twin drivers of compliance.

*Question: What do you see as the main reasons for the prominence of quality assurance in policy in recent years? What was the impetus for that?*

*Well, it came politically with the ANC government, and then some universities have taken it on board more quickly than others. And this university isn't wealthy, so it can't be autonomous... it can't dictate the way HWIs do. They have kept some level of autonomy. So this university would have to be very egalitarian to fit in with the political status. And also, it represents the struggle here, I'm sure that history would carry weight as well. People want to be fair here - that's their history and their tradition.*

Caroline suggests that the university's conciliatory approach to the state is largely influenced by a shared orientation towards promoting equity, which has historical roots in the anti-apartheid struggle, and is also motivated by UWC's need to remain on the receiving end of the state's largesse.

The grounds for resonance between state priorities and academics' views of the purpose of a university appear to be located precisely in the overwhelming support for the institution's mission-in-use, in its social justice objectives.

Higher education policy emanating from the state is explicit about the link between a quality university education and the drive to enable economic and social mobility and transformation through the development of human capital, most especially for the poor and disadvantaged.

Sandra hints at the synergies which exist between her view of the purpose of higher education and that of the state:

*The government wants to make sure that it gets the best returns on its money, but it's not just about that. The National Department of Education should take as its responsibility to build a healthy nation and look in particular at education and ensure that a quality education is brought to the nation. So I think that would be a fair expectation. I think the current government is far more aware of that sort of thing.*

Sandra appears to share the state's commitment to 'building a healthy nation,' and subtly contrasts the new state's orientation towards development with the apartheid state's neglect of national development needs.

Emma, centrally involved in academic development activities at UWC, sheds light on the phenomenon of resonance between state intentions (especially towards improving the position of those previously marginalised), academics' views of quality, and their views of the mission and purpose of UWC:

*I certainly have more of an idea of what the state expects. My own ideas have been opened in these last five years to bills, policies, white papers, directives, manuals... I also have a much better idea of the NQF and SAQA and .... how our society can benefit. Certainly from that point of view I think there is definitely a change. I read somewhere someone called quality audits policing, as opposed to developmental. The HEQC should try to allay fears about it not being policing and indicate that it is developmental. I do perceive the intention of it as being nurturing, supportive and developmental. I think it is part of transforming of our society. I think it is part of making South Africa a better place ... I think the state is serious about its responsibility in terms of making sure that we provide good education...*

Emma expresses strong support for quality assurance initiatives, such as audits, viewing these as developmental and not as instances of surveillance or *policing*. She also suggests, like Sandra, that she has approached state policy in a positive way, familiarising herself with policy documents and showing a willingness to support policy intentions through her work.

Nina, despite providing a cogent analysis of the erosion of institutional autonomy, demonstrates her support for the values driving the changes which have resulted in the curtailment of academic freedom:

*When I was a student I always had the impression the university I was at ... did their own thing, made their own decisions ... When I started here - it all has to do with history, how UWC specifically operated and the way that they did things, and suddenly this whole SAQA alignment was required... I suddenly started to realise that universities were being asked to take responsibility for what they are putting out there and how they are doing it...*

*In the apartheid era, universities could do what they wanted because the system allowed them to... I think universities had much more autonomy... They were allowed to function on their own. With the new government trying to improve the quality of life and quality of training for the population....the state should play a role in monitoring quality, to assess how money is spent, what institutions do with their funds. I would imagine the state has the responsibility to see that people are trained so that they can move forward economically and socially, to ensure they get the best training for the available funds.*

In Nina's view, the autonomy granted historically white institutions, like the one she studied at, was worth sacrificing in the interest of advancing social justice and promoting equity. She believes that the state's intrusive role in education, *in monitoring quality*, was justified by the intended outcome, namely an improvement in the quality of life of South Africa's population.

The earlier analysis of academics' views on quality has demonstrated that many academics favour an approach to quality that is linked to a desire for equity and social justice. They find the state's goal of transforming higher education towards the achievement of public good irresistible and persuasive, and therefore worth supporting.

## **6.9. Academics' responses and the context of disadvantage**

From the conversations with academics and university managers during this research, an important subtext emerged. This subtext was revealed through numerous references to the impact on quality of historical disadvantage, both in the context of inadequate resourcing of the university as an HBU and in the continuing under-preparedness of its students. Bad schooling, levels of poverty and lack of cultural capital were identified as the markers of disadvantage, and the quality of the UWC student intake was seen as negatively affected by these. The context of disadvantage was framed as one of great challenge. The lack of institutional physical resources, the absence in students of core skills in the critical areas of mathematics and language, and the absence of the material conditions to support success, were identified as key elements constituting this situation of disadvantage.

Given that challenging context, the university's decision to commit itself to improving quality through improving performance against efficiency indicators was seen by academics as serving instead to hinder and delay the achievement of quality and even of equitable outcomes.

For example, the attempt by the state, through differential funding, to steer enrolments towards Science, Engineering and Technology and away from the Humanities and Social Science was supported by UWC, which responded to this imperative with vigour. Statistics indicate just how far along the path it had come to exceeding the minimum standards of performance in this area through linking student growth to growth in those preferred areas. The fact that the differential funding system rewarded student enrolments in these areas up to four times more than in other disciplinary areas also fired UWC's enthusiasm. Considering that precisely those areas presented the greatest challenge to the university's students, achievement in Science, Engineering and Technology would undoubtedly demand excessive investment of time and commitment on the part of academics in developing students' abilities in those areas.

Academics conceivably found themselves under immense pressure to deliver graduates in those areas and to deliver those graduates in a minimum time to satisfy time-to-degree indicators. It is not difficult to imagine the impact on quality of the often contradictory factors pulling academics in multiple, divergent directions.

With pressure exerted on academics to improve research output, to focus on teaching and learning efforts to improve graduate success, and to bring funding into the institution through self-initiated partnerships, it is small wonder that so many academics felt burdened and aggrieved by these demands.

Many also highlighted the impractical and even misguided nature of a focus on the improvement of indicators associated with notions of quality as value for money, in the particular context of disadvantage described above. The following quote by Susan expresses this view succinctly:

*You shouldn't demand from the people who teach those students to write research articles for journals. I think people feel ... angry, because at UWC they get a particular quality of student ... You come here because you come from particular difficulties. And you cannot expect the people who have to deal with those difficulties, who have to transform that person into a scholar, to write academic articles, to organise conferences, to be at the forefront in their field. I think it's ridiculous to expect that. But you should keep as many of those who do it well as possible and pay them well and say also to the others, 'That which you are doing is also excellent because you are saving hundreds of students a year,' students who have few other choices and perhaps have just that one year to make it work.*

Susan suggests that UWC should value academics' efforts to turn under-prepared students into scholars more explicitly, rather than placing emphasis only on those academic activities which generate funding and income.

The data revealed a significant degree of disappointment in the new state, which many felt had 'let down' the HBUs, UWC and even the poor. Kenneth articulates this sense of frustration directed at the failure of the state to fulfil particular post-apartheid expectations:

*While about a third or a quarter of our students have got full cost bursaries...it seems that even the full cost bursaries do not cover textbooks ... so we had to abandon prescribing textbooks when the proportion of the class who bought them dropped from one third to ... one tenth of the students. I do feel that what they could do is to give a free dictionary and a free world atlas to every student entering UWC. I feel we have been financially let down. The university is producing the first black generation of professionals and businesses which a whole transformation project of BEE ... depends on... Now we have already reached the stage in the 13<sup>th</sup> year of democracy and 18 years after the effective collapse of apartheid that we are getting the children of middle-class blacks here, so they are able to cope with the financial situation, but it does limit mobility for the children of the unemployed to escape poverty and join the middle class...*

Kenneth suggests the state has abrogated its responsibilities to the poor by not providing poor students with sufficient financial support, and through not offering UWC additional support to produce sufficient numbers of black students to take up positions of leadership in society. In his view, lack of support by the state for poor students has limited the upward mobility of the black working class.

A number of interviewees expressed their disappointment that the post-apartheid state had failed to provide some form of compensation to UWC for the financial sacrifices it had made in performing its particular role in struggle. For example, 'opening the doors of learning' was regarded by many as an act almost mandated by the ANC in exile, as was the university's 1993 decision to enroll students irrespective of whether they could pay for their studies. In fact it was variously suggested that the latter decision was made on the basis of a promise of eventual compensation from the first Minister of Education.

There was fairly strong feeling not only that UWC's loyalty and support for the anti-apartheid struggle should be rewarded but that the institution should also be compensated for the loss of key academic staff members, who left to fill cabinet and other positions in the new government.

