

Master's thesis

Strategic management, M.S.

Policy Implementation in South African Higher Education: Governance and Quality Assurance post-1994

Anna Kristín Tumadóttir



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

University of Iceland Faculty of Business Administration

Lead supervisor: Runólfur Smári Steinþórsson

Co-supervisor: Börkur Hansen

On-site advisor: Johan Muller

May 2009

Abstract

This study looks at a national policy of quality assurance in higher education in South Africa and aims to find out how institutions respond to and affect the higher education policy process. It sets out to explore the 'gap' between policy formulation and implementation.

South African higher education is considered in the context of the transformation it has undergone since the early 1990s. A review of theory funnels down from broad concepts of new public management and governance towards policy process literature, discussing implementation in particular and modes of governance.

The discussions of South African context and the theoretical approach frame the analysis of primary data gathered through qualitative interviews with individuals in central administration, and academic development and research units, as well as deans of faculties, at two higher education institutions in South Africa, in August 2008. Respondents were selected on the basis of their roles within the institutions.

The results suggest that the concept of *policy translation* could be useful for explaining the dynamics of the proverbial 'gap' between formulation and implementation. The higher education policy process, and trends in governance, may support or inhibit policy initiatives. Traditional tensions or contradictions between internal and external mechanisms, development and accountability-oriented perspectives, and bottom-up and top-down structures, can be usefully understood as parallel processes supporting implementation and adoption of initiatives.

Ágrip

Rannsókn þessi fjallar um ríkisstefnu í gæðamálum í háskólakerfinu í Suður-Afríku og snýr að því hvernig háskólar bregðast við og hafa áhrif á stefnuferli æðri menntunar. Rannsóknin skoðar bilið milli stefnumótunar og framkvæmdar.

Háskólakerfið í Suður-Afríku er skoðað í ljósi breytinga sem hafa átt sér stað frá upphafi tíunda áratugarins. Fræðileg umræða hefst á skilgreiningu almennra lykilhugtaka líkt og nýskipan í ríkisrekstri (e. *New Public Management*) og stjórnarhættir (e. *governance*) en þrengist í stefnufræði þar sem umræðan snýst einkum um framkvæmd stefnu og mismunandi stjórnarhætti.

Umræðan um samhengið í Suður-Afríku og fræðilega nálgun myndar ramma fyrir greiningu á gögnum. Í ágúst 2008 voru eigindleg viðtöl tekin við einstaklinga í stjórnsýslu og starfsþróun sem og forseta fræðasviða í tveimur háskólum í Suður Afríku. Viðmælendur voru valdir á grundvelli hlutverka þeirra innan háskólanna.

Niðurstöður gefa til kynna að hugtakið *stefnuþýðing* gæti verið gagnlegt í að skýra það bil sem er milli stefnumótunar og framkvæmdar. Stefnuferli æðri menntunar og straumar í stjórnsýsluháttum geta stutt við eða aftrað stefnumálum. Skilja má hefðbundna togstreitu milli innri og ytri virkni, þróunar og ábyrgðar og nálganna ofan frá og neðan frá sem samhliða ferli sem styðja við framkvæmd á stefnu.

Foreword

This thesis, *Policy Implementation in South African Higher Education: Governance and Quality Assurance post-1994*, is submitted towards the completion of an M.S. degree in Strategic Management at the Faculty of Business Administration at the University of Iceland.

The thesis is 60 ECTS, completed during autumn 2008 and spring 2009. The lead supervisor is Runólfur Smári Steinþórsson, co-supervisor is Börkur Hansen, and on-site advisor is Johan Muller.

Interviews for the thesis were gathered in Cape Town and Stellenbosch in South Africa in August 2008. Part of the thesis was worked on at the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, during a one-month study grant in November 2008.

Allyson Macdonald provided special guidance throughout the duration of the project.

Table of contents

Abstract.....	2
Ágrip	3
Foreword.....	4
Table of contents	5
List of tables and figures	10
1. Introduction.....	11
2. South African context.....	16
2.1. Overview of the South African higher education sector	16
2.1.1. Legislation and policy documents.....	16
2.1.1.1. Green Paper on Higher Education	17
2.1.1.2. White Paper on Higher Education.....	17
2.1.1.3. Higher Education Act 101 of 1997.....	18
2.1.1.4. National Plan for Higher Education 2001.....	19
2.1.2. Institutions and higher education bodies	19
2.1.2.1. Institutional governance structures	19
2.1.2.2. Minister and Department of Education	20
2.1.2.3. Commission on Higher Education.....	20
2.1.2.4. Higher Education Quality Committee.....	20
2.1.3. Institutions studied.....	21
2.2. Governance	22
2.2.1. From cooperative governance to conditional autonomy?.....	23
2.3. Quality assurance in the South African higher education sector ...	25
2.3.1. HEQC directives.....	25
2.3.2. Phased implementation approach	26
2.3.3. Defining quality ... as transformation?.....	27

2.4. Earlier work on quality assurance in South Africa	27
2.4.1. Accountability and improvement in different settings	28
2.4.2. Quality assurance and democracy.....	28
2.4.3. Human resources deficiencies	29
2.4.4. A culture of quality.....	29
2.5. Summary	30
3. Theoretical approach	31
3.1. Quality assurance in higher education	32
3.1.1. Quality assurance and accountability	34
3.2. Theories of the policy process	35
3.2.1. Key concepts	35
3.2.2. Overview.....	37
3.2.3. The Stages Heuristic	39
3.2.4. The Network Approach.....	40
3.2.5. Punctuated-equilibrium theory.....	43
3.2.6. The Advocacy Coalition Framework	44
3.3. Policy implementation	45
3.3.1. Top-down.....	46
3.3.2. Bottom-up	49
3.3.3. Network theory – and other approaches	51
3.3.4. Lessons from the strategic management process	53
3.4. Analytical framework	54
3.4.1. Thoughts on quality assurance	54
3.4.2. Policy ‘translation’ in higher education	55
3.4.3. Framework of governance.....	57
3.4.4. Dynamic policy process framework.....	61
3.4.5. Analytical approach	65
4. Method	67
4.1. Philosophical underpinnings	67

4.2. Research design.....	67
4.2.1. Comparative study	67
4.2.2. Selection of institutions	68
4.2.3. Participant selection.....	68
4.2.4. Interview framework.....	69
4.2.5. Documentary analysis	70
4.2.6. Design limitations.....	70
4.3. Data collection	70
4.3.1. Preparation of interviews, planning.....	71
4.3.2. Interview technique	71
4.3.3. Interview settings.....	72
4.3.4. Transcription.....	72
4.3.5. Data collection limitations	72
4.4. Data analysis.....	73
4.4.1. Coding.....	73
4.4.2. Reduction of data – summaries of interviews.....	73
4.4.3. Themes.....	73
4.4.4. Validation	73
4.5. Ethical issues	73
4.5.1. Confidentiality.....	73
4.5.2. Permission.....	74
4.5.3. Role of the researcher.....	74
5. Results	75
5.1. Central administration.....	76
5.1.1. Policy setting – Political-administrative system	76
5.1.1.1. Policy process	76
5.1.1.2. Quality Assurance Policy.....	82
5.1.2. Institutional setting - Institutional relations	82
5.1.2.1. Policy Process	82

5.1.2.2. Quality assurance.....	86
5.1.3. Micro setting - Street level.....	95
5.1.3.1. Policy translation	95
5.1.3.2. Governance	96
5.1.4. Summary of results.....	100
5.2. Academic development and research units.....	101
5.2.1. National setting	101
5.2.2. Institutional setting	102
5.2.2.1. Policy process	102
5.2.2.2. Quality assurance.....	103
5.2.3. Micro setting.....	106
5.2.3.1. Policy process	106
5.2.3.2. Governance	106
5.2.4. Summary of results.....	107
5.3. Faculty level.....	108
5.3.1. National setting	108
5.3.1.1. Policy process	109
5.3.1.2. Quality assurance.....	110
5.3.2. Institutional setting	111
5.3.2.1. Policy process	111
5.3.2.2. Governance	113
5.3.2.3. Quality assurance.....	115
5.3.3. Micro setting.....	117
5.3.3.1. Quality assurance.....	117
5.3.4. Summary of results.....	122
6. Discussion.....	124
6.1. Policy translation in higher education	126
6.1.1. Dynamic policy process	127
6.2. Governance and quality assurance.....	128

6.3. Key issues	132
7. Conclusion	133
7.1. Notable outcomes	133
7.2. Avenues for further research...	134
References	136

List of tables and figures

Table 1: Typology of essential network characteristics	41
Table 2: Potential and type of policy change	42
Table 3: Purpose, mechanisms and spheres in quality assurance	55
Table 4: Analytical framework: The three levels of governance	58
Table 5: Characterisation of settings	59
Table 6: Action perspectives.....	59
Table 7: Governance - synthesised analytical structure.....	60
Table 8: Interview respondents	68
Table 9: Overview of findings on policy and governance	124
Figure 1: Strategic management process (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985).	53
Figure 2: A conceptual framework for analytical case narratives of higher education policy formulation and implementation studies.....	62
Figure 3: Adapted conceptual framework for analytical case narratives	64
Figure 4: Depiction of dynamic policy process based on findings	128

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the responses of two higher education institutions in South Africa to a national policy of quality assurance. The study examines overall governance structures, conceptions of the policy process, and responses to the quality assurance policy.

The proverbial ‘gap’ between policy formulation and implementation has been the subject of many a scholarly debate. It cannot be practical to generalise that all policy and implementation is in accordance with traditional theories of implementation, which traditionally are split into two broadly identifiable schools, housing the top-down and bottom-up writers. Indeed, the theories may be unable to make broad sweeping statements about policy, which occurs within specific arenas and differs between venues (Hill & Hupe, 2002, p. 43).

The top-down approach to understanding policy implementation began with the seminal work *Implementation* of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973, 1984) who viewed policy as setting goals, and implementation research as looking at what makes those goals difficult to achieve. They argued that linkages between organisations are crucial to successful implementation, and the longer the implementation chain, the closer the cooperation between parties must be, that is, the more actors there are, the more potential there is for “disagreement and delay” (1984, p. 102). Other top-down scholars include Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) who provided a model to analyse the implementation process; Sabatier and Mazmanian (1980) who recognised a feedback process, while distinguishing between formulation and implementation of policy; and Hogwood and Gunn (1984), who looked at practical aspects, such as agreement on objectives, external circumstances, and adequate time and resources, as necessary components for policy makers to consider.

The bottom-up approach to understanding policy implementation is perhaps best characterised by the contribution of Lipsky (1980) with his work *Street-level bureaucracy* which looked at the people on the ground. Their established

routines and devices can be seen as coping mechanisms (Hill & Hupe, 2002, p. 52-53). Gradually, through the choices that are made, the actions of these street-level bureaucrats become a form of policy (Lipsky, 1980, p. 84-85). Other bottom-up scholars include Hjern, and Barrett and Fudge, who looked at policy in terms of networks of actors and mediation between them (Hill & Hupe, 2002, p. 53-56).

Conflicting theories from the top-down and bottom-up schools, some of which will be discussed in greater detail later on, indicate a disconnect between policy formulation and implementation. How is it possible to conceptualise such a disconnect? Is it useful to do so? One possible answer lies in the potential held by the resources of the state and the values of the public servant. What this deficit presents us with is an opportunity for the development of a policy and implementation strategy. The shortcomings of implementation theory are clear to those who wish to see them, and therefore improvements within the implementation arena are simply an opportunity waiting to be taken advantage of.

The top-down approach suggests a centralization in policy making, where bureaucrats attempt to create broad policy that covers a range of local circumstances. Such a generalized approach invariably will generate a policy that can only approximate local situations. By centrally attempting to homogenize all local issues the bureaucrats are destined to fail or at best achieve mediocrity. The bottom-up approach suggests a decentralization in policy making, where street-level officials are creating *ad hoc* policy in the absence of a coherent centralized policy that directly addresses the particulars of the local officials' jurisdiction. The two theories argue themselves into corners and beg for a hybrid theoretical approach, attempts at which include the network approach, and the Advocacy Coalition Framework. In an era of innovation, we might find both top-down and bottom-up initiatives working in the same areas of change.

A disconnect between policy formulation and implementation, or activities on the ground, would not be a problem, if policy makers took a lesson from both these approaches. It becomes a question of allowing both top-down and bottom-

up approaches a role within the same policy theory, and in turn in policy practice.

For instance, a national policy is created. Policy makers admit that different approaches to this policy are needed in order for it to be successful in all the different institutions in which it is to be implemented. If a single policy, centrally designed, is to be successful on a national scale, then arguably a certain element of decentralization, i.e., localization, in terms of authority and implementation options must be allowed for. Therefore, the disconnect between the formulation and implementation is an opportunity for policy makers to acknowledge the general and specific issues while ceding a certain amount of decision making to both the meso level of governance, as well as maintaining some control at the macro level of central government.

We return then to how one might usefully conceptualise the nature of the gap between policy formulation and implementation, as displayed in the literature. How might one improve the understanding, in theory and in practice, of the policy process? This brings us to the research topic of this thesis, that of policy implementation in South African higher education, as it pertains to governance and quality assurance post-1994.

In the new South Africa, higher education has a large role to play in the country's transformation. The Commission on Higher Education, through its Higher Education Quality Committee, is responsible for implementing a national policy of quality assurance. Emphasis is placed on quality as fitness for, and fitness of, purpose, thus linking it heavily to transformation imperatives. Quality assurance policy was formally established in legislation in 1997, and got properly underway in the early 2000s. In this first decade formal bodies have been established, processes have been started, and the higher education community has been required to respond to the quality assurance policy. It is of interest and importance to understand how higher education institutions have responded to centralised policy, and how the national and institutional policy processes work at local, or micro, level. A question arises:

A small-scale preliminary inquiry, carried out in November 2007, suggested that an elusive 'gap' was felt in the South African higher education policy process, and that top-down and bottom-up perspectives were required for a policy to truly have an effect at meso and micro level.

This study therefore seeks to explore this 'gap', asking:

- How does centralised policymaking and localised activity interact in ways that hinder or support the policy process?
- What is the relationship between the policy process and governance in South African higher education?

The value of the study lies in an improved understanding of the South African higher education policy process, and the dynamics there within. Furthermore, it contributes to the theoretical literature by exploring the nature of the 'gap' between policy formulation and implementation.

The primary data used in this study are qualitative interviews with individuals at different levels of governance in two higher education institutions in South Africa. Analysis of data is based on a dynamic depiction of the policy process. The basis for this depiction is a theoretical discussion on how the 'gap' has been conceptualised in the traditional literature. With a view to this 'gap', an altered model of the policy process is presented.

The primary literature focuses on theories relating to the policy process and its stages, with a particular focus on implementation and changing forms of governance. A division can be identified in the literature between that which deals with the *content* of the study – here quality assurance policy and governance in the South African context – and that which deals with the *processes* examined in the study – formulation, implementation as operational governance, and the dynamic interactions between stages of the policy process.

Therefore, the context of the policy will first be established, through an overview of the South African higher education sector, including key legislation and policy documents, identification of primary actors, and an understanding of how

quality assurance is conceptualised in South African higher education, in terms of transformation, and fitness for and of purpose.

The emphasis on context will carry to an understanding of quality assurance in higher education specifically. Higher education institutions are traditionally conceptualised as being “bottom-heavy” and where “core functions ... are seen as naturally defying hierarchical structures” (Gornitzka, Kyvik & Stensaker, 2007, p. 43). While this might indicate a tendency to favour bottom-up or horizontal/network approaches to implementation, the issue is greatly complicated by the role of the state in higher education governance, in particular in the South African context of state steering. Therefore, the understanding of top-down, bottom-up, network and other approaches is crucial prior to attempting to analyse and understand the role of the universities in the policy process and policy implementation.

The literature review examines some approaches to higher education quality assurance, following on with literature on the policy process, discussing different models, theories and frameworks. Specific literature on policy implementation covers distinctions between the top-down and bottom-up schools of thought, as well as other contributions such as network theories, and analytical frameworks specifically focused on implementation. The chapter concludes by assessing the available frameworks for understanding institutional responses to policy implementation, understood as part of a dynamic policy process, within the context of higher education.

