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Institutional audits have become part of higher education culture in South Africa since the first audits were conducted in 2004.

As Cape Peninsula University of Technology our institutional audit was delayed as was the case with other merged institutions.

However, the long awaited moment has finally arrived as the institutional audit takes place from 17 to 22 October 2010.

Institutional Audit

National system on quality management

One of the key pillars supporting the new structure of a transforming higher education in South Africa is Quality Management. The Council on Higher Education (CHE) was created specifically to take on the responsibility of ensuring quality in Higher Education Institutions. This task is executed by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) established in 1997.



The Vice-Chancellor,
Professor Vuyisa
Mazwi-Tanga

The purpose and impact of institutional audits is strongly debated (as will be the case with anything of importance) by South African academics and elsewhere.

The concern is that the intervention by an outside body like the audit panel under auspices of the HEQC is a threat to institutional autonomy, a hallowed principle in academia.

There is also criticism of the methodology used in the audits. The complaint is that they tend to be mechanistic, encourage compliance and actually undermine the very search for quality they claim to be enhancing or searching for.

A strong argument for the execution of institutional audits is that they help increase accountability of institutions to all stakeholders including parents, students, Government and the public generally.

The central purpose, the argument continues, is the promotion and improvement of quality in higher education. The emphasis on quality is of particular importance in the days of global competitiveness for students and resources.

Preparation for the institutional audit

Preparing for this event has been a hard and long journey. The Quality Management Directorate, under the aegis of DVC: Academic, has been the kingpin in the arduous work of taking everyone through the paces of preparing for an audit visit.

Four events in 2008 signaled the intensification of getting the CPUT community ready. A launch, with a *vuvuzela* call by the VC, was an official announcement about the audit. At the same time a newsletter the *Qan* which has since then been a publication that carries the Institutional audit news to the CPUT community was launched.

Another milestone in the preparation process was the workshop in which CPUT was introduced into the theory and practice of self-evaluation. This workshop was facilitated by Prof. Jan Botha of Stellenbosch who put staff through an ADRI (Approach, Deployment, Results, Improvement) approach to self-evaluation. Finally, Working Groups aligned to the HEQC audit criteria were created.

The bulk of 2009 has mainly been devoted to integrating the information collected and validating claims submitted by the Working Groups and beginning to work on the rudiments of an institutional audit report.

An important activity that has helped to infuse reflective practices to the level of ordinary staff members has been reviews of programmes and of strategic units. In these reviews practitioners are expected to reflect on the quality of their work and the degree to which their activities are aligned to the institutional and strategic unit plans.

Of even greater importance for this exercise is the Quality Improvement Plan that has to follow each self-evaluation report thus completing the

continuous improvement cycle.

What is in it for the student, staff and the University?

Skeptics argue that institutional audits are a lot of hype and hot air that simply increase the workload of staff. This is a case of the half-empty or half-full jar. For some the audits can be an opportunity for profound growth for all.

Students

Though not directly involved, students are beneficiaries of being in systems that are continuously being improved. In the end they receive quality education.

Staff

Reflective practice is a life skill that can only improve an individual staff member's life. Through self-evaluation practitioners have an opportunity to critique what they are about and stand to add value to their work. Rewards are multiple. They include recognition as well as the attainment of the high level of self-actualisation.

Institution

For CPUT the institutional audit is a time for the CPUT community to take stock of how far they have travelled towards creating a unique institution. It is also a special moment when the university has to prove to itself and the public as well as the Department of Higher Education and Training the extent it is managing to live up to its Vision and Mission.

Finally

And so this is my final exhortation to CPUT staff and students:

*Let us together gird our loins and put our
shoulders to the wheel for a final push
Bhinqelani phezulu 'nto zakuthi; nenjenje,
nenjenje, nenjenjeya!!!!*

*Laat ons almal lendene omgord en slaan
ons hande aan die ploeg.*

'Have your say'...

Send your key questions and comments on the topic of *Institutional Audits* to news@cput.ac.za