Albert expresses a sense of betrayal at these expectations not being fulfilled, in a conversation about changes in the relationship between the state and UWC:

*In the past 15 years the state has stopped sending its police into the university (Laughs). Well, in fact we now find policemen walking in here but they are coming to class in their uniform. There has been a definite change. It is there for everyone to see that in the old days we were not the blue-eyed boy of the old government. We created and we enlarged the gap with the autonomy that we sought and eventually had, but that was important as part of the major move towards confronting the old government. So we were not the blue-eyed boy of the government and I don't think today we are the blue-eyed boy of this government, but we have confidence in the government and the government in us...*

*I am sure I am talking for most of us here on campus when I say that we think the government can be just a little more considerate towards us on the basis ... of what I mentioned earlier about when HWIs were training company directors and so on and we were turning out teachers and those teachers never got to manage their own companies. That is why today the donations do not snow upon us as they do upon the HWIs. I just think the government needs to compensate somehow for that sort of thing.*

Albert's light-hearted opening line about policemen on campus serves as an interesting metaphor for the transition UWC is engaged in, from a university that fought the state (hence the presence of police on campus) to one that supports it (through educating its police officers).

Albert also expresses his disappointment that the post-apartheid state has failed to reward UWC for its willingness to confront the apartheid state in order to bring about change. He also expects some compensation for the fact that UWC was constrained by apartheid policy in terms of the qualifications it was allowed to offer. HWIs, on the other hand, have continued to reap the benefit, in the form of massive alumni donations, of graduating large numbers of white students during apartheid, who filled top positions in the economy and society.

UWC management have deliberately carved out a relationship with the state that is based on support rather than on confrontation and challenge. Indeed, academics have given credence to the notion of UWC becoming a university that supports rather than fights the state, through empathising with the values and policy goals that drive the state's transformation agenda.

Yet the sense of feeling let down by the new state, as expressed by Kenneth and Albert, as well as the sense of being undervalued, as expressed by Susan, seems to sit uncomfortably with academics' willingness to continue to support the post-apartheid state.

This tension, between the anger and frustration that result from feeling let down and undervalued, and the willingness to comply with state demands, is reflected in the contradictory statements that are interspersed through academics' conversations. It is unclear, yet intriguing to consider, how this tension will play itself out in academics' responses to ongoing quality assurance demands emanating from the state in the future.

#### **6.10. Explaining ambivalence**

The shift to accountability for the achievement of national priorities is experienced increasingly at UWC as an expectation that academics should take responsibility for the achievement of output targets and other performance indicators. On the one hand, academics identify with the values of transformation implicit in the accountability demands and the attempts to steer the sector in particular directions, namely towards economic and social development.

On the other hand, there remains a measure of resentment and anger at the state's attempts to regulate and control the academic project, which is fairly widely regarded as an infringement on academics' rights and freedom and an encroachment on academic boundaries.

The contradictions discernible in conversations with many academics about quality assurance and state regulation are ample evidence of the ambivalence with which they regard the state's intentions and interventions. The language they use shows them grappling with a sense of annoyance at the burdens created by excessive quality assurance demands, coupled with a desire and willingness to support the state's endeavours to achieve change and an improvement in the conditions of the poor and marginalised.

Bulelwa describes the ambivalence associated with appreciating the benefits of reflection, through self-evaluation, and the irritations associated with being expected to comply with external expectations:

*In some ways it has been an imposition for us because there are certain things you have to do and you have to do it in a particular way. Like the self-evaluation portfolio and its particular criteria. We may not necessarily have approached the programme in that way, so at one level it is an imposition. At another level it does get you to reflect on it, so I have a kind of ambivalent response to that.*

UWC has also imposed, over and above the ample expectations emanating from the state, its own quality assurance demands which often exceed external minimum requirements but which are designed to demonstrate 'beyond reasonable doubt' the existence of levels of quality comparable with those of the previously advantaged universities.

Hence the strong focus on recording evidence, on managing and assuring the quality of teaching ('to the nth degree,' according to Tom), and on exercising excessive control of the decisions of supervisors and external examiners. It could even be argued that the university's internal quality assurance is more heavily directed at control and surveillance than that of the state. The overzealous demands of the university, coupled with the demanding expectations of the state's quality assurance structures, has led to a situation of undue and unreasonable pressure on academics and on their working lives.

#### 6.10.1 Ambivalence and overzealous quality assurance

A further implication of the university's overzealousness, its efforts to bury its past and to indicate its support and alliance with the new state (for financial and political reasons), is that often the decisions made by its leadership are directed at anticipating future moves of the state.

In this regard, some of the academics interviewed have accused the institution of often acting pre-emptively and inappropriately as a result of second-guessing the state's next moves. This form of over-compliance, it has been argued, has resulted in a huge waste of resources, including academics' time and effort, as institutional efforts have been harnessed towards initiatives resulting from miscalculations and even false starts.

Don criticises what he regards as the unnecessary and resource-consuming shift towards modularisation and re-curriculation at UWC:

*I do think that things like the qualifications framework ...the registration of qualifications in new ways - means that there are new requirements that have got to be met that are messy. We have got to have those module descriptors and so on. And ... those will be an irritation for people ... I have yet to be convinced of their real usefulness. They were supposed to be things that were transparent, but here at UWC actually you are involved in too many different discourses for that to be the case. So I think that there has probably been quite a lot of wasted energy around those things...*

Don's tone and language suggest that the investment in modularisation by UWC has been a costly mistake.

Carol complains about a series of curriculum change processes her department was required to undertake, and suggests that these, likewise, amounted to wasting resources on things that were assumed to be required ahead of the state's confirmation that they were in fact necessary:

*The first time we did this re-curriculation we did it wrong because it was not expected of us to do it and we responded to the NQF and SAQA processes. Most disciplines here jumped on the bandwagon that you have to have in-service training and workplace experience and all of that. We then went through a three-phase change. We had the curriculum I was trained in, then we changed it in response to SAQA and realignment of programmes and we brought in a new programme in terms of responding to the world of work... But if you consider that the curriculum we've put in place now reflects the first curriculum, we should not have changed. We should not have responded to a higher landscape environment when it was not required to do so. We did it because we thought everyone was doing it and it was detrimental to us.*

Carol concludes by suggesting that *'we did it because we thought everyone was doing it.'* This instance of over-compliance through pre-emptive action appears to have been motivated by UWC's desire to be seen to be in the forefront in responding to change, and to avoid being shown up by other institutions' levels of responsiveness.

As a result of my work with departments during review processes, I became aware of another example of anticipating the state's requirements. During 2000, UWC managers became aware of a possible shift towards programmes, as a form of organising curricula in higher education. Much effort was put into research at UWC into restructuring the curricula around programmes, advisory documents were prepared and made available to departments, and the upshot was that the practice of organising qualifications around a disciplinary major or two was abandoned. Academics at UWC barely understood the new curriculum requirements of designing programmes, and confusion ensued for a few years.

Many academics argued in later departmental reviews that the shelving of majors, and replacing them with a confusing arrangement of core and elective modules, led to a downswing in enrolments in certain departments, while the requirement to design qualifications around programmes has, at this point, not yet been enforced by the state.

## **6.11 Conclusion**

The focus of this chapter has been on demonstrating that increased quality assurance demands have been driven by pressure on the university to improve performance against national benchmarks and other efficiency indicators. The university's underperformance in terms of national indicators, such as graduate success and time to degree, and the need to report to the state on improvement in these areas, were critical factors driving change in the internal quality assurance system.

The analysis has revealed the tensions and contradictions resulting from the university's decision to comply wholeheartedly with the state's transformation demands by adopting the discourse and practices embedded in a value for money and efficiency approach to quality and its improvement.

Academics' responses have been categorised broadly as non-compliance, surface compliance and compliance, while an attempt has been made to explain ambivalence in academics' responses, and the fact that many academics across the spectrum regard quality assurance implementation as burdensome and an irritation.

This study focused on refusal as non-compliance, and found that a critical element in non-compliance involved academics' fiercely resisting encroachment on academic work in terms of the boundaries they defined for such work. Resistance to encroachment, or the defense of academic turf, was associated with resistance to the gradual erosion of academic freedom, as perceived by academics. Refusal was best understood in the context of growing mistrust by the state and university managers, which was manifested in increased demands for record-keeping, documentation and reporting for the purposes of monitoring academic behaviour and action.