A framework for use in this particular study is presented, emphasising that institutional responses to implementation are just one (important) part of the policy process as they shape the scope and nature of the implementation, and as such, certain components of the analytical framework necessarily bear a greater weight for the primary data analysis. Results are presented in accordance with the framework and the research questions laid out above, and are tied to the South African context where relevant. The essay ends with a short discussion and some concluding comments.

2. South African context

A brief overview of the broader political context in which the South African higher education sector exists will by no means do justice to the history of a country that has undergone dramatic shifts in the last two decades. The Republic of South Africa has been a functioning democratic state since the historic 1994 elections. The negotiated transition to democracy allowed for the election of a Government of National Unity. The initial task this government faced was to write a final constitution for the new democratic republic, while functioning under an interim constitution. The African National Congress (ANC), led by Nelson Mandela, won an overwhelming majority in the general elections. Mandela became president of the country, while his deputies were fellow ANC member Thabo Mbeki and former president F.W. De Klerk.

2.1. Overview of the South African higher education sector

The South African higher education sector before the fall of apartheid was inevitably deeply coloured by the apartheid regime. The sector was highly fragmented. Institutions were intended to serve specific races and ethnicities and to embrace specific ideological values. The system included institutions now termed as 'historically white' or 'advantaged' and those termed as 'historically black' or 'disadvantaged'. This past legacy continues to make its influence felt in the transforming higher education sector in South Africa today (Badat, 2004, p. 2-3). The South African higher education sector includes 23 public higher education institutions (CHE, n.d.c.).

2.1.1. Legislation and policy documents

The documents discussed below can be seen as the key foundational documents for the structure of the South African higher education sector as it is today. There have been extensive policy reforms and initiatives since the democratic government came to power in 1994, and higher education, like all other sectors of the country, is undergoing vast transformation and reform. Therefore, discussion of the documents will be focused on their contribution to the introduction of a national policy of quality assurance, as exemplified through

stated values, system requirements and establishment of a statutory body on higher education. For further documentation regarding policy initiatives in South African higher education see Badat (2004) for an assessment of initiatives and outcomes from 1990-2003.

2.1.1.1. *Green Paper on Higher Education*

The Green Paper on Higher Education, published December 1996, preceded the White Paper by a few months. It laid out some similar principles, and described a national policy of quality assurance needing to be founded on “a formative notion of quality assurance, focused on improvement and development rather than punitive sanction” as well as “a mix of institutional self-evaluation and external independent assessment” (Department of Education, 1996, section 12.5), phrases echoed in the White Paper on Higher Education. It also states “quality is a key mechanism for ensuring the accountability and value for money of the higher education system” (Department of Education, 1996, section 12.2).

2.1.1.2. *White Paper on Higher Education.*

Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education preceded the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997, published earlier that year on 24th July. The White Paper sets out a vision for comprehensive reforms of the higher education system, and lays out some key points regarding a quality assurance system for South African higher education.

The White Paper states that:

2.69 The primary responsibility for quality assurance rests with higher education institutions. However, there is an important role for an umbrella national authority responsible for quality promotion and assurance throughout the system.

2.70 Accordingly, the Higher Education Act will provide for the co-ordination of quality assurance in higher education through a Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), which will be established as a permanent committee of the CHE. The establishment of the HEQC, its registration with SAQA and its modus operandi will be determined by the CHE within the framework and procedural guidelines developed by SAQA.

2.71 The functions of the HEQC will include programme accreditation, institutional auditing and quality promotion. It should operate within an agreed framework underpinned by:

- the formulation of criteria and procedures in consultation with higher education institutions

-
- a formative notion of quality assurance, focused on improvement and development rather than punitive sanction
 - a mix of institutional self-evaluation and external independent assessment (Department of Education, 1997b, sections 2.69-2.71).

The above sections of the White Paper lay out the fundamentals for how a national quality assurance system in South African higher education should be implemented. It is important to note that: criteria shall be formulated and tied directly to what the operational definition of quality should be; quality assurance shall be improvement-oriented versus punitive; and that the national quality assurance system shall include internal and external evaluations for institutions. Interestingly, the “formative notion of quality assurance” does not mention accountability, which arguably is as linked to “external independent assessment” as “improvement” could hope to be. It is clear from this, then, that the White Paper sought to explicitly build a developmental connotation with quality assurance, both internal and external. The White Paper mentions accountability in a later section, linking it explicitly to “continuous improvement” and quality assurance:

4.60 The basis for improving public 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 (Department of Education, 1997b, section 4.60).

Although the White Paper presented a vision for the introduction of a national quality assurance system, the legislative basis for the implementation of such a system was in the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997.

2.1.1.3. Higher Education Act 101 of 1997

The *Higher Education Act 101 of 1997*, frequently amended since it was passed on 19th December 1997, is the legislative foundation for higher education policies in South Africa. It states that the Minister of Education shall “determine policy on higher education” after consulting with the Council on Higher Education (Department of Education, 1997a, section 3).

The Council on Higher Education was established as a juristic person through the passage of the *Higher Education Act*, which also provided the legislative basis for the establishment of the Council on Higher Education permanent sub-committee,

the Higher Education Quality Committee (Department of Education, 1997a, section 5.1.c. and section 7.1). The Higher Education Quality Committee was formally launched in 2001, and its quality assurance functions are discussed in more detail below.

2.1.1.4. National Plan for Higher Education 2001

The National Plan for Higher Education provided an implementation framework for the transformative vision presented in the White Paper (Department of Education, 2001).

2.1.2. Institutions and higher education bodies

As stated above there are 23 public universities in South Africa. Qualitative data collection was carried out at two traditionally white universities, the University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University, the former English-medium and the latter Afrikaans-medium, which to a large extent accounts for cultural differences between the two.

In addition to 23 universities, there are certain government bodies pertaining to education in general, and to higher education specifically.

2.1.2.1. Institutional governance structures

Governance structures in South African universities are bound in law by the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997, sections 26-38. The law states that public higher education institutions have the option of appointing a chancellor as their titular head. In addition public higher education institutions must establish structures and offices, as follows: a council, a senate, a principal, a vice-principal, a student representative council, an institutional forum, and others as based on institutional statute (Department of Education, 1997a, sections 26-38).

The council is considered the highest governing body and must consist of the principals, vice-principal(s), five or less ministerial appointees, elected members of the senate, elected academic employees, elected student representatives, elected non-academic employees and others as based on institutional statute (Department of Education, 1997a, sections 26-38).

The senate is accountable to the council for academic and research functions. The principal is responsible for administration and management of the institution. The institutional forum is an advisory body to the senate and is comprised of a wide variety of representatives, including of council, senate, academic and non-academic employees, students, etc. (Department of Education, 1997a, sections 26-38).

2.1.2.2. *Minister and Department of Education*

The Department of Education is an administrative government department comprised of six branches, one of which is the higher education branch. The Minister of Education, a political appointee, is responsible for higher education policy in consultation with the CHE, as stated above.

The White Paper promotes a model of “cooperative governance for higher education in South Africa” which was to be based on the “principle of autonomous institutions working cooperatively with a proactive government and in a range of partnerships” (Department of Education, 1997b, section 3.6).

2.1.2.3. *Commission on Higher Education*

The Commission on Higher Education (CHE) was founded in May 1998, the legislative basis for which is stated in the *Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997*, discussed above. It is “an independent statutory body responsible for advising the Minister of Education on all higher education policy issues, and for quality assurance in higher education and training” (Council on Higher Education, n.d.b). The Commission’s quality assurance responsibilities are delegated to the HEQC.

2.1.2.4. *Higher Education Quality Committee.*

As stated above, the Higher Education Quality Committee is a permanent sub-committee of the CHE. In accordance with the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997 (Department of Education, 1997a), the Higher Education Quality Committee must:

- Promote quality assurance in higher education
- Audit the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions
- Accredite programmes of higher education

(Department of Education, 1997a, section 5.1.c.)

The Board later added a fourth directive of the HEQC: *quality-related capacity development*. In line with this the HEQC operates four directorates: Institutional Audits Directorate, Programme Reviews Directorate, Programme Accreditation Directorate, and Quality Promotion and Capacity Development Directorate (Council on Higher Education, n.d.a).

It is clear that the visionary tone of the White Paper, speaking of quality assurance in terms of “development” and “continuous improvement” is intended to complement the legislative basis for a national quality assurance system.

The HEQC states its mandate as:

In accordance with the Higher Education Act, 1997, and the ETQA responsibilities of the CHE, the HEQC will

- 4.1 Promote quality among constituent providers in higher education in order to facilitate the development of quality awareness and quality responsiveness in public and private provision
- 4.2 Audit the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions
- 4.3 Accredite providers of higher education to offer programmes leading to particular NQF-registered qualifications by certifying that they have the systems, processes and capacity to do so. In relevant cases, this will be done cooperatively with professional councils and SETAs.
- 4.4 Co-ordinate and facilitate quality assurance activities in higher education within a partnership model with other ETQAs (CHE, 2001, p. 7).

The HEQC will be addressed in more detail below, in the context of a broader discussion on quality assurance in South African higher education.

2.1.3. Institutions studied

The primary research for this study was carried out at two higher education institutions in the Western Cape. Interviews were taken with administrators and academics at different levels of governance, that is, central administration, academic development, faculty level (deans) and department level (heads/chairs).

University of Cape Town. Established in 1918, University of Cape Town (UCT) is a historically white, English-medium public university. UCT defines itself as an excellent research and teaching institution, undergoing vast transformation (CHE, 2006). Total student enrolment for 2006 was 21170 in six faculties, each divided into several departments (University of Cape Town, 2008). The Centre

for Higher Education Development at the University of Cape Town serves as a centre for both academic development and higher education research.

Stellenbosch University. Established in 1916, Stellenbosch University is a historically white, Afrikaans-medium public university. Stellenbosch University has a good reputation, both for quality graduates and excellent research activities (CHE, 2007a, p. 9). Total student enrolment for 2007 was 23439 in ten faculties, each divided into several departments (Stellenbosch University, 2007). The Centre for Teaching and Learning at Stellenbosch University serves as a centre for academic development, and the Centre for Higher and Adult Education serves as a centre for higher and adult education research.

2.2. Governance

Any study of the policy process must give notice to the specific governance context in which policies are being formulated and implemented.

In the Green Paper a vision of cooperative governance is espoused as such:

1.1 ... Cooperative governance assumes a proactive, guiding and constructive role for government. It also assumes the active participation by civil society constituencies, which acknowledge their different interests, maintain separate identities, and recognise their mutual interdependence and responsibilities for attaining a common goal. These are the prerequisites for successful change and development. In short, it is the interaction between different constituencies, traditionally identified as the state and civil society, which provides the cornerstone of this approach to governance. The Ministry endorses this as an appropriate model of governance for higher education in South Africa.

1.2 The structures and relationships among stakeholders (including Government) outlined in this chapter are based on the assumptions that:

- No single actor or agency can claim sole responsibility or authority for determining the policies and priorities of the higher education system.
- Competing and complementary interests, interdependence and common goals must be recognised.
- Participation and effectiveness must be balanced.
- Power, shared accountability and responsibility require cooperative behaviour from all participants.
- Within the context of national goals the Government will play a steering and coordinating role with the participation of higher education stakeholders (Department of Education, 1996, sections 1.1-1.2).

In the White Paper a vision of cooperative governance is espoused as such:

3.7 Cooperative governance assumes a proactive, guiding and constructive role for government. It also assumes a cooperative relationship between the state and higher education institutions. One implication of this is, for example, that institutional autonomy is to be exercised in tandem with public accountability. Another is that the Ministry's oversight role does not involve responsibility for the micro-management of institutions. A third implication is that the Ministry will undertake its role in a transparent manner.

3.8 The Ministry will drive the transformation of the higher education system through policies and strategies that are guided by this view of the role of the government and its relationship to institutions of higher education (Department of Education, 1997, sections 3.7-3.8).

Two important points come up when examining these sections of the Green Paper and White Paper. The first is how exactly will cooperative governance work in practice? And the second is how is it possible to exercise institutional autonomy in tandem with public accountability in the context of a state-steered higher education sector?

The past decade of South African higher education transformation has shown that while cooperative governance may sound good as an ideal, it may not be the model best applicable to ensure the attainment of transformation objectives while not endangering institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

2.2.1. From cooperative governance to conditional autonomy?

The rather vague procedural definition of cooperative governance, by the government, has been criticised for not offering a clear understanding of the balance between autonomy and accountability, thus arguably allowing for fairly wide ranging assertion of state authority (Hall & Symes, 2005, p. 208-209). A case study of the higher education sector in South Africa by Cloete, Maassen and Muller (2007) discusses the shifting governance frameworks in higher education in South Africa, showing how while cooperative governance as an ideology might still exist, the practical governance of the sector has moved towards stronger steering.

Governance is defined by the authors as “the efforts of a government to affect (regulate, steer, coordinate, control) the behaviour of citizens and organisations in the society for which it has been given responsibility” (Cloete, Maassen & Muller, 2007, p. 208). It was assumed that by default the introduction of cooperative governance would lead to an improvement in higher education, as it

was assumed that through cooperative governance “participation and cooperation would lead to greater equity and democracy” (Cloete, Maassen & Muller, 2007, p. 213). However, implementing the new, cooperatively developed, national policy framework for higher education in South Africa required a variety of implementing instruments, and was based on the (faulty) premise that the policy process is linear, moving without difficulty from formulation to implementation. The case study shows that unintended outcomes of certain policy initiatives resulted in a form of market governance. This led to purposeful shifts in governance, placing a greater emphasis on control and accountability, versus the earlier emphasis on equality and redress (Cloete, Maassen & Muller, 2007). Thus an increase in state steering is seen in the development of governance in South African higher education. This increase raises questions of institutional autonomy.

Issues of institutional autonomy have been in the discussion of higher education governance in South Africa, as it is acknowledged that state steering of institutions is to some extent required in order to ensure attainment of transformation objectives. It has been suggested that a useful understanding of autonomy in the South African context moves beyond traditional concepts of substantive autonomy (includes academic freedom) and procedural autonomy (e.g. how things are done) and seeks to combine them, in the terms ‘conditional autonomy’ (Hall & Symes, 2005, p. 208). In this sense academic freedom is ensured through substantive autonomy, but state steering in terms of e.g. funding and accreditation lessens procedural autonomy. Conditional autonomy is therefore a “re-negotiation between the external norms of national priorities and the internal norms of academia” (Neave, 1988, referenced in Hall & Symes, 2005, p. 208).

However, the argument for ‘conditional autonomy’ may not yet be achievable in the practical sense in South Africa, as it calls for the right of institutions to “interpret their social responsibilities”, yet conceding that the democratic state still has “legitimate, overarching accountability for the disbursement of public funds” (Hall & Symes, 2005, p. 209). In its annual report 2007-2008 the CHE states that “in this context the HEQC’s understanding of quality as fitness for and

of purpose within a framework of transformation remains a compelling one (CHE, 2008, p.10)". Clearly there is potential for tension within the notion of 'conditional autonomy' in the South African higher education sector, as an understanding of quality as transformation, to be attained by some extent through state steering, includes a judgement of "fitness of purpose" which entails some degree of interpretation of social responsibilities of institutions, in the very least a guidance of what their missions ought to be.

A similar concept of deliberative democracy is introduced in an attempt to reconcile state governance – and steering – with what has become conditional autonomy for higher education institutions. Deliberative democracy is argued to be a safeguard for ensuring ongoing institutional autonomy and academic freedom, in the context of conditional state steering (CHE, 2007b).

2.3. Quality assurance in the South African higher education sector

The formal basis for a national policy of quality assurance in South African higher education is the Higher Education Act of 1997 and the 1997 publication of the White Paper on Education, as discussed above.

2.3.1. HEQC directives

The founding document of the HEQC states that the CHE will "coordinate the establishment of a common set of ground rules for the practice of quality assurance including the inter-relationship between quality assurance promotion, institutional audits and programme assessment" (CHE, 2001, p. 5).

