Effective QA Processes for Diversity, Development and Sustainability

Quality Assurance in a Regional University: Follow-Up, Feedback and Development
The Case of The University of the West Indies

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Introduction

The University of the West Indies

- Regional
- Challenge of resources, vulnerability
- Campuses in Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Open Campus
- Quality Assurance Unit: decentralized cross-campus entity
- Supports the development and sustainability of quality assurance processes
- Facilitator of common standards while safeguarding diversity and regionality
Facilitating Development and Regionality

The Review Process as Change Agent

- All academic programmes/disciplines have been reviewed at least once.
- Curriculum reform a specific outcome of reviews
- Outcomes of curriculum reform include:
  - Reinstitution of cross faculty meetings
  - Harmonisation of programmes to reflect regional and global imperatives
  - Maintenance of regional standard across campuses
Facilitating Development and Regionality (cont’d)

Staff and Student Engagement:

- Academic staff the main drivers of curriculum renewal
- Students surveyed and interviewed as part of the review process
- Students benefit from curriculum renewal
- Knowledge about the review process among students not widespread
- More needs to be done to further embed a quality culture throughout the institution
The UWI System of Programme Review

- Review Team: senior academic from another UWI campus
- Layering knowledge and understanding of quality assurance processes and procedures
- Tangible evidence of the nature of the institutional impact of programme review
- Academic Quality Assurance Committee (AQAC)
  - Indicative of on-going measures to ensure effectiveness and sustainability of UWI quality assurance process
  - Responsive to specific campus priorities
The UWI System of Programme Review

cont’d

Post-Review Follow-up Reflects

- Change in institutional behaviour and organisation
- Increasing formalisation of UWI quality assurance processes
- Concern to promote increased collaboration
- Effectiveness of quality assurance processes
- **Outcomes**: improvement in the teaching and learning environment; evidence of the effectiveness of programme review
- Across all campuses the issue of **resources** is being addressed
Feedback From Internal Stakeholders About Programme Review

Findings of a 2007 survey

- Response rates not always as high as desired
- Might be indicative of some degree of passivity or resistance
Usefulness of Programme Reviews

- Large majority of respondents thought the purpose of programme review was being fulfilled.
  - “A meaningful exercise without which faculty would not undertake a full evaluation of their programmes.”
  - “...extremely necessary and extremely beneficial…”
  - “The exercise is a good one, even if it is to provide a “mirror” for critically viewing the department’s work”.
  - “Exercise well worth the effort”
  - “…very important…”
Benefits and Positive Outcomes of Programme Review

- “Road Map” for strategy implementation
- Encouragement of personal review of pedagogical approaches
- Improvement of service delivery and exchange of ideas with academics from diverse environments
- Recognition of the importance of fieldwork/new technology
- Curriculum review/critical examination of curriculum
- Staff motivated to keep good records and adhere to best practices
- Justification for needed resources
- Increased staffing
- Opportunity for introspection, recognition of constraints and achievements, and objective assessment
Least Helpful Outcomes

- Lack of infrastructural and administrative support for the implementation of recommendations
- No funding provided to implement recommendations
- Difficulty accessing data to better understand trends
- Lack of follow-up of recommendations of review teams
Recommendations for Improving Programme Reviews

- Better access to statistics
- Greater student participation
- Better communication with the QAU
- Research Assistant to assist with data collection
- Increased time for feedback at Exit Meeting
- More thorough briefing of assessors about The UWI system to prevent erroneous statements
- Improved post-review follow-up
Recommendations for Improving Programme Reviews (cont’d)

- Inclusion of the Bursary in the review process
- Require reviewers to read more about rules and faculty regulations
- Perception of the impact of the quality assurance review process would be enhanced by attention to greater dissemination of information about tangible outcomes of programme review.
The Self-Study Exercise of the QAU in 2010

*Mission, Objectives, Governance and Management*

- The Unit is well integrated into the fabric of UWI and the scope and impact of its work expanding
- The self study provides an opportunity to:
  - Recraft mission and objectives
  - Develop an operational plan to reflect current context and realities
  - Explore greater use of technology as a tool for more effective governance and management
The Self-Study Exercise of the QAU in 2010 (cont’d)

**Delivery and Management of Activities**

- Ensure greater objectivity and transparency of the review process by:
  - More careful scrutiny of team leaders
  - Establishing a database of reviewers from which to select team members

- Increase student involvement by:
  - Requiring students to prepare their own reports
  - Conducting independently facilitated focus groups
  - Providing students with feedback on review findings
The Self-Study Exercise of the QAU in 2010 (cont’d)

*Delivery and Management of Activities* (cont’d)

- Encourage wider ownership of the self-assessment process
- Reconceptualise the QA system to encompass all administrative and managerial operations
- Introduce elements of peer review and benchmarking in quality evaluations
- Engage in more systematic research of its effectiveness by:
  - Soliciting feedback on completion of the review exercise
  - Devising strategies to elicit higher levels of staff response to surveys
  - Ensuring concerted and timely action on survey findings
  - Communicating with stakeholders on action taken
The Self-Study Exercise of the QAU in 2010 (cont’d)

**Delivery and Management of Activities** (cont’d)

- Establish international collaborative links as opportunities for:
  - Benchmarking
  - Sharing good practice
  - Staff exchanges
  - Capacity building

- Increase awareness of role and function of QAU
Conclusion

- Despite financial challenges, an adequately resourced teaching and learning environment remains a priority for UWI.
- The system of academic quality assurance is integral to this process.
- The review process is seen by staff to be valuable.
- The post review phase needs strengthening.
- The QAU’s self study identifies:
  - Its importance in helping to preserve the regionality of UWI and therefore its diversity
  - Clear guideposts for its development and the sustainability of the QA process