While some academics welcomed these demands as providing order and structure to a previously flexible and open system of academic accountability, many others viewed them as forms of policing and as introducing an added burden of paperwork to serve the increased bureaucratisation of the academic project.

The extent to which academics regarded quality assurance measures as improving quality was largely, but not exclusively, dependent on the degree of match between the state's and their views of quality and how it should be improved, their views on the purpose and function of a university education, and their political position in relation to the priorities and transformation objectives of the post-apartheid state.

Firstly, this analysis attempted to locate academics' responses in the context of a university in transition, where such transition involved, firstly, 'ditching the HBU label' and seeking future sustainability for the university as an institution of excellence.

Secondly, the transition also involved carving out a new relationship between state and university, one built not on a past history of acrimony and opposition but on alliance building and the brokering of support and partnerships at all levels of its interaction with the new state.

These elements of transition provided for an at times overzealous willingness on the part of university managers to comply with national quality demands, resulting in increasing quality assurance pressure on academics, a change in the nature of academic work, and a redefinition, by persons other than themselves, of the boundaries of academic work.

The willingness to behave in ways which supported the goals of the post-apartheid state constantly came up against the anger and frustration felt by academics, and even institutional managers, at the refusal of the new state to provide compensation, or at least offer special consideration, to UWC. Disappointment arose from the unfulfilled expectation of redress from the state, in the light of UWC's history and in the light of the challenges it persistently faced in continuing to provide equitable opportunities for access and success for the poor and marginalised sectors of the population.

The following chapter will discuss and analyse the central findings of this research in such a way as to achieve a synthesis of various findings presented in this and the previous chapter. It will also reflect on the findings in relation to the research question and conceptual framework of this study.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Communicating the findings

#### 7.1 Introduction

*How do academics in a historically black South African university in transition engage with and implement internal and external quality assurance processes and policies?*

I approached this research question with some tentative ideas about what I expected to find, based on the 20 years of experience I had working in various capacities at the University of the Western Cape. These ideas formed the basis of my initial research propositions, which were as follows:

1. *The high level of prescriptiveness by the Evaluative State in the areas of quality, planning and funding diminishes academics' freedom to make decisions and to be innovative.*
2. *Demands for compliance with quality assurance requirements frustrate academics' efforts to improve teaching and learning in historically disadvantaged universities.*
3. *Historically disadvantaged institutions' aspirations for excellence and competitiveness often conflict with national policy goals and intentions.*
4. *These aspirations, articulated in mission and vision statements, are often not known to academics and sometimes conflict with academics' beliefs and practices.*

A study of the literature led me to the theory of the Evaluative State, as an appropriate conceptual framework for understanding the dynamics of the relationships between the state, the University of the Western Cape and its academics and institutional managers. My study was further guided by a by a set of research sub-questions:

*How do academics' views of quality and how it ought to be improved differ from those embedded in state policy and those promoted by university managers? How do these competing conceptions of quality relate to academics' attitudes towards the implementation of quality assurance policy and practices? To what extent does the state's focus on routine and strategic quality evaluation engender tension and conflict between and amongst academics and university managers?*

The study investigated the impact of the Evaluative State and its demands on academics and academic work by exploring a) tensions and contradictions around different views of quality held by academics, university managers and the state, b) the range of responses academics evince towards quality policy implementation, and c) the behaviour of the university's senior managers in the context of driving UWC's transition from an historically disadvantaged institution to a university of quality.

Ultimately, this study was an exploration of the changing nature of university work from multiple perspectives, namely from the standpoint of the state, institutional managers, UWC's academics and, of course, my own. The findings of the study reveal a series of tensions and contestations between and amongst UWC's academics, managers and the state, which this chapter will explore.

## **7.2 Revisiting the conceptual framework: The Evaluative State in South Africa**

Neave and Von Vught (2001) have noted that higher education systems in developing countries for the most part represent the transfer of one or more models from the west. The introduction into South Africa of a form of state steering that incorporated globalised ideas of how state systems should be transformed and modernised serves as an example.

The South African state, in its relationship with higher education, reflects key characteristics of the Evaluative State in Europe, as described by Neave, Van Vught, Maassen and others. Remote steering, output evaluation, the use of performance indicators as instruments of surveillance, the establishment of intermediary bodies which perform quality control functions on behalf of the state, the rise of managerialism and the creation of an audit culture are key elements of the Evaluative State (Neave, 1991).

The intention of the new state in South Africa is to exert control over institutions in order to facilitate change in the direction of critical national social and economic goals, while achieving global competitiveness. This study has identified the impact of the Evaluative State on one university, has described the complexity of responses to the state, and has demonstrated the depth of incursion of the Evaluative State into the work of academics.

The Evaluative State arose in Europe in a context where higher education was regarded as a major lever of social change (Neave, 1991). This is similarly the case in South Africa, except that the state is far more anxious about the pace of social change - change has to occur rapidly rather in an evolutionary manner, to ensure that South Africa does not fall even further behind the rest of the world in terms of the research and development capacity required to ensure a competitive position in the global economy. Castells (DOE, 2001: 5) described universities in South Africa as the *power sources on which a new development process must rely* in a global context where *knowledge is the electricity of the new informational international economy*, hence the intense depth and breadth of the state's incursion into academic work.

The Evaluative State in Europe introduced conditions which made higher education more responsive to the market. For example, a decrease in state funding demanded diversification of higher education's income streams, and in turn encouraged sensitivity to the needs of, amongst others, business and industry. The new state in South Africa not only applies evaluation frameworks that link planning, performance and rewards more effectively to market demands but also resorts to regular legislative activity, through the enactment of various Acts, Bills, Government Notices and Regulations which govern behaviour and enforce practices that facilitate reform.

The degree of recourse to legislation is much more intense in South Africa, signaling state control that is strongly interventionist. Maassen (1997) argued that the Evaluative State achieves control more through focusing on shaping the products and outputs of universities and less through legislation or regulation, leading to a description of state steering as remote rather than direct. It is clear that state steering in South Africa has been achieved through the exercise of both remote and direct control, which accounts for the intensity with which the presence of the state is felt in higher education.

### **7.3 Central findings of this study**

Four central findings characterise contestation between the state, academics and institutional managers at UWC. First, the imperatives driving transition at the University of the Western Cape conflict with notions of quality espoused by the Evaluative State, leading to ambivalence as overzealous responsiveness encounters intransigence.

Second, academics' loyalty to the state's agenda for social change is severely challenged by their disappointment that the state's quality evaluation system is unable to address and evaluate their work with disadvantaged students.

Third, quality assurance practices adopted at UWC in the interest of accountability result in an increase in monitoring performance rather than an improvement in quality.

Fourth, there is contestation between managers' accountability to the Evaluative State and academics' accountability to student success, expressed in contestation around institutional mission.

In this chapter, I will discuss each finding as it emerged from my study, and also explore each in relation to the conceptual framework of the study. I will also provide an analysis of what I consider to be the failure of the Evaluative State in higher education in South Africa.

#### **7.4 The imperatives driving transition at the University of the Western Cape conflict with notions of quality espoused by the Evaluative State, leading to ambivalence as overzealous responsiveness encounters intransigence.**

The case study of UWC was of a university in transition from an historically disadvantaged institution to a university of quality, and from a university well-known for its struggle against control and repression by the apartheid state, to one that is determined to support the reform efforts of the new, post-apartheid state. The central point to be made about the university's transition from HBU to excellence, is that it is achieved through a conscious effort to *ditch its HBU label* and through its responsiveness to the demands of the state. The transition is a complex one, and reflects a series of incongruencies which result in UWC's leadership evoking different and contradictory institutional identities, depending on the circumstances.

Senior managers constantly vacillate between competing descriptions of the institution, which on the one hand celebrate historical disadvantage and historical blackness, and on the other promote the abandonment of the historical labels of HBU and HDI in favour of a new discourse of great aspirations and excellence. This study has used the term institutional *schizophrenia* to describe the often confusing phenomenon observed when UWC's leadership shift, often in a single conversation, between different and contradictory representations of the institution's current reality.

On the one hand, UWC pursues a representation of itself as a place of exceptional quality, one which *achieves excellence in teaching and learning and great heights of distinction and competitiveness in selected areas (IOP: 2003)*, and associates this description with a view of itself as an *Engaged University*.

Within this description of its reality, UWC is at least an institution of equal quality and comparable standing to any other South African University, and in fact, surpasses other universities in terms of its quality in a number of areas.