The founding document of the HEQC allows for a more explicit link between the developmental goals and accountability requirements of quality assurance, than does the White Paper:

3.4 The HEQC will uphold the accountability requirements of higher education provision within the context of a strong developmental and formative approach to quality assurance. However, the HEQC will, where necessary, expose and act against persistent and unchanging poor quality provision (CHE, 2001, p. 6).

It also suggests a willingness to "expose" and "act against ... poor quality provision" thus diminishing its distance from the "punitive" aspect of quality assurance, rejected in the White Paper.

The HEQC lists as one of its goals that it will “seek to develop a sensible accountability regime for providers through partnerships with other quality assurance bodies and the coordination of the quality assurance activities of multiple agencies in higher education. The active promotion of quality in the early stages of the HEQC’s work will form the basis for developing the appropriate benchmarks for accountability” (CHE, 2001, p. 8). This is a clear expression of the Committee’s phased implementation approach, as there exists a recognition that while development is important in the earlier stages of comprehensive reform of the higher education sector, at some point accountability must be brought to the fore.

2.3.2. Phased implementation approach

In its founding document, the HEQC states that its work must be phased in over time, demarcating two clear implementation phases. The first implementation phase will include, amongst other things, “quality promotion” and “the development and pilot testing of quality assurance instruments and criteria” and “the development of quality relevant capacity” (CHE, 2001, p. 10). The second phase will build on what the HEQC terms the “preparatory activities” of the first phase, allowing the HEQC to be fully operational, where the HEQC “will validate the quality offerings of providers, using rigorous accountability criteria and invoking sanctions where required,” following on from this that the “second phase is likely to be further differentiated between an initial focus on auditing the quality assurance systems of providers followed by more substantive programme evaluations” (CHE, 2001, p. 10).

Based on their own definition of phased implementation it can be argued that the implementation of a national quality assurance in South African higher education is in the very early stages of its second phase. The HEQC will soon conclude its first cycle of institutional audits. The primary research this study is based on, carried out at two higher education institutions that were amongst the first audited at the start of the cycle, in 2005, should therefore, if the HEQC was successful in its intentions of the first phase, reflect a more developmental perception of quality assurance.

2.3.3. Defining quality ... as transformation?

The original intention of the HEQC, as set out in its founding document, was to develop a framework and criteria for quality assurance, which were to be based on:

6.1 Fitness for purpose in relation to specified mission within a national framework that encompasses differentiation and diversity.

6.2 Value for money judged in relation to the full range of higher education purposes set out in the White Paper. Judgments about the effectiveness and efficiency of provision will include but not be confined to labour market responsiveness and cost recovery.

6.3 Transformation in the sense of developing the capabilities of individual learners for personal enrichment, as well as the requirements of social development and economic and employment growth (CHE, 2001, p. 9).

In 2005 the CHE published a research report it had commissioned, *Towards a framework for quality promotion and capacity development in South African Higher Education*, which was intended to serve as a discussion document to allow for deliberation, in conjunction with the publication of a draft framework the following year. However, this draft framework does not appear to have materialised. The framework, according to the then executive director of the HEQC, Dr. Mala Singh, was intended to complete the process of developing “policy foundations of a new quality assurance system for South African higher education” (CHE, 2005, foreword). Earlier mention of this framework is found in the National Plan for Higher Education, where the HEQC was to have “released a framework to guide its work in the development of a robust quality assurance system” (Department of Education, 2001, section 2.3.3) indicating that the preparation of a final framework has been a long time in the making.

2.4. Earlier work on quality assurance in South Africa

A review of the existing literature on higher education quality assurance in South Africa reveals two broad types of articles. On the one hand there are theoretical or conceptual articles, which catalogue the policy and practical developments in quality assurance in higher education, discussing challenges around quality assurance. These articles are based on concepts, debates, theory and literature, but not on specific empirical evidence. On the other hand there are articles based on research projects carried out regarding quality assurance in South African universities and technikons. A comprehensive regurgitation of the literature

would not be relevant here, though the ideas presented in a few of the articles will be discussed.

2.4.1. Accountability and improvement in different settings

Smout and Stephenson (2002) discuss how prior to the establishment of the HEQC its predecessor, the Quality Promotion Unit, focused on “demonstrating accountability and bringing about improvement” (p. 199), two important features for quality assurance. Its foundations rested on improvement versus control, and it emphasised quality assurance systems, looking at how to achieve “fitness for purpose” as the “principal term of reference” (p. 199).

However, encompassing such a differentiated sector as the South African one was, it depended on the institution what sort of emphasis was placed on accountability and improvement. Technikons traditionally focused more on accountability while universities focused more on improvement (Smout & Stephenson, 2002). The HEQC now faces the challenge of addressing such opposite emphases within the same national framework for quality assurance.

A case study of a technikon revealed that the former certifying body of the technikons (SERTEC) focused both on ‘fitness for purpose’ and compliance or accountability. However, it showed a development over time, to an increasing emphasis on improvement, despite lacking the necessary self-reflective skills. This can also be characterised as an issue of lack of human resources and a cultural characteristic of the institution, both impeding a developmental adoption of quality assurance. The institution focused on “what was done rather than how well activities were performed” (Genis, 2002, p. 66). While the process aspect of quality assurance is important, it must be coupled with the content aspect, in order for actual quality improvement to occur.

2.4.2. Quality assurance and democracy

The introduction of quality assurance into higher education, and its reconciliation with ideas of democracy, arises in a number of discussion articles. One argument is that quality assurance can be considered compatible with democratisation and institutional autonomy, while allowing the definition of quality as fitness of purpose to stand, provided it is understood in an inclusive

manner (Symes, 2006). Democratic participation may indeed be widened through quality assurance so long as key concepts are understood in terms of deliberative democracy (Gouws & Waghid, 2006). This in some respects ties to the earlier discussion of higher education governance in South Africa. However, such discussions are very much at the theoretical and conceptual level, and while they aim for an understanding of the ideal, the reality must first be understood in order to understand how one might feasibly achieve the ideal.

2.4.3. Human resources deficiencies

There is an awareness of the fact that South Africa exists in the third world, with a particular oppressive history. Therefore, while the ideal is to benchmark against international standards, there is a lack of human resources to carry out reforms in the sector and elevate its quality assurance (Smout & Stephenson, 2002; Strydom & Strydom, 2004; Strydom & Holtzhausen, 2001; Genis, 2002).

2.4.4. A culture of quality

Strydom and Strydom point out that “many experts currently believe that policy on planning, funding and quality assurance is ‘steering’ the public higher education system in South Africa. There is a strong view that quality assurance should not be seen as ‘a steering mechanism’, especially at this point in time of uncertainty and instability in the higher education system” (2004, p. 110). This brings up both issues of internal versus external quality assurance, and the general orientation of institutions in regards to accountability and/versus improvement.

To some extent, external quality assurance measures, such as institutional audits, must be seen in the light of accountability measures, which can easily be construed as a steering mechanism. However, the argument goes that for a culture of quality to develop within institutions there must be a softer, improvement-oriented touch. Strydom and Strydom argue that it might be possible to reach such a point if everyone takes responsibility for quality assurance, not only the HEQC, but that the system must be patient. Comprehensive reforms of the sector are taking place, and therefore patience is

importance while the dust settles, so as to understand empirically what quality assurance in the South African context truly means and requires (2004, p. 111).

Strydom, Zulu and Murray (2004) support the argument that cultural change is necessary for quality assurance systems to become engrained in the institution. They propose a series of strategies for changing institutional culture, thus overcoming resistance to quality assurance, but call for further research to examine the tripartite relationship between quality, culture and change.

In the case study of the technikon, discussed above, the author reaches the conclusion that the ideal would be “self-regulation” as a “point of departure for quality assurance in an institution and the site visits would be opportunities for constructive dialogue between institutions and accreditation bodies about possible improvements” (Genis, 2002, p. 69). Based on the above, there is evident a desire for quality assurance to be primarily about improvement in the South African context, although the necessary contextual restraints demand accountability too.

2.5. Summary

The key development issues affecting South African higher education in the past 15 years are a combination of transformation efforts by the new government, and responses to international trends. Legislation calls for an ideal of cooperative governance within a context of state steering, which has raised questions about institutional autonomy, linked to a requirement for deliberative democracy to safeguard against a loss of autonomy. Quality assurance policy combines external and internal mechanisms, and is linked to transformation. Quality assurance is defined in terms of fitness for, and fitness of, purpose. These issues and developments define the context within which this study explores policy processes at a national and institutional level.

Following this review of the context of the study, the theoretical background will be discussed, including the concepts and framework that will guide data analysis and presentation of results.

3. Theoretical approach

The nature of higher education is changing worldwide. In part this is due to the proliferation of a market-based ideology taking root in higher education (Gornitzka, Kyvik & Stensaker, 2007, p. 35). Without a doubt, the introduction of market ideologies, which would support more self-sufficient and dynamic institutions, will affect the nature of higher education policy. This may lead to government attempts at steering or control to be within broader frameworks, allowing for innovation and autonomy at the institutional level, without sacrificing accountability at the national level. Whether it is called managerialism, New Public Management, or something else, this new ideology inherently changes the role of government in higher education, though this is not to say that government suddenly becomes less relevant (Dill & Sporn, 1995; Gornitzka, Kyvik & Stensaker, 2007). If anything, New Public Management increases the complexity of the state-institution relationship.

Understanding the situation is further complicated by the importance of the multi-layer and multi-actor approaches, which are arguably as important in policy studies as they are in higher education studies (Gornitzka, Kogan & Amaral, 2007, p. 6). Research findings suggest that, for instance, policy priorities set out at a national level may merge with or relate to strategic plans and priorities at an institutional level (Gornitzka, Kogan & Amaral, 2007, p. 7). This is particularly pertinent as, to a large extent, “public policy ... still is shaped during the implementation process” (Gornitzka, Kyvik & Stensaker, 2007, p. 36) therefore making studies of the implementation process within institutions all the more relevant to understanding the policy process as a whole.

Gornitzka, Kyvik and Stensaker list three factors that make higher education policy implementation research more pertinent than ever:

1. Resource commitment to and social expectations of higher education increase the need for an analysis of the effectiveness of policy processes.
2. Despite state involvement in policy making, it is probable that globalisation, technification and marketisation are influencing the policy implementation process in new ways.

-
3. New stakeholders entering and influencing the higher education sphere suggest a new and unknown policy making territory is being created (Gornitzka, Kyvik & Stensaker, 2007, p. 36)

To a large extent these three factors might apply to any number of government programmes/institutions. At the heart of it lies what may be seen as market ideologies – where an emphasis is placed on results rather than processes – conflicting with a need for institutions/programmes to be accountable to the public. How is it possible to ensure increased accountability at the same time as there is a development towards increased autonomy? This is a particularly pertinent concern in the realm of quality assurance policy, which will be discussed further below.

Cerych and Sabatier's (1986) argument that higher education reform in general is challenged by diffusion of authority in higher education institutions, their bottom-heavy nature, and the broad variety of stakeholders and actors in the implementing process is still valid over two decades after the publication of their work on implementation of higher education reforms in Europe. Therefore, a study of implementation becomes a study of interactions, within and between institutions. This study looks at responses to implementation within institutions, which, when gathered together, form what might be considered an institutional response, which becomes part of an interaction with actors external to the institution. It is therefore one important part of the overall policy process within the sector. Before further discussion of concepts and a guiding analytical construct, certain features of quality assurance in higher education must be discussed, in order to understand the theoretical context of a policy of quality assurance.

3.1. Quality assurance in higher education

The notion of quality management and assurance is traditionally associated with systems and processes. If a system is in place to ensure that certain things get handled in certain ways, one should be assured of the quality of the end product. This may be the case, when the original design is relatively standardised, such as in industry. However, in the case of service, which aspects of higher education arguably now resemble, quality assurance is a two-fold concern. First, there must be quality systems in place, to ensure each student (the customer) is treated in

the same manner. This concerns process. Second, the actual intrinsic quality of the educational experience (the product) offered to the student must also be ensured. This concerns content. Therefore, understanding the nature of quality assurance systems in higher education necessarily begs two questions:

Are there quality assurance systems and processes in place?

Do they result in a quality higher education experience?

Quality assurance in higher education can be easily dissected into external quality assurance and internal quality assurance. External and internal mechanisms may interact and overlap with one another, and in fact may both exist within the same process. Examples of traditional external mechanisms include audit and accreditation, on an institutional, operational unit (e.g. faculty, department) or programme basis. Examples of traditional internal mechanisms rely on external validation but are generally internally initiated, such as use of external examiners for exit modules/subjects, and departmental reviews. However, the external validation will be in the form of peer review, rather than review by a quality agency, thus engendering a more developmental and improvement-oriented view of the process.

Defining quality in higher education is no less complex than defining the concept of quality in general. Pollitt and Bouckaert (1995, quoted in Stensaker, 2007, p. 102) present the two main perspectives of quality as opposing one another. The first perspective, the output-oriented view, is reminiscent of Taylor's scientific management, and while presented as an output-oriented view, it is arguably focused on quality processes rather than the content of the quality. The second perspective, which Pollitt and Bouckaert term process-oriented, views quality as transformative. However, this process-oriented view is arguably more focused on leading to improved quality of the actual content. It is interesting that these two perspectives should be so clearly defined in opposition to one another, as if that which focuses on an output cannot be transformative. However, to achieve a certain output processes must be in place leading to that output, and it is through these processes that improved quality content can be achieved. Therefore, the

two perspectives working in combination provide a considerably more useful conception of how quality might work.

In terms of quality in higher education specifically, the reigning conception is quality as fitness for purpose (Ball, 1995), which allows the concept to be moulded to suit each specific context. This is well suited to broad policy frameworks for quality assurance, rather than specific criteria and indicators, as the concept is arguably so subjective that to measure it against a universal standard would be impossible.

This view is similarly presented in terms of how quality assurance might be seen in light of government steering in higher education:

In contrast to such direct steering, quality assurance is a major vehicle in a communication view of steering: the way quality is assessed, and the consequences (sanctions) of positive and negative assessments in a certain quality assurance scheme, carry important strategic messages to all concerned, higher education institutions and stakeholders alike (Westerheijden, Stensaker & Joao Rosa, 2007, p. 5).

3.1.1. Quality assurance and accountability

As hinted at in the discussion of earlier works on quality assurance in South Africa, the ties between quality assurance and accountability are debated, contested, but ultimately on a practical level they are not refutable. There would be no national system of quality assurance if there were not also a need to ensure that public money was being well spent. Couple public accountability with the market forces previously mentioned, and a quality assurance system determined to be developmental as well, and one is left with the challenge of useful conceptualisation. As Harvey and Newton state:

The perpetual debate about accountability and improvement is as old as quality assurance in higher education. The tension between accountability and continuous quality improvement was pointed out by Vroeijerstijn and Acherman (1990). The dichotomy is much discussed in the quality literature (Frederiks, Westerheijden, & Weusthof 1994; Middlehurst & Woodhouse 1995; Vroeijerstijn 1995). Quality assurance, so the argument goes, is between a rock and a hard place. It is torn between improvement and accountability (2007, p. 230).

Despite this, only a short while later in the very same article, Harvey and Newton reject the very notion of an accountability-improvement continuum:

Improvement is not something that is regulated but something that occurs through critical engagement. Accountability and improvement are not two related dimensions of quality, rather they are distinct and there is no intrinsic tension between them. Quality

assurance has created an illusory tension by pretending that quality is intrinsically linked to the process of monitoring quality, an illusion that is exemplified in the 'fitness-for-purpose' approach. The illusory relationship between accountability/compliance and improvement evaporates when the focus is on the essential nature of quality itself (2007, p. 232).

