

QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY

1. POLICY PARTICULARS

DATE OF APPROVAL BY QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE: 13 May 2003

DATE OF APPROVAL BY SENATE: 6 June 2003

DATE OF APPROVAL BY COUNCIL: 26 June 2003

COMMENCEMENT

DATE: 1 July 2003

REVISION HISTORY: 1st revision 1 January 2005

REVIEW DATE: Every three years – 2nd revision due in 2007

POLICY LEVEL: All University structures, staff and students

RESPONSIBILITY [Person/Division/Committee accountable for]:

- IMPLEMENTATION & MONITORING: Director, Academic Planning and Quality Assurance; and the Quality Assurance Committee
- REVIEW AND REVISION: Quality Assurance Committee

REPORTING STRUCTURE: Director, Academic Planning and Quality Assurance → Vice-Chancellor → Quality Assurance Committee → Senate → Council

2. POLICY STATEMENT

2.1 POLICY DECLARATION:

Rhodes University is committed to striving for excellence and assuring quality in all its activities¹. This policy aims to describe the quality assurance system and

¹ Rhodes University's vision is to be an outstanding internationally-respected academic institution... committed to rigorous scholarship...promoting excellence and innovation in teaching and learning...attracting and retaining staff of the highest calibre...promoting excellence in research and other creative endeavours...striving for excellence and promoting quality assurance in all its activities. (extracts from the University's Vision and Mission Statement, June 2000)

strategies in place at Rhodes in order to achieve high quality, and to monitor the effectiveness thereof.

2.2 POLICY OBJECTIVES:

To ensure that:

- All members of the University community are aware of and support the institution's approach to quality
- An appropriate quality assurance system (a set of quality assurance policies, procedures and performance indicators) is in place to realise the vision and mission of the University
- Structures are in place to monitor and review the effectiveness of such policies
- The University's quality assurance system is coordinated, developmentally oriented, and is characterized by minimum bureaucracy and maximum effectiveness.

2.3 DEFINITIONS:

Quality: Rhodes University interprets quality first and foremost as 'fitness for purpose', the purpose being summarised in the University's vision and mission statement². In assuring quality, the University aims to balance the notions of excellence, efficiency and service provision.

Quality Assurance: Quality Assurance is best described as 'making promises and providing evidence of keeping them'. Quality Assurance refers to the process of evaluating/assessing the extent to which the individual/ unit/ institution is delivering on its promises.

²

Rhodes University's vision is to be an outstanding internationally-respected academic institution which proudly affirms its African identity and which is committed to democratic ideals, academic freedom, rigorous scholarship, sound moral values and social responsibility.

In pursuit of its vision the University will strive to produce outstanding internationally-accredited graduates who are innovative, analytical, articulate, balanced and adaptable, with a life-long love of learning; and to strive, through teaching, research and community service, to contribute to the advancement of international scholarship and the development of the Eastern Cape and Southern Africa. (*RU Vision and Mission Statement, June 2000*)

3. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 THE STRATEGIES, ACTIONS AND PROCESSES BY WHICH THE OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY WILL BE ACHIEVED:

3.1.1 Quality Assurance Structure in Place to Achieve Stated Objectives

The **Director of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance**, reporting directly to the Vice-Chancellor, is the most senior quality manager. S/he is a member of the Academic Planning and Staffing Committee, the Teaching and Learning Committee, the Staff Development Committee, the Senior Management Committee, and is in attendance at Senate and Council meetings. The Academic Planning and Quality Assurance Office provides a facilitatory service to staff and students in order to assist the University in determining its strategic direction and in achieving its mission and goals. Through the Academic Planning and Quality Assurance Office, the Vice-Chancellorate submits annually revised three-year rolling plans to the Department of Education, and reports to the Higher Education Quality Committee on quality assurance structures and systems.

A joint Senate and Council committee, the **Quality Assurance Committee**, is responsible for quality assurance at Rhodes University. The Committee is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, and includes the Dean or representative from each of the six faculties, the Registrar, Dean of Research, Chair of the Student Services Council, one SRC representative, one Council member, four Senate representatives, two staff union representatives, the Human Resources Development Manager, the Director of Academic Development and the Director of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance.

The Committee meets at least four times per annum and is tasked with

- Ensuring the University formulates and adheres to policies in respect of quality assurance, and
- Ensuring that the University is prepared to face institutional audits and programme accreditation.

Whilst the Quality Assurance Committee is charged with ensuring appropriate policies are developed and implemented, its role is to advise Senate and Council on such activities rather than direct them.