Wangenge-Ouma and Langa (2010) argue that universities mobilise claims of excellence to achieve competitive advantage and to attract resources. I would argue that UWC's claim to excellence was motivated in the first place by the need to persuade the state in 2003 that it was a university of quality and that it should be allowed to continue to exist as an independent institution; and in the second place, UWC continued to portray itself as a place of exceptional quality, in an effort to attract attention and resources from the public and potential funders.

In 2001, the university faced closure or merger as a result of a leadership crisis coupled with financial instability and a dramatic decline in student numbers. Its new Rector commenced an intensive campaign during that year to change the perception of UWC as second-rate, in order to win back students and to encourage financial investment from private donors. However, these representations of UWC as having *ditched the HBU label*, rather than being underpinned by reality were based on a persuasive rhetoric, which constructed portrayals of UWC as potentially great and its exceptional quality as aspirational.

There is no doubt that these narratives were successful in changing the public perception of the university. The dazzling portrayal of UWC's *potential for greatness* captured the imagination of the state, private funders and the public. The result was that UWC remained independent and received recapitalisation funding from the state to rescue it from bankruptcy. New and extravagant buildings grew out of donors' support and the increase in student numbers ensured stability and growth.

While this study recognises UWC's claims to excellence as portrayals of itself not often grounded in reality, a central finding is that UWC's leadership indeed attempted to actualise these promises and assurances, through adopting what I have termed an overzealous response to the transformation demands of the state.

The irony was that, although UWC continued to make great strides in terms of its performance in relation to other South African universities, in areas such as graduate output, research output and the growth of student enrolments in science and technology, these actual improvements were not always enough to satisfy the state that UWC was indeed a place of exceptional quality. Other areas of performance, related to student performance against benchmarks such as throughput, graduation and completion rates, persistently detracted from UWC's overall quality picture.

I argue that the contradiction and mismatch between UWC's actual performance and its promise of future quality, created intense anxiety for the institution's leadership. Quality evaluation by the state demanded evidence of actual performance, yet UWC hoped to persuade the state to make allowances and grant special consideration for the fact that at UWC, in some areas, quality was still aspirational, and that a successful transition to excellence required time. When those appeals were unsuccessful, as they were during the 2006 HEQC audit, and the state insisted on evaluating real products and output, UWC's leadership reverted to an alternative representation of the university as historically black and disadvantaged.

Appealing to UWC's identity as historically black and disadvantaged served to signal the university's expectation that the state would demonstrate tolerance towards its transitional status, and that it would be granted special consideration for the challenges it faced on account of its past as an HBU when its present quality came to be evaluated. The representation of UWC as an HBU struggling with quality was called upon to persuade the state that it ought to judge the university, not only in terms of its current reality but with due consideration for the challenges it faced in building quality and in relation to its *aspiration for excellence*. This expectation was constantly thwarted, to the dismay of the university's leadership, as the state continued to demand evidence of UWC's actual and current performance against standard indicators and benchmarks.

In talking to me about the 2006 external audit of UWC, two senior managers appealed to both these conflicting representations of the university. The identity of UWC as equal and even superior to other South African universities was first marshalled in an effort to rebut the Audit Panel's description of the university as an HBU in the profile it had prepared. When the initial report from the Audit Panel was presented to the institutional managers, the other representation of UWC, that of an HBU struggling to build quality, was evoked as a defense against the panel's identification of quality problems in certain areas.

Reverting to a portrayal of itself as an HBU, allowed the institutional leadership to express anger at the state's expectation that UWC should perform at the same level as historically white institutions, which, unlike UWC, were more affluent and were not working with mainly black, poor and under-prepared students.

The state's expectation of quality performance from UWC in areas such as first-year pass rates was perceived to be unjust, prompting a senior member of UWC's leadership team to declare that the state's expectation *'(showed) an absolute lack of any kind of understanding of the reality of the struggle that they claim is our greatest triumph.'*

A significant degree of ambivalence was found in institutional managers' conversations about their interactions and relationship with the state. This is related in part to their disappointment when the state fails to act in ways that support the transition goals and objectives of the university. This disappointment contrasts strongly with the university's commitment that its transition will also involve compliance with the state's demands for change and that it will support the achievement of the state's transformation goals related to equity, development and democratisation.

The powerful words of a senior manager, that UWC *'must become a university that supports government and does not fight it,'* captures the texture of the university's transition and speaks eloquently of this commitment to change. The phrase captures three significant elements of current reality. Firstly, UWC, renowned for its history of challenge and resistance to the demands of the apartheid state, will transform itself into an institution that will comply with the demands of the Evaluative State, without much challenge or struggle.

Secondly, the choice of compliance above resistance must be understood in the context of the university's perception in the post-apartheid era that the very survival of the HBU is under grave threat unless drastic measures are taken to persuade the state of the HBU's worth. Thirdly, the overlap between important elements of the values and ideology of the state, UWC's managers and its academics, enables sufficient convergence of their views of quality and the purpose of higher education to inspire loyalty and support for the state's transformation agenda.

The implications of becoming a university that supports government and does not fight it has vast consequences for the university.

Chief amongst these is the decision to cooperate with the state's agenda for change. In the discussion that follows, I argue that the decision to become a university that supports government and does not fight it emanates from a position of institutional vulnerability.

Most historically black institutions, unable to rise above the effects of racial planning and differential funding, faced the advent of democracy with huge financial, infrastructural and intellectual deficits. In 2001, the head of the Council of Higher Education, Badat (2004), warned the HBUs that expecting the new state to provide *institutional redress to overcome the legacy of disadvantage under apartheid* was not an option, and that *institutional survival at all costs* would not serve the *national interest* in transforming higher education (2004: 23-24).

Expecting compensation for its role in the struggle that brought the new state into existence, as well as for years of deliberate apartheid neglect and under-resourcing, UWC was instead faced with the harsh reality that the post-apartheid state would not tolerate the continued existence of second-class higher education institutions, nor would it provide the developmental support to build quality at UWC. Instead, the university faced the prospect of closure or merger with a more viable higher education institution. The prospect of merger or closure has become like a sword of Damocles, driving the institutional management's responses to the Evaluative State and controlling the direction and pace of transformation.

UWC found itself under pressure to demonstrate its potential to function as an independent institution of exceptional quality, at all levels of research, teaching and technology transfer. Further, after having suffered from its inability to develop capital reserves under the apartheid system, in the post-apartheid period UWC found itself overwhelmingly reliant on state funding for its continued existence, at least while it struggled to slowly build up the reserves that would secure its independence from state finance.

Moreover, the state's recapitalisation funding was granted on condition that UWC demonstrated financial viability into the future, and that it guaranteed the development of exceptional quality at all levels. So UWC's portrayal of itself as a place of quality had to shift from rhetoric to demonstrations of real performance through the provision of evidence that quality had indeed improved, if it were to remain viable.

As a result, UWC's transition was dominated by overzealous responsiveness to demands emanating from the state. The responses of the university's managers to the Evaluative State should be seen in the light of their role as mediators of the state's agenda for change.

In return for continued funding, the Evaluative State expects higher education institutions to take responsibility for their own fate, through putting in place the measures required to enable adequate performance against the state's goals. Managerial responses and behaviours are therefore designed to demonstrate that quality measures have in fact been implemented and are able to deliver the expected results, thus ensuring success in attracting rewards from the state.

At UWC, managerial responses to the Evaluative State are largely directed at ensuring the continued existence of the university in the post-apartheid era. The present higher education system will not tolerate the existence of historically disadvantaged institutions.

It has acted either to shut these down or to signal to the remaining few that their continued existence is contingent on abandoning the label of disadvantage and effecting a successful transition to institutions of excellence, in accordance with the standards of quality set by previously advantaged and white universities and inscribed in new benchmarks and indicators.

Given this context, UWC cannot afford to ignore state demands for quality improvement. Choosing to do so would be at great financial cost to the institution, more so than in the case of most universities in South Africa - *"There are people out there who hold our fate in their hands"* (Susan).

#### **7.4.1 UWC's transition in the context of the Evaluative State**

A central finding discussed above is that UWC's leadership adopted what I termed overzealous responsiveness to the transformation demands of the state, largely in an attempt to realise UWC's claims for excellence and live up to its promises of future quality. However, conflict and resentment arose when state evaluation of quality at UWC revealed that claims of excellence failed to correspond with actual performance measured against the Evaluative State's quality indicators. When the state interpreted this to mean that the claims mobilised failed to reflect current reality, UWC leadership responded with outrage against the unrealistic expectations of performance inscribed in the benchmarks and indicators employed by the Evaluative State to measure quality

I approached this research having identified conflict between the state and UWC's senior managers around the university's performance, and understood this conflict to be related to UWC's transition from an historically disadvantaged institution. From this I derived the proposition that *historically disadvantaged institutions' aspirations for excellence and competitiveness often conflict with national policy goals and intentions*. The theory of the Evaluative State enabled an interpretation of the conflict in ways which drew attention to the mismatch between the state's expectations of actual performance and UWC's hope that the state would make allowance for its challenging transition, by accepting its undertaking that, despite evidence to the contrary, exceptional quality would be realised in all areas in the future.