While it is all well and good to strive for the focus to be on the "essential nature of quality" it is not a very practical goal for those who are tasked with implementing a policy of quality assurance. Stensaker (2007) suggests that bearing in mind this tension in the design of a quality assurance system, a balance can be achieved. If we view a higher education institution as the core entity of a quality assurance system, a balance between improvement and accountability can arguably be struck through balancing internal and external systems. Therefore, if an external programme accreditation is balanced with an internally initiated peer-review of a department, the dual purpose of accountability *and* improvement might be served. As Stensaker (2007) points out though, this is a delicate balance and a swing in either direction will have consequences (p. 110).

Having reviewed the main concerns of definition and debate in quality assurance in higher education, one is faced with how to usefully analyse a policy of quality assurance in higher education. For this, a theoretical understanding of the policy process is necessary.

3.2. Theories of the policy process

The following is a broad review of theories of the policy process, in order to allow an understanding of the multitude of theories available to scholars. While this review is not exhaustive, it does seek to highlight aspects of the theories that most directly pertain to the study.

3.2.1. Key concepts

Prior to embarking on an overview of the literature some key concepts must be discussed to contribute to an understanding of the theoretical approach. These are governance, New Public Management, and policy.

- **Governance.** Discussed to some extent in the *South African context* chapter, the concept of governance is born in the public administration literature. While of irrefutable importance, the debate surrounding a firm

definition of governance has yet to result in a unified conclusion. Governance could be viewed as simply a new term that covers public administration (political governance) and/or policy implementation (operational governance) (Hill & Hupe, 2002). As Frederickson and Smith (2003) outline the debate surrounding governance, certain useful aspects emerge, such as: “governance is centred on the need to account for the changing relationship between government and society” (p. 225) with further elaborations related to the fragmented state and the need to understand new and emerging roles within public administration.

However, governance not only applies to the relationship between government and society, in this study the higher education sector, but governance is also a term applicable to the operating structures within institutions, in this study universities. Therefore, governance is used on two levels: national governance, and institutional governance. This distinction is crucial when analysing data, as to some extent the coherence and structure of institutional governance shape the institution’s response to national governance and policy.

- **New Public Management.** New Public Management, sometimes known as managerialism, is considered to be a paradigm shift in public administration. While governance and New Public Management are not one and the same, it is useful to look at proposed similarities between the two, such as the dominance of networks, the state’s declining capacity for direct control, the blending of public and private resources, and the use of multiple instruments (Peters & Pierre, 1998). All of these concepts certainly could apply to governance – yet governance as it will be addressed here is more nuanced, and is theoretically posited in different forms, such as operational, cooperative, market, and so on. One might, therefore, for the purposes of this study, view New Public Management as the operational philosophy, whereas governance has a view to the normative in public administration.

While not central to this study, the influence of the New Public Management paradigm must be kept in mind as relating to higher education. The state's declining capacity for direct control could arguably give public higher education institutions freer reign over their in-house policies. This leads directly to the blending of public and private resources, as the educational environment becomes more competitive, and reduced funding results in increased emphasis on private grants and research funds. Essentially, theories of New Public Management make one aware of the complex context in which the higher education policy process operates.

- **Policy.** Depending on the ideological standpoint, policy, and its ensuing 'success' can be defined in a variety of ways. Barrett (2004) says that "policy may thus be regarded as both a statement of intent by those seeking to change or control behaviour, and a negotiated output emerging from the implementation process" (p. 253). This is strongly reminiscent of Mintzberg's work on strategies, which will be elaborated upon below.

A definition of policy is strongly tied to a definition of policy success and/or failure. It has been argued that the complexity of the implementation process means that "action cannot necessarily be directly related to, or evaluated against specific policy goals" (Barrett, 2004, p. 254) which raises the question how does one evaluate success and/or failure? This is a particularly crucial question, in light of a dynamic interpretation of the stages of the policy process. This study adopts the view that in a context of cooperative policy making measures of success or failure may be presented in a broad framework, but their interpretation must be based on individual implementation of the policy.

3.2.2. Overview

There exist several frameworks, models and theories of the policy process. Dominant in the early policy process literature was the idea of the policy process as split into stages, generally including agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. While some scholars suggest the stages heuristic

has outlived its usefulness (Sabatier, 2007) it is nonetheless of value as it allows research to focus on particular parts of the policy process, and as an analytical tool for descriptive research it can be very useful. Arguably, one cannot study one part in isolation, as they are inextricably linked. An agenda that is set becomes a policy, which must be implemented, the evaluation of which can focus on initial policy imperatives, actual outcomes, or other aspects, depending on the purpose and philosophy behind the assessment. Despite the argument that elements of the policy process are inextricably linked, studies of implementation processes flourished, after the publication of seminal works in the early 1970s and 1980s (see e.g. Pressman & Wildvasky, 1973; Lipsky, 1980).

Despite what appears to be a decrease in implementation research in the 1990s, contributions to the field are still necessary and important, and there are signs that interest is growing once more (Barrett, 2004; Schofield & Sausman, 2004; Hill & Hupe, 2002). There is even an argument to be made that the “apparent demise of implementation studies represented no more than academic opportunism; using different language and labels for the same issues” (Barrett, 2004, p. 258) as the wave of New Public Management introduced business management concepts to the world of public administration.

Changing theoretical shifts have sought to synthesize original divisions. The importance of context, too, has been emphasised (see e.g. Barrett, 2004; Hill & Hupe, 2002) with an increased awareness of the specificity of certain policy situations, which include political contexts, and could possibly even include trans-national or global contexts. In terms of higher education policy, some even go so far as to say that “higher education policy making is not only country specific but also sub-sector specific” (Kogan, 2007, p. 62).

In addition, implementation is to be understood in the context of the other elements of the policy process, so while accepted as an individual stage or element, it must be seen in a broader fashion. Succinctly put, “a policy is not a given entity; studying implementation of a policy without looking at how those policies come about, divorcing our understanding of implementation from our

understanding of the processes that generate policies may be a fruitless exercise” (Gornitzka, Kogan & Amaral, 2007, p. 7).

To some extent this has increased the usefulness of broad, analytical frameworks, as they may serve to guide a wider range of implementation research. However, it has also increased the importance of context, both geo-political and sub-sector. Therefore this study discusses both quality assurance in higher education, and higher education in South Africa, to ensure an understanding of context in its fullest sense.

While this study is primarily focused on perceptions of the implementation of a national policy of quality assurance in South African higher education, it cannot be divorced from the other ‘stages’ of the policy process, which are inextricably bound to the geo-political context in which the policy was originally formulated. Therefore, a review of the policy process literature will focus heavily on implementation, yet with a holistic approach, allowing for an understanding of the importance of the entire process, and how parts of it fit together. As such, the theoretical literature to be reviewed will include that which talks to the policy process as a whole, as well as that which focuses explicitly on implementation.

3.2.3. The Stages Heuristic

The notion that the policy process is split into stages was developed in the 1970s (see e.g. Lasswell, 1970; Jones, 1970; Anderson, 1975). While there were some differences as to definition and number of stages, in general they included agenda setting, policy formulation, policy implementation and policy evaluation, and would be illustrated as a linear, top-down process:

Agenda setting → Formulation → Implementation → Evaluation

While certainly the division into stages is useful for defining the scope of research by limiting it to a stage or two, e.g. implementation, criticism of the stages heuristic, as coined by Sabatier (1991), includes pointing to its lack of a causal theory (Sabatier, 2007HE), an inaccuracy in defining stages in a linear fashion, misunderstanding the ties between them (Nakamura, 1987), and the oversimplification of focusing on one major piece of legislation as opposed to

including supporting and/or interacting legislation in the same domain (Hjern & Hull, 1982; Sabatier, 2007a).

Therefore, a framework that is to successfully include concepts and ideas of stages, or elements, of the policy process, must respond to the criticism by considering stages, or elements, as components of a dynamic, non-linear, process, affected by multiple pieces of legislation within a policy domain. As such one could argue that a study focusing on a national policy of quality assurance will not solely be based on a policy introduced in one document or piece of legislation, but will consider the original agenda setting, for instance in a foundational document or white paper, the formulation, as deliberated in legislation, the various actors relating to the formulation and implementation stages, and how their dynamic interactions may or may not result in continued evaluation and/or alteration of the original policy objectives. The *South African context* chapter sought to fulfil such contextual requirements for a fuller understanding of the policy, such as ideals of governance, state steering, and the link between quality assurance and transformation. A framework that takes into account such a host of factors will be discussed below.

3.2.4. The Network Approach

The network understanding of the policy process lies in the idea that the policy process involves a diversity of mutually interdependent actors, thus propelling the analysis of the policy process away from the notion that actors work by themselves, in isolation (Adam & Kriesi, 2007).

Adam and Kriesi (2007) discuss three differing approaches to the network concept. The first considers the concept to entail a “distinct, new governing structure”, the second involves generic applicability to “possible patterns of interaction among public and private actors in policy-specific subsystems”, and the third is a “formalized, quantitative approach of social network analysis” (p. 130). The third approach will not be further discussed here.

The first approach, which views the idea of the policy network as a distinct governing structure, focuses on how policy networks as a distinct form of governance differ from traditional governance approaches, such as hierarchical

or market coordination. The term *network management* encompasses the idea of a different form of public management, born out of the disappearing clear delineation between that which is public and that which is private (Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997). The emergence of network management can be seen in light of the changes brought about by New Public Management, and the effect that those changes had on governance at a national level. Network governance, Adam and Kriesi argue, is not an entirely novel concept, but its foundation in the public-private boundary blurring has long been seen in “weak states that do not have the required resources for policy making” (2007, p. 132). This approach of policy networks as a distinct form of macro governance, while certainly interesting, is not wholly relevant to a study focusing on the meso and micro levels of policy. While aspects of it may perhaps be carried from the macro to the meso and micro levels, it is of more interest to discuss the ideas around the second approach to the network concept, as generic applicability may serve better in lower levels of analysis.

The problem with the second approach to the network concept, that of generic applicability to possible interaction patterns between public and private parties, is a lack of cohesiveness in the literature, a lack of agreement between competing typologies. Adam and Kriesi (2007) seek to rectify this lack of cohesiveness by presenting a typology that takes into account what they deem the “essential network characteristics” (p. 133). Their typology is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Typology of essential network characteristics

Power distribution:	Type of interaction:		
	Conflict	Bargaining	Cooperation
Concentration	Dominance	Asymmetric	Hierarchical
Fragmentation	Competition	Symmetric	Horizontal

(Adapted from Adam and Kriesi, 2007, p. 134.)

Based on this typology, the argument is that six types of policy networks can then be identified. First one must determine what the distribution of power is like in the policy network, whether it is concentrated in the hands of one or a few, or if it is fragmented and shared amongst actors. Once that has been

determined the predominating type, or degree, of interaction can be looked at. They allow for three types of interaction, predominated by conflict, bargaining and cooperation.

Adam and Kriesi (2007) then take their typology one step further, by elaborating on its implications for policy dynamics, that is, seeing how the nature of the policy network affects policy dynamics, and the potential which specific types of networks hold for policy change, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Potential and type of policy change

Distribution of power:	Type of interaction:		
	Conflict	Bargaining	Cooperation
Concentration	Dominance Moderate potential for rapid (serial) shift	Asymmetric Low to moderate potential for incremental change	Hierarchical Low potential for change – maintenance of status quo
Fragmentation	Competition High potential for rapid (serial) shift	Symmetric Moderate to high potential for incremental change	Horizontal Low to moderate potential for change – maintenance of status quo

(Adapted from Adam and Kriesi, 2007, p. 145.)

This typology is an interesting contribution to the overall policy literature, as it allows for elaboration of the network concept within an overall analytical framework. This is particularly important as this study does not focus specifically on policy networks, but raises questions of how policy is originally formulated and translated at the meso level prior to implementation, the formulation and translation parts of the process being particularly interesting in terms of policy networks. This typology could contribute in discussion of results.

One of the key problems with any discussion of policy networks in an implementation study is that there is a lack of empirical evidence relating types of policy networks to specific policy outcomes, and in fact, there is some evidence to the contrary, which explicitly found a lack of a connection between networks and outcomes (e.g. Richardson, 2000; Daguerre, 2000). It is therefore the challenge of future research to attempt to find valid, empirical links between networks and outcomes (Adam & Kriesi, 2007). As stated above, networks are not the centrepieces of this study, but by using policy networks as one analytical

tool in a broader framework, links may be established that would provide the direction for future study. Therefore, despite the problem of lack of empirical evidence, network analysis is still relevant for understanding the initial steps in the policy process, that is agenda setting, formulation, and possibly an additional step prior to implementation, in which policy is interpreted. Given a better understanding of these initial steps, links may be established to the operational side of policy.

3.2.5. Punctuated-equilibrium theory

The ideas presented by punctuated-equilibrium theory are indirectly relevant to this study. Reasons for reduced relevance include the fact that the theory was born out research focused on the United States and has been confirmed in several advanced democracies and focuses primarily on the issue definition and agenda setting elements of the policy process (True, Jones & Baumgartner, 2007) while this study is based on research carried out in South Africa, a young democracy, and focuses specifically on the implementation element of the policy process, though with some view given to earlier elements.

Punctuated-equilibrium theory makes a distinction between what can be called macro-politics, where punctuations, or rapid change may occur, and subsystem politics, where in general equilibrium or incrementalism is the norm (True, Jones & Baumgartner, 2007). What is particularly interesting to note would be the acknowledgement of relevance or ties to other theories of the policy process. For instance, True et al. describe a situation of major political change as the opening of a “window of opportunity”, a clear reference to Kingdon’s multiple streams framework (see Zahariadis, 2007). In addition, the whole discussion of policy subsystems directly relates to the idea of policy networks as generically applicable to various types of relationships, as discussed in terms of the second approach to network theory, above. This is one way in which punctuated-equilibrium theory needs to be borne in mind for this study – as it relates to the idea of policy networks.

Punctuated-equilibrium theory is also linked to work on social movements, through its focus on issue dynamics. The theory basically maintains that in a

specific situation political conflict may expand “beyond the confines of expert-dominated policy subsystems”, thus entering other policy venues, allowing the issue to bubble over in a sense, becoming a punctuation in the policymaking process (True, Jones & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 176). This is a second way in which punctuated-equilibrium theory is indirectly relevant to this study.

3.2.6. The Advocacy Coalition Framework

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) can be seen as grounded in a synthesis of the bottom-up and top-down schools of implementation theory, discussed below. It is considered a theory of the policy process, rather than an implementation-specific theory, as it deals with policy *change*, rather than explicit implementation, over time spans of a decade or more. It borrows elements of the bottom-up networking technique of Hjern and colleagues, discussed below as ‘implementation structures’, and starts from the identification of a policy subsystem, including identification of those actors indirectly involved. In turn, it borrows elements of the top-down models of e.g. Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) and Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), discussed further below, as they relate to concerns of behavioural constraints posited by socio-economic conditions and legal instruments (Sabatier, 2007a, p. 26).

The value of such a framework as the ACF to a study in the field of higher education might be the role of the policy subsystem, defined as those actors who “form a variety of public and private organisations who are actively concerned with a policy problem or issue, such as higher education” (Sabatier, 2007a, p. 27), ensuring that the broadest range of actors is taken into account, and not solely the commanding hierarchical structure. However, for this particular study, which focuses on a national policy of quality assurance, the ACF as “starting from a policy problem or subsystem – rather than a law or other policy decision” (Sabatier, 2007a, p. 26) becomes considerably less relevant and/or useful for developing an analytical framework for the study.

However, aspects of the ACF are helpful and pertinent when considering certain aspects of the policy process. For instance, the ACF emphasises policy-oriented learning, depicted as internal feedback loops, coupled with “increased

knowledge of the state of the problem parameters and factors affecting them” (Sabatier, 2007a, p. 30). Essentially, this policy-oriented learning can result in changes to the policy core or objectives. An interesting question might be to what extent policy-oriented learning takes place in the interactive process between formulation and implementation.

3.3. Policy implementation

Hill and Hupe (2002) provide an overview of the theoretical literature on policy implementation. They position the theoretical discussion as occurring pre-1970s, before the term *implementation* came into use (p. 18-40). They then discuss the literature on implementation, in the early 1970s (p. 41-84). The two primary schools that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, termed the top-down and bottom-up approaches, were the original theoretical dedications to what had previously been considered the missing link of policy - that is, the leap from formulation to outcomes.