A Senate Committee, the **Teaching and Learning Committee**, is focused on improvement, promoting teaching excellence, and the formulation of policy to achieve teaching excellence. Specifically, it aims to

- advise the Senate on the formulation and implementation of University policy for effective teaching and learning;
- facilitate the development of an appropriate total environment for teaching and learning;

- promote greater understanding within the University of learning processes;
- assess, on an ongoing basis, the effectiveness of policies, programmes and systems relating to teaching and learning and to recommend improvements; and
- monitor the quality of facilities and technology provided by the University for teaching and learning and to motivate new developments where necessary.

The major focus of the Teaching and Learning Committee is *development* while that of the Quality Assurance Committee is *accountability*.

A **Staff Development Committee** was established in 2001 and aims to assist the University in realizing its objectives through promoting and ensuring excellence in staff development. It is responsible for

- advising Senate and Council on the formulation and implementation of policy, systems and programmes for effective staff development;
- ensuring consistency in the design, implementation and evaluation of the skills development systems, procedures and programmes
- raising awareness of the importance and need for effective staff development
- assisting in the identification of development priorities
- ensuring the provision of quality, effective training and development programmes
- facilitating the development of an appropriate total environment for staff development
- linking skills development and employment equity initiatives particularly in terms of the need to redress past imbalances
- ensuring that the requirements of the Skills Development Act and Skills Development Levies Act are met.

The **Student Services Council**, comprising 50% students, is charged with assuring quality in the area of student life. The Council proposes policy in areas such as sports administration, student societies, the residence system and counselling and health services, and deals with any problems which arise. Both the Student Services Council and the Students' Representative Council have direct access to management, including the Vice-Chancellor, at any time in order to deal with urgent matters. In addition, students are represented on all major University committees.

The **Dean of Research's office** is tasked with formulating policy and assuring quality in research and postgraduate matters. These include training, development and monitoring of staff and postgraduate students, administration, funding and resource allocation, and the management of associated research institutes. The productivity and quality of research is regularly monitored and the Dean of Research publishes an annual research report detailing activities, publications, statistics, etc of all university related research activities. A **Higher Degrees Guide** provides a ready reference for postgraduate students and their supervisors. This booklet sets out the procedures which must be followed by higher degree candidates in that it brings together the University rules, the procedures for examination of theses, and various Senate requirements (such as the guidelines for the supervision of higher degrees).

In addition, the **Academic Development Centre** contributes to the assurance of quality by supporting staff in meeting the demands of teaching at a Southern African university with international standards. It does this by running an on-going staff development programme and by providing assistance with curriculum development, assessment and evaluation.

Review committees, representing all University stakeholders, conduct **academic and administrative reviews** every three to five years, where departments/divisions present their future plans and describe their quality assurance policies and procedures. These reviews aim to

- plan at the departmental level - to consider the range of courses offered and their long term viability as well as to give departmental staff and the wider University community an opportunity to be involved in academic planning;
- review the existing use of resources in academic departments and divisions;
- look for synergies at departmental/divisional level, not simply to economise but in order to free up resources for new initiatives;
- appraise and encourage research;
- identify and develop community service activities;
- consider progress made in relation to previous review recommendations;
- highlight areas of good practice;
- ensure university activities fit in with the institutional strategic plan;
- view departments/divisions in their institutional as well as national and international contexts;
- identify quality assurance procedures and ensure that these are consistent with the quality assurance policies covering the University as a whole;
- consider feedback from departments and divisions on the review process.

Ad hoc reviews are undertaken where necessary, usually where a department experiences a major change (such as a significant drop or increase in student numbers) outside of the normal review process.

3.1.2 University Quality Assurance Philosophies and Strategies

Quality Assurance at Rhodes is viewed as a **shared responsibility** in that it is both centralised and decentralised. Whilst the Vice-Chancellor and senior management play a major role in ‘driving’ the University’s quality assurance system, all members of the Rhodes Community are expected to strive for high quality in their activities.

An ethos of individual pride and responsibility is encouraged in that responsibility for defining the quality of teaching and courses rests with individual lecturers. Heads of departments are responsible for ensuring that policy requirements are met within their own departments.

Rhodes University sees quality assurance as a **developmental process** which does not have an endpoint. The focus is on **improvement**, where good practice is identified and shared, and the emphasis in university policies is on improving the status quo rather than censuring areas of weakness.

Quality Assurance and Academic Planning are combined wherever possible in order to best utilise limited resources and maintain a holistic view.

The University's assessment system is based on self-evaluation and peer review.