The measurement of institutional performance, through the evaluation of actual output, is central to the Evaluative State's response to individual institutions. In a sense, the state contracts institutions to provide particular products and outputs, and disburses funding only in relation to actual delivery of the outputs and products agreed upon.

Public funding is therefore conditional on performance, and the state's ability to steer higher education hinges on the consistency and inflexibility with which it applies its evaluative principles. The degree of influence the state will have on higher education and its ability to successfully steer institutions in the desired direction depends on the consistent application of output evaluation and the allocation of appropriate rewards and penalties. Evaluative State theory is therefore premised on the idea that failure to evaluate and reward performance appropriately will result in non-achievement of policy goals.

Given the Evaluative State's objectives for goal-achievement, it is clear that the refusal to reward UWC's on the basis of future claims for excellence is an indication that the Evaluative State will evaluate and reward quality only in terms of actual, demonstrated performance against clear indicators and therefore cannot accommodate UWC's notion of quality as *potential for greatness*. The intransigence of the Evaluative State in this regard is met with anger and disappointment by UWC's leadership, resulting in conflict and manifesting in ambivalence in the university's response towards the state.

**7.5 Academics' loyalty to the state's agenda for social change is severely challenged by their disappointment that the state's quality evaluation system is unable to address and evaluate their work with disadvantaged students.**

I have shown that the notion of quality as transformation, and specifically as adding value to students' lives, is central to academics' work at UWC. But academics' notions of quality differ from those of the state. Academics' dedication to this approach to quality is intensely personal and the emotional rewards they receive in witnessing the academic development and social upliftment of individual black students, '*from squatter camp to CEO of a large company*,' is plain to see in the passionate way they speak about their work. University work, from the perspective of UWC's academics, entails dedication to both student success and the creation of opportunities for black students, who for the most part are poor and educationally under-prepared.

Regardless of the harsh conditions of academic work, and despite being underpaid and seriously overworked in a context of quite severe resource constraints, academics at UWC were passionate about their work and committed to being at the university.

Infrastructural constraints and the lack of financial stability over decades had resulted in overcrowded and under-ventilated lecture rooms and laboratories. Some buildings were in a state of disrepair, academics were forced to share office space, and understaffing had led to excessively high workloads compared with those of their peers at better-resourced universities in the region.

The constant refrain from academics was that witnessing the transformation of individual students under their tutelage, from first-year entrants who lacked cultural capital and intellectual preparation, to postgraduates '*cracking a genome*' after many years and much help, made their work worthwhile.

Many academics were attracted to the state's rhetoric of what policy documents repeatedly referred to as *the principles characterising a transformed higher education system* (DOE 1997; 2001; 2002a). Principles such as equity and redress, democratisation and development, supposedly guiding reform, resonated with academics' conceptions of the importance of their work with UWC students.

Academics at the university appeared *captured by the discourse* (Trowler, 2001) of redistributive social justice that framed state action, as improving the structural conditions and life chances of the marginalised and disadvantaged.

Having understood the passion with which academics at UWC take on the challenges of their work with disadvantaged students, I was able to comprehend the depth of their support for the state's goals and objectives with regard to equity, redress and development. Hence, the significance for academics of '*becoming a university that does not fight the state but supports it*' is related to the degree of congruence between the state's equity and development goals and academics' devotion to their work to ensure student success.

However, despite the enthusiasm with which UWC's academics embraced aspects of the state's priorities and goals, many felt aggrieved that the work they engaged in with students was devalued and not recognised by quality evaluation systems. They want a quality measurement system that acknowledges and evaluates their work in relation to the '*mopping up*' they engage in with students.

With this goes a desire for a different way of understanding and measuring quality, one which is connected to UWC's context and student intake and that acknowledges an important component of UWC's identity, that of an institution which excels in access and development.

Instead, academics constantly face pressure to perform in accordance with the expectations of the state and of institutional managers, against indicators which measure quality as efficiency and value for money, when in fact their work is centred around transformation and adding value to students' lives and futures.

As a result, academics approach implementation of quality-related policies with a significant degree of ambivalence. Their support for the state's goals translates into an orientation that reflects a certain degree of loyalty to the state. However, the displeasure they feel about the state's choice of quality evaluation system comes through clearly in their conversations, when they speak about '*feeling let down*' and disappointed, and express their dismay that the new state, whose development goals they support, appears to be unsupportive of their work with disadvantaged students.

I approached this research recognising the frustration experienced by academics in implementing quality assurance mechanisms. I also understood that they regarded these requirements as burdensome rather than as supporting the work they did with students, and I was aware of their perception of the opportunity costs related to complying with quality assurance requirements. Essentially, the academics did not regard quality assurance measures as contributing to their efforts to improve quality, but instead believed that these measures distracted them from the real task of improving students' performance and hence their quality.

These initial observations arose out of many years of work at UWC in evaluating the quality of academic departments, and led to the formulation of an initial research proposition as *demands for compliance with quality assurance requirements frustrate academics' efforts to improve teaching and learning in historically disadvantaged universities*. My research, guided by the conceptual framework provided by the theory of the Evaluative State, revealed the interconnectedness between academics' frustration and resentment towards quality evaluation and their feelings of disillusionment with the failure of the quality system to endorse and support their work with UWC's students.

#### **7.5.1 Quality assessment and the Evaluative State**

The dilemma UWC faces in feeling unsupported while desiring to be *a university that supports the state*, is to be found in the fundamental characteristics of the new state as an Evaluative State. The post-apartheid state in South Africa wishes to transform the higher education system towards efficiently achieving the goals of economic growth, while encouraging institutions to be responsive to social and economic needs. It does this through rewarding increased participation and success of black students, through reducing public funding and thus encouraging diversification of institutional income streams, and through linking funding to goal achievement.

Achievement against benchmarks and performance indicators is constantly evaluated in order to gauge the progress of the higher education sector against policy goals. Fundamentally, the Evaluative State will not fund institutions in areas that do not deliver on key goals. Even its disbursement of development funding, designed to increase universities' ability to perform in critical areas, is consistent with its steering formula.

The Evaluative State therefore cannot accommodate academics' hopes that their tireless work with disadvantaged students will be rewarded, for the simple reason that adding value is inconsistent with promoting efficiency. Transformation, as it occurs with UWC's students and with the attendant '*mopping up*' activities, cannot happen quickly; it is resource intensive and requires patience. Hence centralising time-to-degree, pass rates and other efficiency indicators frustrates academics' achievement of cherished goals. The passion for transformation that they exhibit contradicts the aspiration of the Evaluative State in South Africa to steer higher education rapidly and efficiently. The interplay between these irreconcilable obligations generates frustration as academics begin to recognise that current quality assurance mechanisms, and what they measure, cannot speak to what they consider to be their real work, namely transforming students who enter the university facing major challenges into successful intellectuals.

Academics at UWC, despite their support for the state's goals of equity and social justice, are constantly engaged in contestation with the Evaluative State, as they struggle for the right to define, in Nina's terms, *what excellence is for (our) university, in (our) country*.

They feel anger and frustration that the state's evaluation of quality consistently rewards the achievements of other South African universities, but not UWC, *when in actual fact the work that is being done here is so much more important than anything (those universities) can dream of* (Nina).

Orr (1997) has suggested that quality is a contested, political concept. This research has shown that quality is indeed a political concept in the context of the Evaluative State in South Africa, where the state determines that the conceptualisation of quality as efficiency and value for money should dominate evaluation. Further, the state has the power to decide what the evaluative system should measure, in this case, student completion and success rates, and also decides what the benchmarks and indicators of that performance should be. Academics at UWC are thus unable to assert their notions of quality as transformation, as adding value to ensure the success of black students and deciding how quality is best improved with their students.

Singh (2006) and Lange (2006) have proposed that the tools of the Evaluative State, namely the performance indicators that rationalise the evaluation system, have the potential to measure progressive goals, such as the achievement of equity and democracy in South Africa.

On the basis of that premise, they propose that the use of what they agree to be conservative performance indicators characteristic of the Evaluative State is justified on account of the intended aims, mainly the promotion of social justice and the achievement of equity.