The idea of implementation had of course existed before - but specific approaches to implementation studies began in the 1970s. In part, this may be due to the recognition through policy evaluation (see Easton, 1965) that often what was planned (policy formulation) did not happen (policy outcomes). The birth of 'implementation studies' is as much a change in the use of the concept as it is the birth of a truly new theoretical field (Hill & Hupe, 2002). Interestingly this is something seen again in the late 1990s, in the noted decline in implementation studies, as analysis became increasingly based on business language (Barrett, 2004).

Those conditions that may limit general applicability of theories of implementation include "variations between policy issues" and "variations between institutional contexts", suggesting that generalisations may be bound to specific national or political contexts (Hill & Hupe, 2002, p. 43). In this light, attention should be paid to the specific context of policies. Scholars have noted that the sheer difficulty in finding a cohesive implementation model may lie in the fact that generalisation as such is virtually impossible to achieve (Hill & Hupe, 2002). This gives rise to the notion that accounts and studies of

implementation must be context-specific, in order to have some generalised application, though necessarily bounded by a particular context. For example, implementation within particular sectors, such as higher education.

This difficulty in finding a cohesive model, or the limited ability to generalise about implementation in difficult contexts, may well be the reason for why, despite the aforementioned renewed interest this decade in implementation studies, attempts at creating a coherent synthesized theory of implementation during the 1990s and beyond have petered out. The contributions of Lester and Goggin (1998) have been criticised as having “no new theoretical syntheses and no programme of empirical research” (Sabatier, 2007a, p. 24), and Matland’s (1995) ambiguity-conflict model falls prey to nobody having “seriously applied Matland’s framework” (Sabatier, 2007a, p. 25). This criticism by Sabatier, however, must be taken with a grain of salt, as he firmly believes that only his Advocacy Coalition Framework is coherent, has been empirically tested, is constantly being developed, and is widely used.

The difference between the top-down and bottom-up approaches to implementation has been described in terms of three different usage contexts:

1. The most appropriate way to *describe* the implementation process.
2. The most appropriate *methodology* for implementation research.
3. The *normative* purpose of implementation research (Premfors, 1984, quoted in Gornitzka, Kyvik and Stensaker, 2007, p. 38).

In essence these differences centre on how one defines implementation, how one defines policy and/or the object of implementation, how success or failure is determined, and how best it is to accomplish policy/objectives through implementation. Debates of these definitions and characterisations are fundamental to the clashing top-down and bottom-up perspectives.

3.3.1. Top-down

As mentioned earlier, the top-down approach began with the seminal work *Implementation. How Great Expectations in Washington are Dashed in Oakland; Or, Why It’s Amazing That Federal Programs Work At All This Being A Saga Of The Economic Development Administration As Told By Two Sympathetic Observers*

Who Seek To Build Morals On A Foundation Of Ruined Hopes written by Pressman and Wildavsky (1973, 1984), considered by several scholars (including Parsons, 1995; Ryan, 1995) to be the 'founding fathers' of implementation research. They are considered to be part of the top-down school of implementation theorists, whose starting point is policy formulation, and implementation research then looks at the goals of the policy, and how they might be hard to achieve. The crux of their proposed model involves the idea of an "implementation chain", arguing that the more distant the cooperation between institutions required to work together to implement a policy, the more likely there are to be problems in implementation, thus introducing the term *implementation deficit* (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984).

In the second edition of the work, after Pressman's death, Wildavsky appears to distance himself somewhat from the original model, adding a new chapter, 'Implementation as Evolution', written with an Italian scholar, Majone. The original model has a very practical, rational approach: "policy sets goals; implementation research is concerned with considering what then makes the achievement of those goals difficult" (Hill & Hupe, 2002, p. 44) as stated above. However, this slight shift in the second edition seems to favour the idea that formulation and implementation are interactive parts of the policy process, and not simply logical first and second steps. This shift is significant, as a step towards the thinking that the policy process is highly interconnected.

Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) went a step further from the Pressman and Wildavsky model, putting forward a model based on the assumption that implementation is most likely to be successful when goal consensus of the policy is high and only marginal change is required (1975, p. 461). Of the six factors that Van Meter and Van Horn discuss, it is interesting to point out that of *characteristics* of the implementing agencies. This is important to bear in mind, specifically in higher education and the South African context, where various human resource constraints affect the ability to successfully implement higher education reforms.

What is interesting about their model is that arrows always point forward, from the policy and its standards and objectives, and resources, through to various variables, with the end result being performance, which one could call policy outcomes. There is a clear linearity between the policy goals (standards and objectives), leading to the various variables affecting implementation, to outputs.

Van Meter and Van Horn introduced their model in the 1970s, prior to the second edition of Pressman and Wildavsky's work in the early 1980s, and prior to the apparent shift in Wildavsky's thinking from the more rational, procedural steps, to an interaction between formulation and implementation. What is missing in a model such as the one put forth by Van Meter and Van Horn is some sort of feedback loop. Admittedly, Van Meter and Van Horn were creating a model to guide implementation studies, rather than prescribe implementation processes to actual policy practitioners. This model would have been strengthened by the role of a feedback loop, however formal or informal it might be. This would both acknowledge the interactive, non-linear nature of the policy process, and would also allow those practitioners utilising the model as some sort of guideline to look for ways to learn from the process.

The leap from the descriptive model of Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) to the prescriptive model of Sabatier and Mazmanian (1979, 1980) includes the crucial element of the feedback process (Sabatier, 1986, p. 22), yet still includes a clear distinction between policy formulation and implementation. Sabatier and Mazmanian's model borrowed, however, from Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), and from Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), in its list of six factors considered to be necessary for effective implementation. These are:

1. Clear and consistent objectives.
2. Adequate causal theory.
3. Implementation process legally structured to enhance compliance by implementing officials and target groups.
4. Committed and skilful implementing officials.
5. Support of interest groups and sovereigns over time.
6. Changes in socio-economic conditions, which do not substantially undermine political support or causal theory (Sabatier, 2007a, p. 19-20).

Sabatier and Mazmanian's model has been developing ever since it was first introduced in the late 1970s. The six factors, or variables, although clearly strictly top-down, are useful for consideration in an analytical framework, bearing in mind certain criticisms of the prescriptive model. These include that clear and consistent objectives are hard to achieve – particularly in a growing culture of negotiation in policymaking – and therefore the assessment of the effectiveness of a programme must be reconceptualised as encompassing a range of “acceptable values” (Sabatier, 2007a, p. 21).

Hogwood and Gunn (1984) share similarities with Sabatier and Mazmanian in that their top-down theorising is prescriptive and provides recommendations for policy makers. Their list of recommendations is guarded from a charge of idealism by admissions of that which is not possible, but they describe these recommendations as constituting 'perfect implementation', a concept borrowed from Hood's (1976) discussion of 'perfect administration' where availability of resources and political will would result in 'perfect implementation'. Setting forth a prescription for 'perfect implementation' to policy makers, while admitting that it cannot be attained, may seem fruitless and idealistic, but at least it provides policy makers and implementers alike with an ideal for which to strive. In addition to being prescriptive and useful for policy makers, the approach forwarded by Hogwood and Gunn (1984) is a useful analytical tool for those studying implementation as it provides a model of the situation being researched (Hill & Hupe, 2002).

3.3.2. Bottom-up

If Pressman and Wildavsky were the 'founding fathers' of the top-down approach, their bottom-up counterpart can be considered to be Lipsky (1980) who published *Street-level Bureaucracy. Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. He makes the argument that street-level bureaucrats necessarily enter the service tradition with some shred or semblance of idealism, but time, resources, pressure and other constraints put them in the position of having to create coping mechanisms. While on the one hand this contribution can be viewed as a testament to how hard it is to control the actions of street-level bureaucrats, the people on the ground actually carrying out policy goals, it is

more of a testament to how Lipsky views policy implementation, in terms of "street-level workers with high service ideals exercising discretion under intolerable pressures" (Hill & Hupe, 2002, p. 53).

This is where Lipsky's title of 'founding father' of the bottom-up approach may be well deserved. He provided a new research perspective, shifting away from a focus on top-down policy input, and looking at what actually happens at the implementation level, rather than what deficits occur.

Criticisms of the top-down models, forwarded by advocates of the bottom-up school, are invariably considered to be addressed by the models forwarded by the bottom-up scholars themselves. These include a focus that central decision makers neglect other actors, e.g. private sector, local officials, both in terms of policy implementation, and in terms of policy subversion/diversion, and that top-down models are hard to use in cases other than those focusing on a central piece of legislation (Sabatier, 2007a, p. 22).

Implementation structures, as discussed by Hjern and Porter (1981), are highly reminiscent of discussion of policy networks. While the implementation structures might be termed implementation networks, the difference lies in where the policy formulation takes place. The focus of Hjern and Porter is on field-level actors who are making decisions about implementation, whereas policy networks address the broader ideas of policy formulation. Ideologically one might be able to link the two, if one is to follow the argument that those at the bottom are the true policy makers, as they create policy through their (implementing) actions. However, this is not an argument that will be pursued here.

Another interesting feature of implementation structures is a concern with how it might be possible to improve accountability at the field or street-level - a concern voiced by Lipsky (1980) as well. Concerns with, and questions of, accountability in implementation are of interest in this study. Depending on the philosophical or practical stance taken on quality assurance, an agenda of accountability could lie at its heart.

Barrett and Fudge (1981) placed a particular emphasis on the concept of compromise as a likely prerequisite to action. They also speak of different modes of action. They see the link between policy and action as dynamically connected, suggesting that policy may undergo "interpretation and modification" and even "subversion" (1981, p. 251) by those actors involved in its implementation.

The problematic aspects of Barrett and Fudge's depiction of the policy-action continuum seem to be the rejection that policy formulation can be separated from implementation, therefore making it very difficult to demarcate the scope of any research on specific elements of the policy process. This does not mean that the anti-thesis involves subscribing to the somewhat outdated stages heuristic, as discussed earlier. It simply implies that their post-modernist view can be seen as an argument for policy research to be on a case-by-case basis, rather than to aim for more generalised theoretical approaches.

However, their emphasis on the constant political nature of the implementation process might simply be viewed as defining politics as a (far-reaching) variable in the implementation process, and that their emphasis on compromise in the implementation process suggests a feedback loop with those responsible for policy formulation, conceptualising implementation as negotiation and interaction. In essence, this potential feedback loop, the presence or lack thereof having been previously discussed, could insert a 'missing' element into the policy process as traditionally defined: that of policy *translation*. Therefore the process could be viewed as agenda setting, formulation, 'translation', implementation, and evaluation, where translation can be seen as dynamic, cooperative, and as assessment-in-action, looking at what works and/or how to make things work.

3.3.3. Network theory – and other approaches

The need for an approach to policy implementation, alternative to the top-down and bottom-up schools, is perhaps best captured in the words of Sabatier (2007b, p. 23) when he says "just as top-downers are in danger of overemphasising the importance of the centre vis-à-vis the periphery, bottom-uppers are likely to overemphasise the ability of the periphery to frustrate the

centre." This suggests the need for a more balanced perspective, where there is an attempt made to balance the role of the centre and the field periphery.

Scharpf (1978) developed ideas of policy networks in terms of their coordinating qualities. These ideas were later picked up by other scholars, suggesting that networks might 'solve' or reconcile Wilson's classic politics-administration dichotomy (1897), by bringing the state closer to civil society (Smith, 1993), picking up on Hjern's (1982) ideas that the elusive "implementation deficit" identified by Pressman and Wildavsky (1973, 1984) might be dealt with through developing networks, or communities, to collaborate on policy issues.

For instance, if a policy is being developed at the state (macro) level, the argument goes that there is less likely to be an implementation deficit, or more likely to be 'policy success', if stakeholders and actors from the actual implementing sectors are included in the policy formulation process. This brings about the desired continuity between the formulation and implementation of policy.

This more consultative or collaborative approach to policy implementation does not see policy "in terms of the realisation or non-realisation of hierarchically determined goals" (Hill & Hupe, 2002, p. 61), therefore shifting the emphasis from set goals that must be implemented, to what might even become less prescriptive policy formulation, resulting in less of an implementation 'deficit', or 'gap'. Criticism of what might at first strike one as an ideal solution to the problems of implementation include concerns with the interests of those who are not included in these policy networks or communities (see Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997). Nonetheless, network theory within implementation studies, as well as within broader ideas of the policy process (discussed above), gives a new way of looking at how formulation and implementation can be dealt with consultatively - though due to its very nature it complicates a clear distinction between those two elements of the policy process.

3.3.4. Lessons from the strategic management process

Mintzberg and Waters (1985) discuss the concept of strategy, and identify parts of the strategic process as intended, unrealised, deliberate, emergent and realised, as shown in Figure 1.

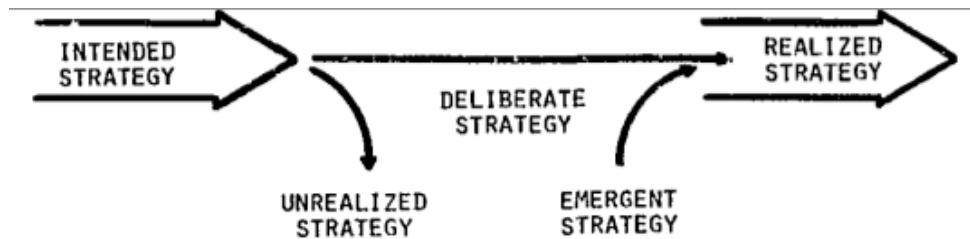


Figure 1: Strategic management process (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985).

Intended strategy is that which is articulated by the organisation at the start of the strategic process, in much the same manner as the formulation of a policy, prior to implementation. Deliberate strategy is what occurs on the path from intention to reality, which under 'perfect' conditions can form exactly as intended. However, Mintzberg and Waters posit that unrealised strategy is that part of the strategy that falls by the wayside during implementation, which could be an expression of deliberate or non-deliberate subversion. Unrealised strategy is then supplemented by emergent strategy, as that which emerges from the organisation itself, in response to the implementation of the intended strategy. This emergent response can be seen as the back and forth process occurring in the unclear boundaries between policy formulation and policy implementation. A strategy can be perfectly emergent if action is consistent over time, in the absence of a clearly intended strategy to deliberately guide actions through execution or implementation. This is strongly reminiscent of bottom-up conceptions of policy making. Mintzberg and Waters depict the eventual realised strategy as the end product, though in the case of a dynamic cycle this realised strategy is arguably re-evaluated or reformulated once more. Mintzberg and Waters' conceptualisation of the strategy process lends itself to an argument for a dynamic interpretation of the policy process as depicted in terms of policy stages.

3.4. Analytical framework

The emphasis of this study is to understand how centralised policymaking and localised activity interact in ways that hinder or support the policy process. A national policy of quality assurance was selected to serve as a common policy example in the interviews, yet more general musings during the interviews brought up examples of various different policies. To understand the interaction between centralised policymaking and localised activity, an understanding of the policy process in general is required, with a view to understanding the institutional response partly in terms of policy ‘translation’ or interpretation. Analysis of governance practices is guided by ideal types and combinations thereof. First, some thoughts on quality assurance are introduced.

3.4.1. Thoughts on quality assurance

O’Toole (2004) points to a fundamental normative difference between the top-down and bottom-up perspectives on implementation, when he asks:

Is implementation primarily a matter of assembling action in support of the intentions and orders of political leaders? Or of mobilizing the energies of disparate stakeholders to make sensible choices in congealing problem solving around a complex, context-specific, and dynamic policy issue? Does the practical question essentially focus on issues of compliance and monitoring? Or of innovation, collaboration, and creativity? To the extent that there are different positions on this matter, the relevance of apparent ‘knowledge’ regarding implementation is likely to be a matter in dispute. Further research will not solve such fundamental normative differences (p. 314).

