

3.2 Quality Management at UWS

1. The emerging quality¹ agenda in higher education

Seven interlocked pressures have led UWS, like many Australian & overseas universities, to give much closer attention over recent years to effective Quality Management:

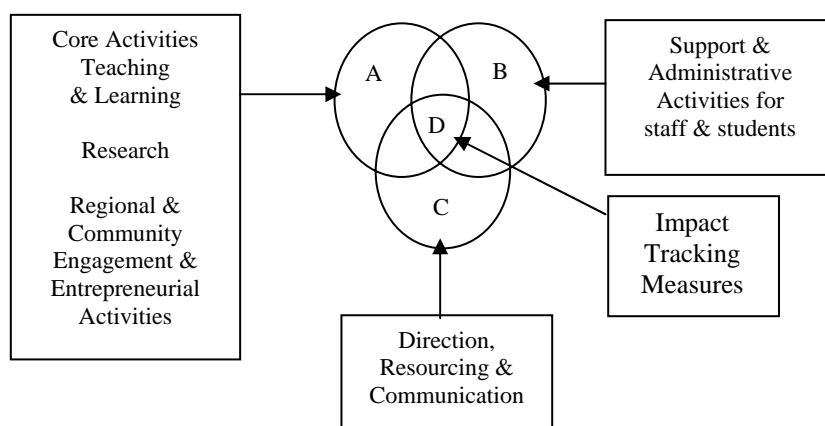
- Changed funding;
- Increased competition (locally and internationally);
- A growing consumer rights movement;
- Calls for greater public accountability and increased data in the public arena;
- Changing legislation including amendments to its own Act and meeting the requirements of new Acts like the Educational Services for Overseas Students Bill and the HE Support Bill 2003;
- Introduction of Australian University Quality Agency Audits;
- Rapid developments in Information Technology.

2. A comprehensive and effective approach to quality management at UWS

An effective response to this emerging quality agenda focuses on achieving mutual reinforcement between the activities of the whole organisation. That is, as Diagram One indicates, we need to optimise the combined effect of the following on the quality of the outcomes (D) we achieve for our students, clients, professional partners & other stakeholders:

- A. The University's core activities of Learning & Teaching; Research & Scholarship; Regional & Community Engagement and its Entrepreneurial Activities;
- B. Its Support and Administrative activities for both staff and students;
- C. Its Direction-setting, Governance and Resourcing processes.

**Diagram One
Mutual Reinforcement between UWS Activities**



¹ A fitness for purpose definition of 'quality' is being used. The institution's purpose is seen in its mission and its key development priorities are seen in its vision & strategic plan. Under a fitness for purpose definition, a learning program or activity is of high quality if it is demonstrably relevant, desirable and feasible for those intended to benefit from it. 'Quality' is also about adding value to individual, local and national capability.

The UWS Quality Management System seeks to ensure that, in the areas outlined in Diagram, that the University puts into practice international good practice on how:

- a. Proposals for quality enhancement or innovation in universities can best be developed, tested and given priority;
- b. The quality of all existing and new activities is best tracked during delivery and how prompt and wise attention to emerging areas for improvement can be assured;
- c. Appropriate implementation support can most effectively be provided to ensure that desired quality improvements and services are successfully implemented;
- d. To get most value from Review and Strategic Planning processes.

3. Using the University's AUQA audit as a lever for institutional improvement at UWS

The following excerpt from the AUQA Audit Manual provides a concise summary of the main aims of the process:

"Each auditee should have systems that are relevant to its own objectives and character, so the actual procedures used and the way they are implemented vary between institutions and agencies. Amid this variety AUQA's anchor point for drawing conclusions on quality is always the objectives of the auditee (as seen in its mission, strategic plans, objectives, improvement priorities), together with any explicit or implicit external objectives, and the effectiveness of the auditee's systems in achieving those objectives.

In order to check its own policies, procedures and practices, to learn whether it is achieving its objectives and to determine how to improve its performance, an institution or agency must have in place appropriate measures and indicators of both quantitative and qualitative form. Measurements give information about individual items but also about processes.

AUQA emphasises process-based audit, with outcomes providing information on the effectiveness of the processes.. Although processes are more than documentation, institutional practice and knowledge must be sufficiently formalised that it does not reside solely in the minds of individuals.. the audit covers not merely what the auditee is doing (the processes) but the consequences of what it is doing (the outcomes). The audit is also concerned with the auditee's self-monitoring to identify the need for and consequences of doing things differently" (AUQA Manual Ch1 pgs 12-13)

The approach being adopted to prepare UWS for its 2006 AUQA audit is that identified as having been most productive for the many universities which have already undergone this process both in Australia and overseas. The self-assessment phase is given focus by the use of a set of key quality management benchmarks identified from what has received most attention in all AUQA audits to date. These benchmarks are organised around the elements identified in Diagram One. Key areas for improvement at UWS are currently being identified and addressed in the areas of assessment, data integrity, the implementation of the University's key strategic plans, offshore Quality Assurance and complaints' management. Other areas for improvement in the UWS Quality Management system will emerge as further self-assessment against the AUQA benchmarks unfolds, starting with a session on this issue at the 2004 Senior Managers Retreat. A trial audit will be used to validate the University's self-assessment document and a website will invite staff to review its authenticity from their perspective.

Previous experience has shown that, if well handled, the process of identifying key areas for improvement against the AUQA benchmarks and knowing that these must be addressed effectively prior to audit means that the whole process can be used as a lever for achieving those internal improvements which are necessary to keep the University well-positioned in the new operating environment outlined at the outset of this briefing paper.

4. Key quality management ‘hot spots’ in higher education, nationally and internationally

We now know through our work on quality management in the higher education systems of Scandinavia, the U.S., Europe, New Zealand and South Africa over the past three years and from the HE audits completed to date in Australia that the following areas are ‘hot spots’ for attention as a quality management system is developed and refined:

- All staff must understand what key quality concepts mean in practical terms and be clear on their role in the overall quality management system of the University;
- It is essential to put in place effective tracking and improvement systems which cover all the areas in Diagram One and to ensure that the quantitative and qualitative data generated are valid, accurate and produced in a timely and consolidated fashion;
- The key areas for improvement which emerge from these tracking systems need to be addressed promptly and wisely. This requires the development of a network of quality management teams which operate in partnership across Colleges and Divisions. It also requires the effective use of external networks with partner universities to identify high quality improvement solutions;
- In the area of learning and teaching the following require particularly close attention:
 - Quality Assurance for student assessment;
 - Effective management of student expectations
 - Quality Assurance for international students studying onshore and offshore;
- Ensuring that the University’s key strategic directions and approach to quality management are not only relevant, desirable, feasible and widely understood but that they are effectively implemented;
- Staff quality, including succession planning for the anticipated exit of a large number of ‘baby boomers’.

5. Achieving multiple pay-offs

The overall intention is to ensure that there are multiple pay-offs from each planning and quality activity undertaken. For example, ensuring that the University’s key strategic directions are successfully implemented not only has clear benefits for UWS students and other stakeholders but provides effective case material for its AUQA audit. Similarly by ensuring that the University puts in place a robust tracking and improvement system means that the data generated can not only be used to prove the quality of what is being achieved as part of its Annual Institutional Assessment Framework negotiations with DEST but the same data can be used to identify key, evidence-based areas for improvement. Furthermore, if subsequent tracking shows these quality improvement projects have been successfully addressed, the whole process can be cited in the University’s AUQA self-assessment document as well as become the basis for performance-based funding.

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