However, my research has shown that the existing performance indicators which constitute the state's quality evaluation system are effective in measuring only certain policy goals, namely those associated with accountability, efficiency and increased productivity. Therefore, the fundamental assumption upon which state policy is based, that the Evaluative State's mechanisms of performance evaluation and accountability will ensure success in the achievement of key policy goals, is inherently flawed. In South Africa, the use of conservative means serves to ensure that the higher education sector achieves only the conservative and technical goals embedded in state policy, those of steering the higher education system towards the market and the achievement of efficiency and increased productivity.

#### **7.6 Quality assurance practices adopted in the interest of accountability result in an increase in monitoring and policing performance rather than an improvement in quality.**

*In a panopticon prison, a tower is situated in the centre of a courtyard surrounded by buildings of cells, with each cell window under direct scrutiny of the tower and each inmate visible to the surveillant alone. The cells are theatres in which the actor is alone, individualised and constantly visible...Such a prison is a model for understanding the new management practices in higher education and how these function to control, classify and contain teachers (Shore & Roberts, 1993).*

National and international demands that higher education should provide a supply of graduates with high-level skills to meet the advancing technological challenges of the global economy resulted in a shift to skills-based knowledge. Universities are now expected to equip students with skills required by the market, and to ensure that those skills are honed towards maximising graduates' performance in the workplace. The National Qualifications Framework was introduced in South Africa as a means of organising qualifications around sets of competencies or outcomes that are required in specific areas of employment. A system of level specification on the NQF ensures that higher level qualifications reflect increased complexity of skills and competencies. The NQF is also designed around the achievement of principles such as transparency, portability of credits, and mobility of learners through learning pathways.

A system of outcomes based education, conforming to the requirements of the NQF, has been introduced at UWC, through initiatives such as modularisation within a credit framework and curriculum restructuring. Outcomes, assessment methods and learning materials are aligned to ensure the achievement of the module outcomes. While modularisation and a credit system have been enforced throughout the University, curriculum restructuring has proceeded with varying degrees of success across the faculties.

Modularisation and outcomes based education at UWC have achieved a number of the transformation goals desired by the state. Firstly, outcomes based education represents a shift in focus from content to skills-based learning in a way which links the lecture room to the workplace (Malcolm, 2001). Academics are required to articulate the links between learning in specific modules and the practical usefulness of these skills in society and the economy. Linking intended outcomes to assessment serves to measure what students actually know and can do at the end of a module with the skills the module is designed to develop.

Curriculum alignment requires that learning outcomes are precisely articulated and that assessment specifically measures the skills and knowledge embedded in the outcomes. The concept of alignment implies a direct association between, or a lining up of, learning, outcomes and assessment in a configuration which allows little deviation.

Avis (2000) has argued that outcomes over-specify and *render visible what the learner is to achieve on completion* and lead to a technicised practice which limits creative and critical engagement with the curriculum. At UWC, curriculum alignment was introduced as a quality assurance measure directed at improving student performance in order to improve pass rates and degree completion. It was hoped that clarifying outcomes and assessment upfront would make it easier for under-prepared students to successfully decode the academic requirements of modules. Academics, on the whole, were eager to support the curriculum restructuring initiatives for two reasons. Their work at UWC was devoted to helping students pass and the focus on student success as a performance indicator compelled them to cooperate, lest they be accused of failing to act to remedy under-performance. The implicit assumption that low module pass rates indicated a failure of academics to achieve against a critical performance indicator resulted in performance anxiety amongst many UWC academics.

Despite supporting the restructuring initiative, academics at UWC were resentful of the negative impact of curriculum alignment on actual quality improvement and the resulting curtailment of academic freedom in the classroom. One academic's reference to curriculum alignment as a *double-edge sword* captured the ambivalence many felt in complying with this quality improvement measure, considering it administratively burdensome and intellectually oppressive. Academics at UWC rejected the tendency of the learning outcomes approach to '*narrow learning and restrict student empowerment*' (Avis, 2000: 46) through the over-specification of outcomes, content, methods and assessment. One academic spoke of '*straitjacketing*' and an approach to teaching that resembled a '*paint-by-numbers*' method, rather than encouraging more flexible and innovative methods.

Herein lay the *double-edged sword*, for in as much as the Evaluative State had the effect of encouraging institutions to adopt innovations directed at improving teaching and learning (Dill, 1998: 370), such innovations served as powerful instruments of policing and surveillance, rendering visible academics' efforts to attain the desired performance indicators (Avis, 2000), while simultaneously disabling academic creativity and eroding intellectual autonomy.

The introduction of quality assurance measures at UWC also saw the emergence of a new class of professionals, academics with an interest in pedagogical issues, who, by virtue of fulfilling leadership roles in faculties, were able to exploit opportunities for curriculum reform. The shift towards standardising curriculum alignment as an approach to curriculum design was thrust upon academics by academic leaders who had the power to cajole others to comply with at least the procedural demands of this particular quality assurance measure. The potential for strengthening collegiality and encouraging intellectual debate around teaching and the curriculum was reduced by the adoption of an approach that foregrounded accountability and demanded compliance.

Together, modularisation and curriculum alignment enabled more sophisticated monitoring of academic work and performance. Academics were required to submit module templates for perusal by committees of Senate and compile module files which detailed learning outcomes, planned and actual assessments, learning materials, academic reflection, self-assessment and improvement plans. In some faculties, the curriculum information in module files had to be made available for inspection when requested, and this exposed to external scrutiny what had previously been regarded as largely private academic work.

Senior academics justified this form of policing by arguing that they needed to inspect aspects of academics' work in order to offer advice about improvements. The overall intention, however, was to introduce accountability into teaching. The underpinning belief was that aligning exit outcomes with assessment, combined with the ability to inspect academics' teaching and their work with students, allowed for more accurate evaluation of academics' efforts to improve the university's performance against key indicators.

Hence the notion of the panopticon paradigm which likens management and quality control in universities to acts of surveillance and policing, through laying academic work open to scrutiny and available for inspection by institutional managers, and even by the state (Shore & Roberts, 1993).

The requirement to be explicit about learning outcomes and to make academics' pedagogic decisions available for monitoring and inspection amounted to a breakdown of an ethos of trust and the end of an era at UWC, one which had seen the goodwill and integrity of academics as being central to assuring academic quality.

*'Management by ideology was the modus operandi – you were assumed to be on the team,'* was how one professor described the apartheid-era quality model. Academics at UWC have become victims of a form of quality assurance that places more emphasis on monitoring and inspection than on quality improvement, and a culture of trust and tolerance has been replaced by an ethos of policing and surveillance (Morley, 2003).

### **7.7 There is contestation between managers' accountability to the Evaluative State and academics' accountability to student success**

The university's mission of promoting and achieving redistributive social justice through access and redress is central to academics' understanding of the purpose of a university education and their views of quality. A second element of the institutional mission, namely a commitment to community engagement and social development, was also deeply cherished by the academics included in this study.

The centrality of an understanding of the institutional mission to the conceptualisation of quality pointed strongly to the situatedness of quality meanings in a way that suggested that context and internal factors were powerful factors shaping academics' views of the purpose of higher education, their views of quality, and their understanding of how quality ought to be measured and improved.

Significant overlap exists between the fitness for purpose approach to quality and that of quality as transformation, and the analysis has argued that academics' views indicate the centrality of the transformative elements of the mission-in-use to their conception of quality. Harvey and Green (1993: 19) argue that, within a fitness for purpose approach, *'a high quality institution is one which clearly states its mission (or purpose) and is efficient and effective in meeting the goals which it has set itself.'*

The problem for the achievement of quality in the approach taken at UWC is that there is a lack of consensus between academics and managers about what the mission of the institution is or ought to be. Academics prefer a mission-in-use which favours a strong focus on community engagement, public service, and student transformation.

However, the leadership of the institution has captured the notion of engagement, disengaged it from its association with public service, and linked it instead to serving the needs of the state and the global economy and to notions of quality as efficiency:

*The Engaged University envisions a future that transcends past struggles in favour of an institution that is shaped by the congruencies and contradictions between transformation and global competitiveness... The Engaged University...offers academically viable and financially sustainable programmes, achieves excellence in teaching and learning and greater heights of distinction and competitiveness in selected priority areas (UWC, IOP 2004-2009).*

The Engaged University values excellence, financial stability, and competitiveness, and identifies priority areas which connect higher education with industry and the skills needs of the national and global economy. Academics and institutional managers express clear preferences for different aspects of the university's mission, and their choice of mission is related to their view of their role within the university. Academics and managers occupy distinctly different worlds. While managers work on reporting to the Evaluative State, academics have to deal with the internal and contextual issues, such as the nature of students' backgrounds.