Here, O’Toole links words like compliance and monitoring to the top-down school, and words like innovation and collaboration to the bottom-up school. It is not a great leap to seeing how the top-down bottom-up debate relates to the accountability-improvement debate within the quality assurance literature. Can the two co-exist? Are they on a continuum? Do they exist in parallel? Or, as Harvey and Newton contend, are they distinct dimensions of quality, with no intrinsic tension between them? (2007, p. 232). They point out that the “argument is that improvement comes from a change culture and local ownership, which compliance processes do not encourage” (2007, p. 231).

In the case of the South African higher education sector, which comprises 23 public universities, it is clear that quality assurance must serve a dual purpose: the institutions must be publicly accountable for the funds that they receive, yet

simultaneously they must continuously strive to improve their quality of teaching, learning and research. Tension arises when government steering makes accountability demands that affect an institution’s autonomy to determine their own institutional mission. It is not to say that an institution cannot continue to improve on its own terms, but it must also serve the public good, which in the South Africa situation extends the definition of quality from “fitness *for* purpose” to “fitness *of* purpose”, as well as. While the framework used for data analysis centres on policy theory, the links displayed in Table 3 will be explored as they emerge in the analysis.

Table 3: Purpose, mechanisms and spheres in quality assurance

Purpose of Quality Assurance	Accountability	Improvement
Implementing mechanisms	Compliance and monitoring through audit and accreditation	Development and collaboration through peer-review and self-evaluation
Sphere	External	Internal
Based on ...	Process	Content

3.4.2. Policy ‘translation’ in higher education

The discussion of Sabatier and Mazmanian’s Advocacy Coalition Framework included the idea of policy-oriented learning. Interestingly, Sabatier and Cerych’s (1986) work, *Great Expectations and Mixed Performance. The Implementation of Higher Education Reforms in Europe*, broadly considered to be the seminal contribution to the higher education policy implementation literature, they mention that “program reformulation may also be the product of a more subtle process involving cumulatively important changes largely imperceptible to people outside the implementing institutions” (p. 10). This understanding of programme reformulation can also be seen in light of policy change, that is, as original policy objectives are altered during the implementation process. A similar conception in the work of Barrett and Fudge (1981) is discussed above.

It appears to be broadly accepted in the literature that:

- 1) There is a ‘gap’ between policy formulation and policy implementation.
- 2) Some degree of policy change/subversion goes on at the implementation level.

-
- 3) There can be 'reformulation' at the implementation level, which does not necessarily qualify as a deliberate attempt to alter policy objectives.
 - 4) It is difficult/impossible, yet apparently analytically necessary, to make a clear distinction between policy formulation and policy implementation.

This begs the question: this 'gap' or 'missing link' between the two elements of the policy process should surely be considered *something* rather than nothing, or missing. Simply stated in the words of Majone and Wildavsky (1978)

"Implementation is evolution ... When we act to implement a policy, we change it" (p. 114). Therefore, it is proposed that this 'gap', or this change, between formulation and implementation be considered a period of *policy translation*, as briefly alluded to earlier. Policy translation can be understood in terms of an interactive, interpretative process.

This has been argued by Stensaker (2007), who uses the concept of *translation* in a discussion of higher education quality assurance, to define the "process that goes with move from the governmental, external outlook on quality assurance to the internal, management view" (Westerheijden, Stensaker & Joao Rosa, 2007, p. 6). They continue:

Translation suggests a more complicated process than the more traditional term of 'implementation'. Implementation suggests a linear, mechanical process of making commands happen, while translation has the image of an active process performed by an interpreter – and much may be lost in translation ... Successful translation is not just a matter of replacing a word from one language with a word from another, but also must take account of different grammar, syntax, and cultural nuances.

The latter term takes us from the design focus related to regulatory issues to how policies are translated into practice with increased attention paid to policy networks, policy communities, and policy styles ... it is not the design, but the *dynamics* of the policy translation process that is emphasised (Westerheijden, Stensaker & Joao Rosa, 2007, p. 6).

Stensaker's discussion of policy implementation is focused on higher education. He concedes the bottom-heavy characteristics of higher education institutions and their resistance to change, stating that it is "more the translation of quality that has been socially authorised than the idea of quality as such. Hence, potential resistance appears not to be directed against change as such, but against change that could affect the fundamental characteristics of higher education" (Stensaker, 2007, p. 113).

This period of policy translation is an overlapping period between formulation and implementation, and it is proposed that it should be considered part of a dynamic policy process.

The concept of translation is further supported by the understanding that in higher education “policy making and reform implementation tend to take place more and more in a network structure that replaces traditional bilateral relationships between the government and higher education institutions. Instead of looking at implementation process in the traditional (causal) way, implementation processes should be perceived as *interactive* processes” (Gornitzka, Kyvik & Stensaker, 2007, p. 53). This notion of interactivity not only contributes to the concept of translation but also points out the need for any analytical framework for implementation research to include an acknowledgement of and role for the dynamic aspect of the process.

Policy translation will be explored in the data to see to what extent there is an indication that in the response of higher education institutions to the implementation of a national policy there are examples on the one hand of policy formulation and policy implementation, and of policy translation. The latter should throw light on the institutional response in the policy process. One must bear in mind that translation will be dependent on such factors as the structure of national governance, interaction between government structures and institutions, and the nature of the policy. In short, the role and usefulness of the translation concept might depend on the context in which it is to be used.

3.4.3. Framework of governance

Gornitzka, Kogan and Amaral point out that “studies of implementation are not a dead-end enterprise but ... implementation as object of investigation does not necessarily have to be undertaken within a limited set of analytical frameworks. Implementation studies include a variety of frameworks that refer to conceptual developments more generally” (2007, p. 5). Bearing this in mind, any framework deemed useful for this study should build on an understanding of other theories, models or frameworks of the policy process in general and implementation in particular. In this sense, even a theoretical framework that focuses on

description rather than prescription is useful, as with a larger body of knowledge adhering to certain frameworks eventually prescriptive trends could be identified out of empirical studies.

Hill and Hupe (2002, p. 183-187) provide an analytical framework where they present three levels of action in terms of political-societal relations loci, in order to illustrate and categorise the different activities falling under the label of governance, shown in Table 4. Hill and Hupe point out that certain factors fall outside the framework, in what they term a ‘meta-locus’. These include economic and socio-cultural factors and institutional environments.

Hill and Hupe (2002) understand the constitutional, the directive and the operational to be three types of activities (levels of action), examples of which can be found in all three levels of political-societal relations. That is why at the macro level we see examples of constitutional activities (e.g. design of institutions), directive activities (e.g. policy formulation), and operational activities (management of policy processes). They base this categorisation on the work of Kiser and Ostrom (1982) who speak of ‘worlds of action’.

Table 4: Analytical framework: The three levels of governance

	Level of action			
		Constitutional	Directive	Operational
Locus in political-societal relations	Political-administrative system <i>Macro</i> <i>Policy setting</i>	Designing political and administrative institutions System design (e.g. inter-governmental relations)	Formulation and decision (designing legislation and policy statutes) Creating policy frameworks (e.g. institutionalising oversight)	Managing policy processes
	Institutional relations <i>Meso</i> <i>Institutional setting</i>	Systems maintenance	Designing and maintaining implementation trajectories	Managing inter-organizational relations
	Street level <i>Micro</i> <i>Micro-setting</i>	Designing local institutions	Designing local ‘implementation policies’	Managing external and internal contacts

(Adapted from Hill and Hupe, 2002, p. 183.)

Hill and Hupe (2002) also consider this framework to be a mapping of the stages heuristic of policy. This is perhaps clearest at the directive level of action where

we see formulation or design at the macro level, design and maintenance of implementation trajectories at the meso level, which could be seen as a sort of ‘policy translation’ level, down to the micro level where policies are implemented.

Hill and Hupe (2002, p. 186) build on the framework in Table 5, with a summary of characterisations of settings, in order to be able to tie specific characterisations of settings to defined modes of governance.

Table 5: Characterisation of settings

<i>Policy settings</i>			
Character of policy formulation	Distinct policy formulation	Framework policy formulation	Ongoing policy formulation
<i>Institutional settings</i>			
Character of inter-organizational relations	System of command	Marketplace	Network
<i>Micro-settings</i>			
Orientation	Rule application	Service	Consultation and consensus
Fitting label for mode of governance	Authority	Transaction	Persuasion

(Adapted from Hill and Hupe, 2002, p. 186.)

Each of the modes of governance fits a specific ‘action perspective’ which prescribes what sort of implementation management is applicable, at the operational level. The action perspectives are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Action perspectives

Authority	Enforcement perspective	Central to this is management via inputs	Chain
Transaction	Performance perspective	Management of outputs and compliance with output targets is central to this perspective.	Rope
Persuasion	Co-production perspective	Central to this is allowing participation of several actors, and managing outcomes, considering them to be shared results.	Woven thread

(Adapted from Hill and Hupe, 2002, p. 188-189.)

In essence, Hill and Hupe are seeking to map out elements of the stages heuristic, as well as conceptualise implementation in terms of operational governance. To

this end, the characterisation of settings and to some extent the action perspectives can be understood as part of the operational section of Table 4. Tables 4, 5 and 6 have been merged to map out the processes, shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Governance - synthesised analytical structure

	Constitutional	Directive	Level of action				
			Operational				
			Mode	Authority	Transaction	Persuasion (or Deliberation)	
			Perspective	Enforcement (via inputs)	Performance Management (via outputs)	Co-production (via outcomes as shared results)	
			Analogy	Chain	Rope	Woven Thread	
Locus in political-societal relations	Political-administrative system	Designing political and administrative institutions	Formulation and decision (designing legislation and policy statutes)	Managing policy processes	Making responsibilities explicit	Creating 'interfaces'	Making discretion explicit
	Policy setting	System design (e.g. inter-governmental relations)	Creating policy frameworks (e.g. institutionalising oversight)	<i>Character of policy formulation</i>	Distinct policy formulation	Framework policy formulation	Ongoing policy formulation
	Institutional relations	Systems maintenance	Designing and maintaining implementation trajectories	Managing inter-organizational relations	Creating clarity on tasks and competence	Enhancing contract compliance	Realising partnerships
	Institutional setting				Taking care of sufficient resources		
				<i>Character of inter-organizational relations</i>	System of command	Marketplace	Network
	Street level	Designing local institutions	Designing local 'implementation policies'	Managing external and internal contacts	Enhancing motivation and internalisation	Enhancing and maintaining service orientation	Enhancing professionalization
Micro-setting				Realising compliance to standard operating procedures	Rewarding target compliance	Institutionalising client participation	
				Leadership		Enhancing co-ordinated service delivery	
				Training on the job		Account management	
			<i>Orientation</i>	Rule application	Service	Consultation and consensus	

(Adapted from synthesis of tables presented by Hill and Hupe, 2002.)

The synthesis in Table 7: Governance - synthesised analytical structure is useful for understanding the characteristics of different modes of operational governance. It may however be cumbersome as a platform for analysis of qualitative data. As Stensaker points out:

Decades of research on implementation in higher education and elsewhere have shown us that implementation is not a simple linear process, but a highly complex, and sometimes even a paradoxical and contradictory, process. Using perspectives that can capture some of this complexity should therefore be prioritised in future studies in the sector (2007, p. 114).

A simpler model for exploring the dynamics of translation may allow for a more open analysis of the processes at work, and should allow for the effect of context.

3.4.4. Dynamic policy process framework

In a context of hybrid governance based on the ideology of cooperative governance, as discussed in the *South African context* chapter, it is relevant to understand the interplay that is over-simplified by the stages heuristic. As suggested above, the concept of policy translation is proposed as an addition to understanding the policy process. Translation continues in the institutional response to implementation – not only in terms of how the central administration has a role to play in the formulation itself or how it chooses to implement policy at the institutional level – but how lower levels of governance react to it. However, the stages heuristic must be updated in order to understand multi-level dynamics, interaction and feedback. The weakness? The model will still merely be descriptive. However, this may not be bad, as a descriptive model is analytically relevant, and arguably has more utility than attempts at a prescriptive model, given how wholly context-specific policy processes have been shown to be.

A framework for analytical case narratives of higher education policy formulation and implementation studies was presented by Enders, Jeliaskova, McGuinness and Maassen in 2003, with the goal of fulfilling two primary functions:

To ensure a common language of description and making sense of specific events.

To provide the basis for further learning and lesson drawing from specific cases to different contexts, situations and issues (Enders et al., 2003, p. 7).

The framework is based on the stages of the policy process, arguing that it is analytically possible to separate stages, despite blurring in practice. This too allows for a point of entry at any stage of the process, both in terms of research and in terms of process initiation. Like Hill and Hupe's framework above, it takes into account the context, viewing it as a potential field for causal explanations of the process. It also allows for both horizontal and vertical analysis of the process, and within vertical analysis it gives room for understanding a process both in terms of top-down and bottom-up perspectives. Essentially, the framework presented by Enders et al. (2003) captures the criteria set forth by Gornitzka, Kogan and Amaral (2007) earlier – that a variety of frameworks referring to conceptual developments more generally might be more relevant in implementation studies - but it could be applied to the entire policy process. The framework is shown in Figure 2.

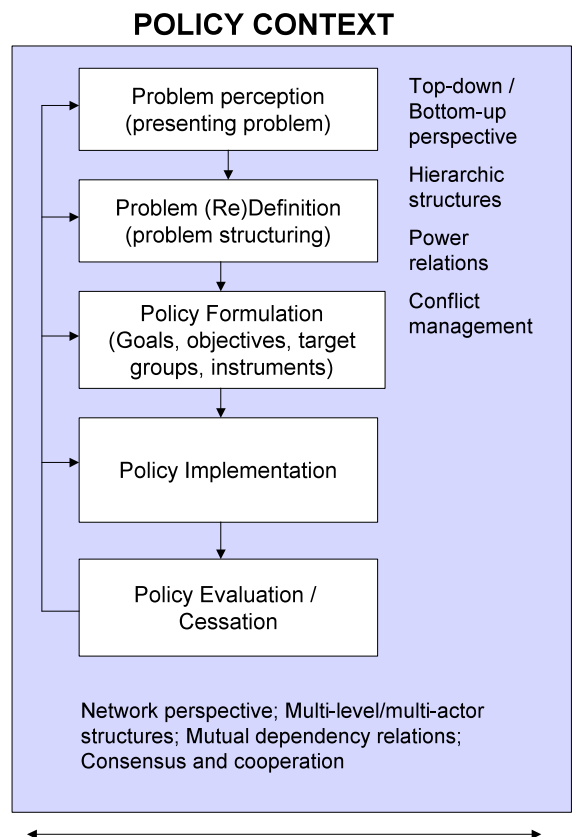


Figure 2: A conceptual framework for analytical case narratives of higher education policy formulation and implementation studies.

(From Enders et al., 2003, p. 8.)

The framework is presented within the context of governance shifts in higher education, specifically as they relate to policy implementation. Enders et al. (2003) catalogue the shift in higher education from top-down governance in the form of steering, towards more of a concern with the sector's unique characteristics. The traditionally bottom-heavy nature of the sector must be taken into account when considering implementation. Governance emphases have further shifted towards looking at the role of the state, and how in Western Europe the role of the state has changed in the last couple of decades, with the wave of new public management and increased market structures in higher education (Enders et al., 2007, p. 4-5). This particular governance shift manifested itself differently in the South African context. Market structures would not be in line with the attainment of transformational objectives in South Africa, and therefore any form of market governance would have to be supplemented with more direct state steering – something that Western Europe arguably shifted away from in the last couple of decades.

However, the context of governance shifts does include a focus on multi-level governance, where the policy process has multiple actors. This, too, is exemplified in the analytical framework presented by Hill and Hupe (see Tables 6, 7, and 8) where there is a concern with different levels of governance. Enders et al. (2003) also note that more attention is being given to the “organisational level in higher education and its role as a target and agent of change” (p. 6), which is precisely what this study aims to do - see the institution and its response and potential within the policy process. In addition to this, one argument for the selection of the stages heuristic as the basis for the framework is that it suits analysis of policies that are initiated from the top-down in a deliberate manner (2003, p. 16) and it takes into account the “actor's perspective” which focuses on how “actors deal with a policy problem at different stages of its tackling” (2003, p. 17). Both aspects suit this study, as it is based on a nationally initiated policy of quality assurance, and studies actors at different governance positions within higher education institutions.