Individuals/departments are encouraged to set their own targets (within the broader mission of the University) against which they are evaluated by internal and external peers. In addition, the principle of 'self-reflective practice' is built into all recent University policies.

Appropriate Performance Indicators are provided annually in a widely distributed 'Digest of Statistics' and are used to indicate and monitor performance in relation to the University's mission as well as provide a central source of essential information for those responsible for the planning and management of the University.

A **Head of Department's Guide** is continuously revised and published annually as a resource for all heads of departments. It provides information on the responsibilities of headship, on recent developments in higher education and at Rhodes, as well as on the various administrative divisions and services offered at the University.

Frequent communication is ensured by keeping staff and students fully informed of all quality assurance initiatives and developments via the University website, the Academic Planning and Quality Assurance Office, the internal newsletter Rhodos, the Heads of Departments' Guide and reports to Faculties, Senate and Council. Input from as wide a range of people as possible is sought in the development of new policies, the introduction of new systems and the production of review reports. In addition, the following communication strategies are employed:

- The University's senior management, including the Vice-Chancellor, Vice-Principal, Registrar, Dean of Research, Dean of Students and Directors of support services, meets on a weekly basis to discuss administrative policy and management issues.
- A 'Vice-Chancellor's Forum' is included in all Senate and Faculty Board meetings whereby either the Vice-Chancellor or the Vice-Principal provide an update on internal and external developments and respond to questions from the floor.
- The Vice-Chancellor, Vice-Principal and senior management meet monthly with the Deans. This meeting is relatively informal and provides an opportunity for brainstorming, consideration of new ideas, sharing new information etc.

- The Vice-Chancellor visits all academic departments every two years, spending a full two hours in each department. These unstructured visits are intended to provide the Vice-Chancellor with the opportunity to ‘walk the factory floor’ and the members of the department the opportunity to raise issues of concern.
- An Academic Discussion Group, to which all members of Senate as well as visiting academics are invited, was initiated in 1999 to provide an informal opportunity to discuss various issues of relevance to higher education in general and Rhodes University in particular whenever the need arises. This forum promotes interaction and consideration of new ideas which can then be fed into formal committee structures.
- A Vice-Chancellor’s staff forum is held every 6 months and all staff are free to attend and ask questions.
- A University thinktank is held every two years. Executive management, Deans, the SRC President, the Chancellor and several members of Council meet over a three day period to discuss the effects of the external environment, specific internal issues, and the most appropriate strategic direction of the University.
- In recognition of the crucial role played by Heads of Departments in the strategic direction and overall success of the University, a workshop is held annually for all Heads of Departments in order to share information and to provide HoDs with the opportunity to raise issues of concern or propose strategies for meeting the challenges which lie ahead.

3.1.3 Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures

An overarching policy document, entitled the **Policy Protocol**, requires all policy proposals to conform to a standard framework. This ensures essential information is consistently provided and is available to all those affected by the policy. Essential information includes when the policy was introduced, what it aims to achieve, and who has responsibility for its implementation and review

A Policy Register, which is easily accessible and regularly updated, ensures all existing University-wide policies are recorded on a central University website.

Proposals for new academic programmes are initiated by individual departments whereafter they require faculty approval before consideration by the Academic Planning and Staffing Committee, Senate, Council and the Eastern Cape Higher Education Association before being submitted to the Department of Education, the Higher Education Quality Committee, and the South African Qualifications Authority.

Either the Vice-Chancellor or the Vice-Principal chair Selection Committees at the professorial level as well as lower levels falling in their respective areas of expertise. The chairing of Selection Committees is considered to be an important quality assurance

activity as the appointment of **excellent staff** is critical for ensuring the University meets its objectives.

Quality Assurance Policies have been developed in key areas in order to facilitate a high quality environment for teaching, learning and research. The major policies are:

- Curriculum Development and Review
- Evaluation of Teaching and Course Design
- Assessment of Student Learning
- Supervision of Postgraduate Students
- External Examining
- Plagiarism
- Short Course Management

Further policies will be introduced as considered necessary.

3.2 REVIEW PROCEDURE:

- 3.2.1 The Quality Assurance Committee reconsiders the effectiveness of the Quality Assurance Policy every three years, preferably at the first meeting of the relevant year.
- 3.2.2 The Committee's recommendation is submitted (via the Quality Assurance Committee Minutes) to Senate and Council for consideration
- 3.2.3 If revisions are recommended and approved, a copy of the revised policy is widely distributed by the Committee Secretariat, and the web version is replaced by the new policy.