As a result, one view of how quality ought to be improved constantly comes up against the other. Academics resent being held accountable for the achievement of efficiency and excellence, while institutional managers express dismay at the lack of support by academics for their efforts to reconfigure UWC's mission and future direction around satisfying the demands of the Evaluative State.

UWC's story of institutional change is an account of the development and entrenchment of managerialism. Its leadership chooses to continuously embark on strategic action which serves to accrue rewards from the Evaluative State, within the terms and conditions embedded in the multiple performance contracts that exist between state and university. The sheer intensity and pace of compliance aimed at transformation makes change at UWC so powerful and dramatic. Within a short space of time, every aspect of intellectual life has felt the impact of managerialism, as the leadership has determined that transformation ought to happen quickly and visibly, in areas that matter to the state, against performance indicators that count and where the financial rewards are most powerful.

For example, changing enrolment patterns reflect growth in the university in the areas of science, technology and commerce, areas deemed critical by the state for economic growth and global competitiveness and which therefore draw the largest per capita funding. In this regard, the concepts of enrolment planning, planned growth and the development of excellence in strategic areas dominate the discourse of the university's leadership, and render academic voices silent. *Compliance has muted criticism*, according to one senior academic.

Responses from academics to the new managerialism have been remarkably low-key, marked by a lack of debate and an absence of challenge. The reasons for such a response can only be assumed. Perhaps the leadership has acquired legitimacy through its various triumphs. A merger was successfully fought off, the standing of science in the university has been raised, private donations flow in from local and overseas agencies, subsidy earned from research and teaching output has increased, new extravagant buildings proliferate, and the perception of quality at UWC has increased in the public sphere. Perhaps the triumphs inspire faith in the ability of UWC's managers to attract the resources necessary for the university's survival. Or perhaps it is simply a case of change being so rapid, happening on multiple fronts, that the sheer pace of it leaves academics reeling and unable to identify the most relevant issues or decide which they should respond to.

Universities are complex organisations, many things happen at the same time, people become distracted, and it is possible, in the words of one academic, that *'we may have taken our eyes off the ball.'*

#### **7.7.1 The Evaluative State: managerialism and performativity**

The Evaluative State in South Africa holds universities accountable for the achievement of policy goals and national priorities. National demands for undergraduate and postgraduate success, especially in the areas of science, technology and commerce, address the need to provide highly-skilled human capital for the development of the national and global economy. State demands for efficiency and cost-effectiveness, while achieving high productivity, are underscored by a reduction in state funding and the application of performance-based funding. These funding and efficiency measures serve to steer higher education towards the needs of the market, through inducing sensitivity to the requirements of the national economy and the regional needs of business and industry. Funding from the state needs to be supplemented by third stream income, from private donors, national research councils, business and industry.

Institutional managers at UWC are ever-mindful of the need to demonstrate accountability to the Evaluative State, by ensuring that the university deliver on key goals and priorities. They are acutely aware of the need to secure the university's financial stability through demonstrating accountability and achieving successful performance in areas of national priority. Not only is accountability a matter of survival but in the context of UWC's transition, it has become a matter of institutional pride to demonstrate the university's shift from HBU to excellence and competitiveness.

The work of university managers is therefore directed at reporting to the Evaluative State the success UWC has achieved in terms of its performance in relation to national targets. In this regard, the Evaluative State has succeeded in causing the institution to change its behaviour and reconfigure its mission, as an Engaged University, to achieve accountability. UWC as an Engaged University pledges to be guided by the goals of global competitiveness, excellence, efficiency and sustainability and the needs of the national economy in priority areas.

The Evaluative State's framework of goals and targets, and its system of evaluation against performance indicators, forms the backdrop against which institutions are expected to be productive, and creates the conditions for the rise of managerialism (Deem, 1998 and 2001; and Deem & Brehony, 2005). Institutions require strong central leadership to create the strategies and circumstances required to attract funding, to achieve goals and targets, and to produce the teaching and research outputs expected by the state (Teichler, 1994).

The study of UWC demonstrates that academics and managers are driven by contradictory goals and ambitions. The work of academics with their students focuses on the needs of equity in access and success, and prioritises the achievement of the development goals of social justice and democratisation. UWC's leadership, on the other hand, is driven by external pressure from the Evaluative State and works on improving institutional accountability and achieving greater efficiency. High achievement and performance in teaching and research dominates institutional managers' priorities, and signals the rise of a culture of performativity (Peters, 1992) at UWC, one which counteracts academics' efforts to improve student performance.

UWC has improved its position in relation to other universities, increasing its competitiveness nationally and even globally. Its national rankings have improved in the areas of third stream income as a percentage of total income, research publications by staff, postgraduate enrolments, and staff ratings and doctoral qualifications. UWC has also directed change in enrolment patterns to address the high skills requirements of science and technology. However, it has been less successful in its attempts to improve teaching output through increasing graduate success, completion and pass rates.

At UWC, student success, undergraduate completion rates and first-year pass rates lag behind those of other institutions. It remains one of only two HBUs still in existence and its black students constitute 95% of enrolment. UWC's poor performance in terms of graduate success must alert the institution to possible opportunity costs related to pursuing goals related to research output and privatisation of income. Further, the university's poor record in critical areas of student performance must alert it to the necessity of shifting its focus and resources to the needs of the majority of South Africa's population and to the goals of equity of access and success.

Managerial responses to the demands of the Evaluative State have eclipsed responsiveness to the demands of social justice and democracy, and UWC faces the dangers of completely abandoning aspects of the mission upon which its reputation was built, namely dedication to achieving access and equity and serving the marginalised communities from which its students come.

In the past, the fear was that poor leadership, financial instability and inefficiency would signal the death of HBUs like UWC. Today, the fear is that pursuing entrepreneurialism, efficiency and competitiveness will lead to the demise of the principles HBUs proudly struggled to assert.

### **7.8. Analysis: The failure of the Evaluative State in South Africa**

While the ideas of the Evaluative State had their roots in neo-liberalism and globalisation, the interesting feature of South Africa's adoption of this organisational rationality was its interface with a set of goals and priorities more in line with a crucial principle of the developmental state, namely that education and the acquisition of middle- and high-level skills is the only way for the country's poor to access better jobs and a route out of poverty.

The belief that *the skills deficit amongst the black population is the primary cause of extensive poverty* and hence that *education is the most important determinant of level of earnings and status in the labour market* (Buhlungu et al, 2007) lies at the heart of education reform in the post-apartheid era and is a basic principle driving the state's goals with regard to education reform.

This commitment to reform which benefits the poor and marginalised characterises the operations of the Evaluative State in higher education in South Africa. Singh (2006) recognised that the evaluation system adopted by the state bore strong hallmarks of a neo-liberal, conservative framework, with its focus on efficiency and productivity. Yet Singh and Lange (2006), both senior officers at the HEQC, argued that the progressive ends desired by the state outweighed the conservative means adopted, and suggested strongly that *efficiency can also be invoked to enhance equity and redress gains*. Lange proposed to critics of the Evaluative State that in South Africa the ends justified the means (Lange, 2006), since the presence of democratic transformation goals excused the use of bureaucratic and technicist forms of evaluation and control.

However, in South Africa, the choice of means has impacted severely upon the achievement of the desired ends. The misguided choice of a quality assurance system that promoted efficiency and accountability has led to the most negative consequences, the most central being the failure of the higher education system to improve the success, throughput, retention and completion rates of poor, black students in South Africa.

The achievement of equity of outcomes is a primary goal of higher education transformation, and broadening participation from the current rate of 15% to the desired 20% requires the inclusion of more black students, more students from poor families, and more from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. The challenge of achieving equity in the context of massification, given the condition of disadvantage of South Africa's majority, is thus a huge one, and is possible only through implementing strategies which address the educational and economic deprivation of university students. This research has shown, through highlighting the work of UWC's academics, that efficiency goals counteract efforts to encourage the success of students from weak educational backgrounds, where time and the single-minded dedication of academic staff are critical elements for success.