It must be noted that the framework presented by Enders et al. is still under construction, as part of a larger project that looks to analyse higher education

policy processes in different parts of the world. Given that it is still at the developmental stage, it does not seem inappropriate to propose a further 'stage' into the framework itself - as this study seeks too, to consider the concept of policy translation when understanding the policy process and institutional responses. Some response activities might not fall strictly into the stage of implementation, yet when a policy has already been formally, nationally formulated and presented, one is left with something of a void, to understand how the policy changes when it is interpreted or translated by an institutional buffer before becoming part of the core activity of the institution, thus the framework with which this study works is shown in Figure 3.

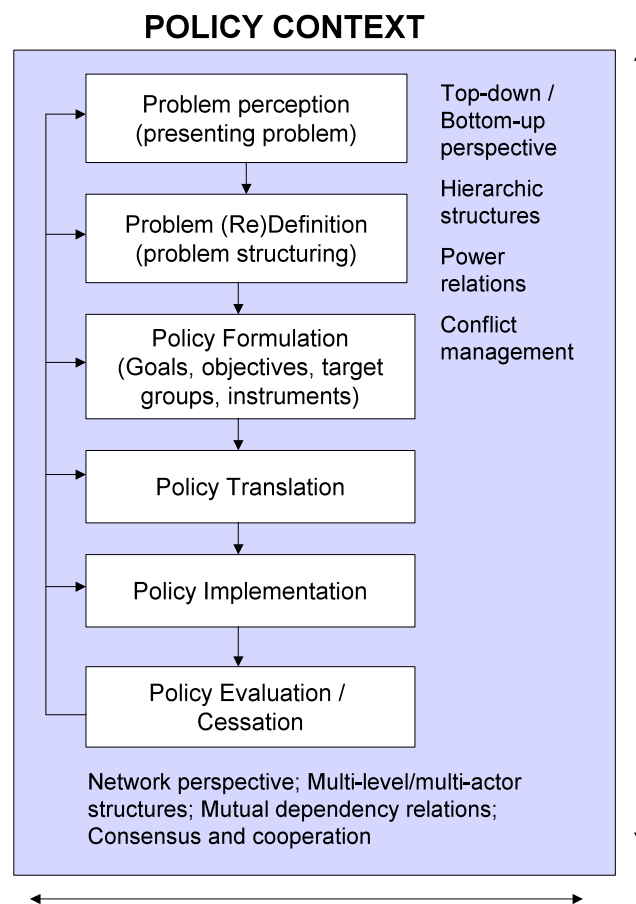


Figure 3: Adapted conceptual framework for analytical case narratives

(Based on Enders et al., 2003, p. 8.)

3.4.5. Analytical approach

While contextual aspects of the policy process are described separately in the *South African context* chapter, they will be considered during analysis of primary data, in order to see what sorts of links may be established.

It must be noted that with the addition of policy translation for understanding the policy process in higher education (in this study for a policy of quality assurance), that the traditional conception of policy outcomes or policy results, against which policy evaluation traditionally measures success or failure, must be considered in a different light. A qualitative analysis of the responses to quality assurance within higher education institutions necessarily will explore the translation elements of the policy, perhaps altering what might have been viewed as desirable outcomes. Placed within a context of cooperative, or even hybrid governance, such as that which exists in South African higher education, broad frameworks and interpretable or translatable policy definitions dominate the higher education quality assurance landscape.

This study does not attempt to determine the success or failure of the implementation of a national policy of quality assurance, as it focuses on a moment in time, within a shifting understanding of success or failure. Criticisms of previous implementation studies have suggested that analysis over too short a period “affects the validity of conclusions concerning success or failure” and therefore such conclusions are explicitly avoided in this study (Gornitzka, Kogan & Amaral, 2007, p. 4). Nonetheless, one can consider to what extent implementation is considered to have been secured, and at what level of governance full understanding and participation in the implementation programme is desirable. This is particularly relevant as academics are notorious for being resolutely inflexible when facing change (Gornitzka, Kogan & Amaral, 2007, p. 11). Only when understanding the role of the institutional response in the policy process, and to what extent implementation has taken place, and within what sort of an understanding of the policy, can one begin to assess the fate of a policy.

In light of the above I propose to do the following for my analysis of primary data:

- Allow for emergent themes and trends, through open coding, as will be discussed in the *Method* chapter.
- Discuss emergent themes and trends in terms of the conceptual governance framework, synthesised above, originally presented by Hill and Hupe (2002).
- Seek to relate relevant concepts of governance and implementation to quality assurance, particularly as it links with traditional notions of top-down and bottom-up implementation.
- Place this discussion within an understanding of the dynamic nature of the policy process, as presented in the framework by Enders et al. (2003).
- Not least, attempt to usefully conceptualise policy translation as part of the policy process.

4. Method

The research asks the question: How does centralised policymaking and localised activity interact in ways that hinder or support the policy process? Furthermore: What is the relationship between the policy process and governance in South African higher education? The study focuses on the responses of two higher education institutions to a national policy of quality assurance.

4.1. Philosophical underpinnings

The philosophical basis for this study is one of pragmatism. Pragmatism concerns itself with “what works” and focuses on finding solutions to problems (Creswell, 2004, p. 11). The researcher is concerned with how institutional responses to policy implementation affect or determine the success or outcomes of implementation. In this study, the problem lies in the potential for the classic ‘gap’ or ‘deficit’ between policy formulation and implementation, and the research aims to understand forces at work aiding or hindering implementation. An understanding of the dynamics of the particular policy process may contribute to an understanding of how best to ensure effective implementation of a policy, and how it might be desirable to influence an institution’s response to a policy.

4.2. Research design

4.2.1. Comparative study

This study is designed as a comparative case study, which traditionally focuses on a particular issue within more than one case (Flick, 2006, p. 142). The comparative aspect is necessary in order to begin to answer the research question, with a view to outcomes being relevant at other institutions. The data will be analysed in terms of themes where similarities and differences between participants are identified, structured in terms of governance position. Data for the study are derived from two sources: documentary analysis to gain an

overview of the political and institutional context and extensive interviews with key individuals at different layers of institutional governance.

4.2.2. Selection of institutions

As discussed in the *South African context* chapter, the two institutions correspond to each other roughly in terms of student body and faculty spread, though differing, e.g. in terms of history, language and culture.

4.2.3. Participant selection

The interviewees at the two different institutions correspond to each other in terms of position in institutional governance. Selection of interview participants was based on two features: institutional governance position, and availability/willingness to be interviewed. To this end representatives of the different governance positions, as shown in Table 8, were contacted. Those responding positively were interviewed. The total number of positive responses was 33 and the total number of negative responses was 13. After completion of all interviews two interviewees were dropped from the data set due to lack of exposure and/or experience with the subject being studied. However, the participants contacted were not specifically selected on the basis of age, gender, race, experience or other criteria, with the goal being as random a sample of participants within each governance layer as possible. A more purposeful sampling would have been appropriate if background were to play a role in analysis. However, for this study the focus was on the position, and potential commonalities amongst those in the same position.

Table 8: Interview respondents

Governance position	Institution A	Institution B
Central administration	3	2
Academic development and research	1	2
Dean (Faculty level)	3	4
Chair/Head (Department level)	8	8
Total	15	16

After transcription and preliminary analysis, a decision was made to not include responses by department heads/chairs in the results of this thesis, but rather to allow such responses to form an independent project down the road.

4.2.4. Interview framework

Interviews were structured around a framework of themes and questions, which varied depending on the governance position of the individual being interviewed. The manner in which the interviews were carried out meant that the interview framework was half-open or semi-structured. Interview questions/themes were as follows:

Background information:

How long working at institution?

How long in current position?

Size of faculty/department? (office staff – students)

General implementation questions:

Role in institutional implementation

- How active in implementing institutional strategy/vision?
- Role in governance policy process (planning, formulating, implementing, evaluating)
 - Institutional policy-making
 - Faculty-level policy-making
- Where does the real/perceived power to implement lie?
 - At the institutional level
 - At the faculty level
- Challenges with implementation?
 - Successes – what works
 - Failures/problems – what doesn't

Quality specific questions:

HEQC institutional audits

- What level of involvement in audit process?
- How aware of quality assurance systems w/in institution?
- How active in monitoring quality/progress?
- Level of support from central administration?
- Any knowledge of mid-cycle report?

Implementing quality assurance systems in higher education

- View of quality assurance systems (continuous)
 - versus
- View of quality audits (one-time)
- Experience of tension between academic life/higher education and quality assurance?

4.2.5. Documentary analysis

The *South African context* chapter reviewed documentary data pertaining to the study, such as legislation and policy documents, as well as reviewing quality assurance as it currently is defined and implemented within the South African context. This review of secondary data was intended to provide context rather than in-depth analysis.

4.2.6. Design limitations

The ideal pragmatic approach to address the research problem would have arguably been a mixed methods sequential exploratory design. The mixed methods sequential exploratory design is a two-phased design. During the first phase qualitative interviews could be gathered from key figures in the two academic institutions. Preliminary analysis of the qualitative data would then be carried out, with the intended result of an emergent theory. During the second phase themes identified during preliminary analysis of the interviews would be figured into a quantitative questionnaire distributed to approximately 10 higher education institutions. The rationale for this research method would be to identify important themes emerging from the qualitative data, which could then be tested and studied through gathering of quantitative data.

However, the qualitative emphasis in the study as carried out allows the researcher to look for an emergent theory, based on the argument forwarded in the theoretical chapter that not all Western-based literature is necessarily directly applicable to the Southern African context. Based on the outcomes of in-depth analysis of over 20 interviews the emergence of a framework, or trend, should be identified, which can be assessed quantitatively in an independent study. Due to the study being carried out within the constraints of time and resources efficiency was a strong determinate of the research design and research method.

4.3. Data collection

Data was collected through qualitative interviews. Interviewing was the suitable data collection procedure given the nature of the topic. It allowed for the researcher to control to the interview agenda to a large degree, ensuring

responses to and discussions of specific themes, yet having the freedom to follow-up on points of interest raised.

4.3.1. Preparation of interviews, planning

A preliminary investigation was carried out in November 2007. The focus was the relationship between policy and practice within higher education transformation in South Africa. The preliminary study was based on interviews with two actors within the higher education arena in South Africa, both based at the University of Cape Town, one from the Centre for Higher Education Development, the other a professor from the Faculty of Humanities.

The outcomes of the preliminary study highlighted problems within policy implementation in South African higher education, as well as raising points relating to quality criteria and assessment. In light of this a topic for further research was identified and refined.

The researcher was familiar with the broad overview of quality assurance in South African higher education prior to carrying out interviews at the two higher education institutions. The researcher had also reviewed executive summaries of reports on external audits of the quality assurance systems at each of the two institutions. The reports referred in part to self-assessment portfolios prepared by the institutions. This allowed the researcher some level of understanding of internal processes prior to carrying out the interviews.

4.3.2. Interview technique

When emailing prospective participants in order to set up interviews a brief description of the project was included in the email, in addition to which an offer to send the prospective participant a copy of the research proposal was included. Some participants requested a copy of the research proposal. Once a positive response was received and the interview was scheduled, participants were offered to receive a copy of the interview framework ahead of time. Some participants requested this. It did not appear to make a difference to the interview, whether they had or had not had the questions ahead of time.

During the interviews the researcher would on occasion repeat back to the participant a summary of what they had said in order to ensure understanding of

the point. While the interviewer did not sum up at the end, she did consistently ask if there was anything else the participant wanted to share that had not been asked about. In most circumstances participants would begin to say that they thought everything had been covered, but would usually add a brief point, emphasising something they had previously said, or a new point tied to some part of the discussion. The interviewer made a point of not interrupting participants, and giving a moment's pause prior to moving on after a participant had completed their answer. This was in order to ensure that the participant's train of thought was derailed as little as possible.

4.3.3. Interview settings

Interviews were carried out face-to-face in the offices of the participants, although the option of phone or email interviews was presented when first seeking an audience with prospective participants. Interviews ranged between 30-90 minutes, depending on the respondent's level of experience and engagement. The vast majority of the interviews were around 60 minutes in length. All interviews were recorded on a dictaphone, after receiving consent from the participants.

4.3.4. Transcription

Transcription of interviews was partly carried out by the researcher, and partly by a transcription service provider. However, all transcripts were checked for accuracy prior to formal analysis.

4.3.5. Data collection limitations

The limitations of carrying out interviews with these particular participants was that some had the advantage of speaking their first language, while the interview was necessarily conducted in the second language of other participants. Therefore, challenges with articulation and understanding might have had some effect on the data gathered. An attempt was made to combat the potential for anomalies amongst participants by ensuring a broad range of participants, particularly at the Dean and Head/Chair level, thus intending to make anomalies more apparent.

4.4. Data analysis

4.4.1. Coding

Open coding was employed for the first stage of data analysis. Coding was first tied to paragraphs and/or sections of the data that responded to specific questions. After initial coding the codes were grouped into logical categories in order to highlight relevance to the research topic (see Flick, 2006, p. 297-300).

4.4.2. Reduction of data – summaries of interviews

Each interview was separately coded, categorised, and key themes identified, prior to establishing themes across interviews.

4.4.3. Themes

Once broad categories of codes were identified, and themes within interviews were identified, the emerging cross-interview themes were used to describe and contrast perspectives between interviews.

4.4.4. Validation

While generalisability and reliability are less important issues in qualitative research, validation becomes paramount to ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of data (Creswell, 2004, p. 195-196).

The strategies deployed to ensure validation of data in this study were the use of thick descriptions when giving examples of themes in the findings. At the same time, the presentation of discrepancies in the data were emphasised, so as to give the reader an understanding that not all perspectives cohered with another.

4.5. Ethical issues

4.5.1. Confidentiality

Confidentiality of recordings and full transcripts was promised, as was anonymity in terms of data analysis. Participants, if specifically identified in relation to segments of text, are identified as from Institution A or B, and as their respective governance position. Therefore, their institution does still not identify those participants who were perhaps lone representatives of a governance position.

4.5.2. Permission

Prior to interviews commencing, permission was requested to record interviews. In all instances permission was granted, though in most cases the participant requested not to be directly quoted. However, as anonymity was already considered a given in the research process this was never a problem.

4.5.3. Role of the researcher

The researcher comes from a dual background of political science and strategic management. In terms of political science, the research has placed a particular emphasis on the political process model within social movement theory, focusing on the South African context. The coupling of political science and strategic management lead to a combined interest in public administration and policy sciences, that is, an interest in how things get done in the public sector.

An understanding of broad concepts of the policy process, an academic background in strategic management and familiarity with institutional processes allowed the researcher to establish credibility with interviewees. The interviewees seemed quite relaxed, perhaps because the researcher was a graduate student and was going through a learning experience. The goal of the interviews was one of learning, and as they were carried out in an educational setting this made for perhaps a greater willingness to impart information.

5. Results

The results sections are structured in such a manner as to give a comparative and contrasting insight into the different layers of institutional governance that were researched. As explained in the *Method* chapter interviews were taken with heads or chairs of departments, deans, central administration and academic development. Responses of the department heads/chairs will not be analysed and presented in the results chapters. The combination of the responses of the other three groups should provide insight into the institutional responses to a national policy of quality assurance, as well as giving details on institutional governance and the policy process. To this end, the results chapters are divided by institutional governance layer, where respondents are categorised in terms of institution A or institution B. The results chapters will start at the top, and work down, like this:

- Central administration
- Academic development and research as a supporting function
- Faculty level, as the operational unit of the universities.

Within each individual results section findings are presented at three settings, in accordance with the framework of governance presented earlier. The *Policy setting* looks at results relating to the political-administrative system, the *Institutional setting* looks at institutional relations, and the *Micro setting* looks at the street level, and that which occurs within institutions forming the response that is communicated between institutions, like this:

- Policy setting - Political-administrative system
- Institutional setting - Institutional relations
- Micro setting - Street level

The main weight of the quality assurance discussion relates to the institutional and micro level, and is situated accordingly. As is the case with the policy process itself, it is difficult to clearly delineate between the institutional and micro settings. Operations at the micro level form responses at the institutional level.