A cursory evaluation of the non-achievement of higher education's goals over the past ten years leads to my conclusion that the Evaluative State has indeed failed South Africa. The OECD (2008) has pointed out that the critical goal of *producing the high quality human capital needed to propel and sustain the social and economic development of South Africa* remains far out of reach of the higher education system. In various places in its report, the OECD argues for the need for reflection and examination, on the ways in which exogenous and internal factors affect student performance, on the best strategies for dealing with the poor academic preparation of students (OECD, 2008: 362), and on the ways in which the views and needs of academics and students can be incorporated into quality assurance processes (2008: 353).

My study has shown that UWC's efforts to achieve fundamental development goals have been thwarted by the application of the Evaluative State's steering tools and mechanisms. Efficiency has worked against transformation, output evaluation has worked against quality improvement, and UWC academics' work with black and poorly-prepared students has been obstructed and not encouraged by the state's funding framework.

UWC academics' notion of quality as transformation and as adding value, their patient work in '*mopping up*' the disasters of the poor schooling system, and their success in building excellence through dedicating time and personal effort to improving student performance have not been adequately commended and acknowledged by the Evaluative State. .

Instead, the state's application of performance indicators that prioritise pass rates and completion rates distracts academics and ironically works against their achievement of the goals related to graduate success that these measures are meant to promote. Statistics on enrolments and graduations, in terms of race, show that black students in South African universities experience the lowest levels of success, and white students the highest. In 2007, black students comprised 63% of enrolments, but only 57% of graduates, while white students comprised 24% of enrolments, but 30% of graduates (FINWEEK, 2010).

The state's assumptions of the links between efficiency and student success, in the context of the huge challenges facing South Africa's black students, are thus fundamentally flawed and impact powerfully on the achievement of critical national priorities, most notably on the achievement of equity in human capital development in South Africa.

The inability to achieve fundamental transformation goals is essentially a failure of the Evaluative State and is related to the assumptions it makes about the link between human capital development, efficiency and the achievement of equity in South Africa. The new funding framework rewards output achievement against external benchmarks, such as completion and retention rates, while failing to recognise the input needs of equity, access and success of South Africa's majority population.

## **7.9. Recommendations for future research**

This study has revealed a number of areas which might require further research. Firstly, the study has focused on the impact of the Evaluative State on a particular historically black university. This raises the question of whether historically white universities in South Africa have experienced similar effects in the post-apartheid era, and this is a question which is worthy of further study. Secondly, my study has suggested that UWC has just begun to enter the race towards becoming an entrepreneurial university, and more research is required to examine the impact of that particular transition on academic life.

Thirdly, a closer investigation is required into the changing nature of academic work, as academics are required to shoulder greater responsibilities than was traditionally expected. This study has begun that examination by exploring the notion of encroachment, and this initial exploration has suggested that more in-depth work needs to be done in this area.

### **7.10. Suggestions**

This study's central findings around quality seem to suggest that a number of subtle changes in policy approaches are required in relation to both institutions and the academics within them. Firstly, a greater recognition of context is required by policy makers and those in state agencies, like the HEQC, who are tasked with implementation. Recognising context involves the realisation that the same quality judgments should not be applied across the higher education sector, but that a more mediated response and approach to institutions is required, which takes account of context, history and what the institution is trying to achieve.

Secondly, the presence of growing disappointment amongst academics at UWC in the inability of the quality evaluation system to value the work they do with students, suggests that the state and its agencies need to recognize that multiple views of quality do exist within institutions. Further, that multiple views of how quality ought to be improved also exist, and, importantly, should be accommodated and explicitly recognized by evaluation agencies, especially during transitional phases. Understanding academics' perceptions of quality and its improvement might serve to inform new evaluation measures and improve implementation strategies.

Thirdly, this study has also shown that the input needs of systemic transformation have been ignored at great cost. Further, that producing the human capital needs required to compete in the global economy requires far greater strategic investment of resources by the state into areas and strategies that have been shown to contribute to improving the chances of success of poor and black students.

The South African state has adopted an evaluation framework that is not context-bound, that is rigid and inflexible in relation to evaluation and reward. In this country, such a system will defeat the ends and goals of higher education transformation, and will not achieve progressive goals associated with democratisation, social justice, redress and equity.

## 7. 11. Concluding words

I suggest that the Evaluative State has indeed failed South Africa, primarily because it is insensitive to the needs and values of the people who are most central to its success, the academics and their students.

The Evaluative State sets the goals and targets and expects institutions to devise the strategies to achieve success. The state retains the power over the determination of systemic goals, but creates and fuels the illusion that power is in the hands of managers and academics, to choose the path and future direction of higher education institutions. In the current context and given its reliance on state funding, UWC has little choice but to comply and respond positively to the demands of the Evaluative State. However, the seeds of dissent have once again been planted by the state through its intransigence and unwillingness to recognise the contribution UWC makes to social transformation through its work with black and poor students.

As long as institutional pride remains invested in notching up achievements that will earn rewards from the Evaluative State, the voices of protest at UWC will remain muted. Only when, as an institution, UWC recognises that its past mission of service to the poor, disadvantaged and oppressed is still relevant today, and is being enacted powerfully in its classrooms and corridors, will it be ideologically empowered to challenge the Evaluative State's neo-liberal agenda for change.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: Interview protocol for Academics

#### **Purpose of HE and role of academics in universities**

In your view, what ought to be the main aim or purpose of Higher Education?

What is the main role/purpose of an academic in a university in your view?

#### **What is quality in higher education?**

When we talk of trying to improve quality in higher education, what is it that we should be trying to improve?

Has quality in the university improved, stayed the same or declined during your time here?

What makes it easy or difficult to achieve quality in this university?

What would you regard as a good outcome of your work with students

#### **Definitions of quality**

Some people talk about quality in the following ways. Which would be most in line with your thinking?

**Excellence:** surpassing a minimum set of standards

**Value for money:** a focus on efficiency and effectiveness, measuring outputs against inputs

**Fitness for purpose:** relates quality to a purpose or mission, defined by the provider, or to a particular programme's aims and learning outcomes.

**Fitness of purpose:** relates quality to a purpose defined elsewhere, or to external aims and objectives

**Transformation:** education is about doing something to the students, a qualitative change results

What would you trace your beliefs about Quality back to? Where do your beliefs about quality come from?

#### **Changing university environment**

What changes in the university environment have you experienced over the past 5 years or so that have impacted your work most?

## **Quality assurance activity**

### **For the record: Interviewee's QA activity in faculty**

Are you involved in any Quality Assurance activity in the faculty? Have you always done this work?

What do you see as the main reasons for the increase in activity around quality assurance in recent years?

What has been your response to this increased activity around QA – how would you describe your reaction to this increased QA activity?

How would you say this increase in QA activity has impacted your work most?

Do others in your faculty share your attitude? What has their reaction been, is there a range of reactions?

### **Responses to quality policy**

What was your reaction to news of the HEQC audit?

What outcome are you expecting or hoping for from the HEQC audit?

Were you involved in the preparation of the self-evaluation report and did you find any value in the preparation process?

Have you read the self-evaluation report and how do you feel about its content?

### **Role of the state**

What changes, if any, have you noticed in the relationship between the state through the DOE and higher education over the years?

## **APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL for Institutional Managers**

### **Purpose of HE and role of academics in universities**

1. In your view, what ought to be the main aim or purpose of Higher Education?
2. What is the main role/purpose of an academic in a university in your view?

### **What is quality in higher education?**

3. When we talk of trying to improve quality in higher education, what is it that we should be trying to improve?
4. How would you assess the quality of an institution? What kinds of things would you focus on?
5. Has quality in the university improved, stayed the same or declined during your time here?
6. What makes it easy or difficult to achieve quality in this university?

### **Definitions of quality**

7. Some people talk about quality in the following ways. Which would be most in line with your thinking?

**Excellence:** surpassing a minimum set of standards

**Value for money:** a focus on efficiency and effectiveness, measuring outputs against inputs

**Fitness for purpose:** relates quality to a purpose or mission, defined by the provider, or to a particular programme's aims and learning outcomes.

**Fitness of purpose:** relates quality to a purpose defined elsewhere, or to external aims and objectives

**Transformation:** education is about doing something to the students, a qualitative change results

8. What would you trace your beliefs about Quality back to? Where do your beliefs about quality come from?

### **Responses to quality policy**

9. What was your reaction when you heard that UWC would be going through and HEQC audit in 2007?
10. What outcome were you expecting or hoping for?
11. How do you feel about the HEQC's Audit report, now that you've seen it?

### **Role of the state**

12. What changes, if any, have you noticed in the relationship between the state through the DOE and UWC over the years?
13. What has been the impact of these changes on academics and on their working lives?

Last amended: for Rector's interview. 2 July 2008

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