In light of this, the decision on where to situate discussion of certain results that is at what level is partly influenced by the particular governance layer being analysed. The central administration and academic development are inevitably more centre-focused within their institutions, and are therefore likely to be considering the institutional setting, and inter-institutional relations. Conversely, faculties as operational units of the university are more likely to consider the micro setting in their responses, and how those results may travel “up” to the centre. Each *Results* section includes a summary.

5.1. Central administration

Respondents from within the central administration were situated within the institutional planning units of both universities, and within the senior leadership. They are identified as the ‘central administration’ broadly, referred to as Administrator A1, B1, etc. Emerging themes raised specific features of the functions of units responsible for institutional planning in both institutions, as well as the relationship between institutional planning units and academic development and research units.

5.1.1. Policy setting – Political-administrative system

5.1.1.1. Policy process

Perspectives of the policy process, as exemplified by those working in central administration, reflected an overall consultative policy making process nationally, an increasing stability in the sector after a period of rapid policy reform, despite which some uncertainties were rearing their head.

Ongoing policy formulation

Two of the central administration respondents at institution A made statements reflective of the idea of ongoing policy formulation, occurring in a consultative manner. The existence of a consultative policy making culture in the national context was exemplified in comments made by Administrator A3:

Okay, so new policies. There tends to be quite a consultative culture nationally in fact. ... So if it's something in the offing, it will mostly have two or three iterations through the different universities who will then take it through their constituencies and then formulate a response, which is, we hope, taken into account and then, you know, there will be another iteration so usually when something hits us and then it's an actual, like a formulated or Gazetted, sort of policy and we've had two or three sort of the - sights of it.

... So it's very seldom that it's something come out completely out of the blue and blindsides, you think "Oh, my gosh, what is this?" - Administrator A3

The consultative approach to policy making is also ensured within the system, in the sense that the Department of Education seeks consultation from the Council on Higher Education on policy matters:

First of all they [DoE] have to consult with the council of higher education, it's a statutory obligation. And that consultation would be via the - via the vice chancellors but it will come through - essentially through regulations ... So you see it coming through major acts of legislation but they don't come all that often for the simple reason that the central government department is very weak in terms of staff and expertise, there are very few people in the division. - Administrator A1

Policy making at the national level, in the political-administrative system, is of an ongoing, consultative nature, in the manner of the 'cooperative' governance which the government defined for itself as its chosen approach to governance. In practice this would suggest aspects of a persuasion, or deliberation, mode of governance, in terms of the ideal types, at the national level. This more consultative approach to policy making has the potential to lead to more widely accepted formulation of policies. This notion of more specific formulation was supported by respondents at both institutions. In terms of general policies, Administrator B1 said that "...many of these are quite clear on where in the institution it's responded to." In terms of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework in particular, Administrator A3 said "...you realize that actually it's pretty well defined so there's not much room for manoeuvre."

These responses suggest that by the time the final policy comes along there is not much leeway in terms of the institutional response. While this might raise the issue of there being a top-down steering, this must be viewed in the context of the consultative policy making discussed above. It is therefore quite possible that clarity in the implementation of a national policy framework is the result of some interaction earlier in the policy process - and that the *translation* of the policy may well take place before the final formulation is complete, thus enhancing the dynamism of the process.

Stability

A shift from what appeared to be policy overload, during the initial reform years of the higher education system in South Africa, to an increased stability in the

sector, may too be the result of deliberated policies. The rapid reform within the system was described by Administrator B1, who said that "... at some point government had about 32 different initiatives and simultaneously they introduced the quality system, a qualification system, a new funding formula and enrolment planning and what not." Administrator B1 described these "major initiatives" as "quite ambitious and not very realistic".

The question of political leadership was quite important in terms of increasing stability in the system. Administrator B1 described the previous Minister of Education as "a bit of a hyperactive person", but that the current Minister is "much more stable" and has focused on consolidating, going on to say that "...in some areas there's more stability. The whole area of the quality assurance system and accreditation, that's fairly settled now, and institutional audit that runs, so there is a system."

However, new initiatives appear to be bringing some uncertainty into the process again, which may cause problems with institutional autonomy:

...student fees, the minister is, and I think that in fact has already indicated, she's going to move into this field to restrict the increases, annual increases in student fees. Yeah that's a really important thing, yeah, as far as the autonomy of institutions are also concerned. So we don't know what to expect but it doesn't look good, that's the one thing that is problematic at present. – Administrator B2

Steering

Closely related to conceptions of institutional autonomy is the extent to which the government attempts to steer the higher education system, and the manner in which it attempts to do so. In accordance with the White Paper on Higher Education the government intends to steer the national coordinated higher education system in South Africa through three mechanisms: funding, planning and quality assurance. Certain aspects of government steering were identified in the data, including a trend towards *ad hoc* approaches in use of steering mechanisms.

Ad hoc policy remedies

Perceived irregularities in the South African higher education policy process were noticed as the lines between the central government steering and

provincial government blurred. An overall perception of the *ad hoc* manner in which government operated was noted by both Administrator B1 and B2:

So it becomes more complicated as government tries to respond to specific needs here and there and wherever. ... It's not coherent. ... It's, I wouldn't say haphazard but it's, it's *ad hoc* in a certain sense. There's a need and then government will jump on it and do all kinds of special things to respond to that need. – Administrator B1

Unfortunately in my view, the funding system needs some maintenance, it needs some ... revision, because it is becoming a very *ad hoc* system. You know every new problem you want to deal with, you allocate some funds and then someone decides how these funds will be distributed and you're moving actually farther and farther away from the actual formula because the formula need to be very, it needs to be a blind process that you don't look at specific problems at specific universities, at specific institutions. – Administrator B2

This *ad hoc* approach to problem solving experienced by respondents at institution B is distinctly in contradiction with ideas of the authority mode of governance – which should reflect a model of state steering through specific instruments. Indeed, *ad hoc* approaches are not compatible with any of the identified modes of governance, as they are an anomaly in what should otherwise be a rational process. Indeed, it is quite in contrast with observations on increased state steering:

Yeah, we've seen an increase in state - ... we've seen an increase in state steering systematically since 1997, because 1997 was also the passing of the South African Higher Education Act. And if you look at the subsequent years that act has been amended virtually every year ... And the amendments [to the HE act] have been overwhelmingly to tighten the state steering mechanism and those have included the right of the Ministry of Education to intervene in individual institutions. ... So it's a steering approach that's got - that's become more and more evident over the past decade. – Administrator A1

When it comes to whether institutions have autonomy, whether the state has a centralized higher education system, and whether there's autonomy for institutions, that's quite a debate. That's changed. – Administrator B2

However, looking closely at what is being said, the amendments that have included the right to “intervene in individual institutions”, while increasing steering, also have the potential to increase actions that may be perceived as *ad hoc* to other institutions. While strong steering of the system might seem to be in contrast with *ad hoc* remedies, an increased steering capacity, or mandate, of the government may just result in a less transparent structure.

Part of the national steering of the system through funding takes place in a consultative manner, reflecting the ideal of cooperative governance adopted by

the government, as described by Administrator B2, who said the government uses the funding formula to steer the system, but that it is done in consultation with institutions. This too may contribute to why less transparency and more *ad hoc* funding solutions are seen in a negative light.

Complex context

The South African higher education system, as established in the *South African context* chapter, is based on a complicated past. The increase in state steering may be better understood with a view to the past:

It's complex. It's difficult to say it's like this or like that. It's complex in the sense that there are all kinds of factors. Sometimes, it is, and sometimes not. - Administrator B1

Within the historical context of the South African higher education system certain institutions were under very centralized control, while others enjoyed more traditional aspects of academic freedom. The previously disadvantaged institutions may in fact have gained autonomy in the current system, although the legislation, with increased capacity, allows for significantly stronger steering:

So you could also say that those Universities have in actual fact gained a great deal of autonomy within the state's steering because previously they were state controlled. - Administrator A1

Which is possibly - I mean one way of looking at that is to see that as relatively sinister, in a sense that that could come in. But the other thing that of course you also know is that in order to contextualize what's happened since 1997 you've got to see it in the longer context of South African higher education as a whole because at the time of the first democratic election in 1994, the South African higher education system was such a comprehensive mess and so very peculiar that there wasn't anything like it anywhere else in the world. So there's no way we could have carried on with what was inherited from the 80s, no way at all. And the inheritance from the 80s was - that while the formerly white universities ... had a great deal of autonomy, the universities that were designated for black students had no autonomy at all, they were just extensions of the government. - Administrator A1

Adding to the increased steering potential of government is the highly politicized nature of the higher education system:

I don't know whether higher education is not politicized in your country but it's highly politicized in our country. - Administrator B2

The Vice-Chancellors, they have this organization, HESA [Higher Education South Africa], where they all get together, but every now and then they blow up and this group want to walk out and then this and that so it's quite a politicized affair. It got entangled now in national politics, party politics. It's actually quite a messy thing at the moment. - Administrator B1

Due to historical inequalities in the system. funding too becomes more complicated, as a one-size-fits-all approach may not work in order to bring all institutions to a more equal ground:

So there is a need for special government intervention to make sure that they just have a basic standard of facilities. So that's why I say its complex. One cannot say that this type of institution simply benefits and the other one not. - Administrator B1

It is a difficult balance to strike, as the government distances itself from a highly uneven past system. Increased steering allows for better control over redress efforts. However, coming to terms with the needs of individual institutions also reflects the government's ideal of cooperative governance, with a centrally coordinated yet differentiated system. It is almost possible to conceptualise the system in terms of cooperative steering, which encompasses the *coordinated yet differentiated*.

Uncertainty with funding

The balance between steering a system and allowing for some level of institutional autonomy does beg the question how implementation may be successfully secured. One must pursue a certain line in order for results to be obtained. It is therefore surprising that funding, employed by government as a form of steering, should bring uncertainty to the system, rather than clarity:

See it now in the institution we experience that as a factor of uncertainty. We're supposed to have a national agreed upon formula in terms of which government will fund the institutions but instead of using that formula consistently every year government adds a little special thing there, and a little special thing there. So the total block is shrinking and these specialized allocations are – there is proliferation there and it's difficult in an institution to, how to respond to all of this and how to play that game and make sure we will get all of the funds. – Administrator B1

Administrator B2 concurred, describing the situation as “very, very negative”, in particular by those institutions that do not receive any of the additional funds. The system was characterized as being in play between central steering and individual autonomy.

I think - I mean our national policy tracks back to the 1997 white paper on higher education which is still - still remains the only government statement, and I mean, South African Universities are in interesting play between central steering and individual autonomy. So, on the one hand there's a discourse at [Institution A] which would say that we're an independent institution and we make our own policy rather than national policy. - Administrator A1

In short, the higher education policy process at the macro level in South Africa is characterised by an ideal of cooperative governance, within a context of increased state steering. Any uncertainty or lack of transparency may be seen as *ad hoc* remedial actions, but are perhaps more usefully understood as an attempt on the government's part to balance cooperative governance with steering, and autonomy with redress measures.

5.1.1.2. Quality Assurance Policy

In terms of quality assurance policy, the responses of participants were heavily focused on the institutional setting, and how the institution responds upwards, as well as downwards. It therefore makes sense to place the main discussion on central administration perspectives of quality assurance policy within the institutional setting.

5.1.2. Institutional setting - Institutional relations

5.1.2.1. Policy Process

The members of the central administration of institution B suggested that inter-organizational relations are fairly active and operate well. This is suggestive of the persuasion mode of governance, characterized by networking, and the realization of partnerships. This was, amongst others, illustrated through coordinated responses to national initiatives:

You see that is typically, is a good example of where the institutions, people in similar positions like us would talk to one another and share information and we prepare documentation and we - quite often we respond to documents and quite often we generate documents, policy documents. - Administrator B1

I think a crucial word is also networking. ... I think quite a lot of us have quite a lot of networks, I still have some that are becoming less and less. ... So I think it's important to actually sort of have those networks going also with the other institutions because they heard something and they just phone you and say "Are you aware of this? This is going to happen and are you ready for that?" That sort of stuff. Like for instance the whole problem with the student fees, that the department and the treasury is developing a system to sort of put a lid on the increase in student fees from year to year. - Administrator B2

...when it comes to the policy stuff, there are I would say, group of five or six of us who are very closely in contact, and also with government people and CHE and HEQC people. - Administrator B1

Responses suggest that the institution is given an opportunity to participate in the national policy process. Prior to the finalized formulation of a national policy, institutions are given the chance to be a part of the policy making process.

Well I think there are different aspects, the first is that if a national policy relates to our particular area of work. Then one of our first roles would be to facilitate a process of engagement around a draft policy. So all of the HEQC policies for example were initially circulated as drafts. And so we would have then been responsible for coordinating comments on those policies, which we've done on numerous occasions, and we do that with other policies as well. - Administrator A2

The policy process in the institutional setting, in terms of national policies, suggested a response at the institutional level, where central administration tries to find ways in which to make the policies their own, after their final formulation.

And I think the reality is that within institutions, they're always looking to see how they can tweak it, you know, to sort of minimize the work that might be involved or the impact internally but you tend to find that they - I find increasingly more specific and more carefully formulated and it's - it actually doesn't allow you too much leeway in what you can and can't do and then, you know, the other thing is there's a sort of ... it's like a spirit or an acting in good faith. - Administrator A3

This participative policymaking is understood to be carried out in good faith at Institution A. After initial participation in draft policies, the implementation of the final policy respects the intentions of the policy makers.

So for example, higher education, the HEQF, the qualifications framework. There is definitely an intent there and you find individuals and universities trying to say 'Oh, but we can do it like this, you know, we can" but we try not to do that, you know, we try to act sort of in good faith and we just put the thing together and we have collaborated in the process of putting it together. - Administrator A3

This ongoing policy formulation during the making of the policy is suggestive of a persuasion mode of governance. However, given that the directive should be clear once the making is complete it becomes important at the institutional level to ensure compliance within the formulated policy framework. Institutional ownership of the response and implementation process becomes increasingly important for successful implementation.

Institutional ownership

The importance of institutional ownership of the response to, and implementation of, national policies was underlined, though clearly the responses varied:

I mean mostly key national policy documents would be tabled at the senate executive committee, so that's at a leadership level. But one's not sure about the extent to which people really engage with those policies and take ownership of them. But from a policy point of view, it's important that they know about them and that they do take some kind of ownership of, but again the degree of ownership may vary depending on the policy. - Administrator A2

It was suggested, too, that the government has in turn responded to institutional responses to national initiatives, by altering them over time. This suggestion of ongoing policy formulation within the policy setting should make for a networked approach to implementation at the institutional level, as was suggested earlier in this section on the policy process.

So it's been quite interesting because that's something we report on to the Ministry of Education and it's - determines how much money we get for foundation funding ... and I've actually seen the requirements change quite dramatically over three years and what they asked for this year was sort of a fraction of the detail that they wanted in the previous year simply because they must have realised this is sticking, it's not just giving any... I think they're going to go back to the drawing board in fact and re-look at it. - Administrator A3

Implementation and autonomy

Despite persuasion, or deliberation, trends in governance, the manner in which institutional autonomy is balanced with being a publicly funded institution is more indicative of a transaction mode of governance.

And that sort of celebrated in terms of the notion of academic freedom and institutional autonomy and in fact university autonomy is actually enshrined in our constitution as a principle. But then on the other hand of course we're a public institution that couldn't survive without public funding, which we receive through subsidies for our research and also for our teaching. So it's an interesting tension as to how a national policy is played out within the institution. - Administrator A1

A transaction mode of governance would suggest that the implementation of the policy might be accomplished through enhancing compliance of institutions to broad policy frameworks. As the term suggests, broad policy frameworks allow for some flexibility in the institutional implementation of the policy, but the implementation must nonetheless be kept within the demarcated boundaries. Respondents suggested that when something is to be interpreted and implemented an attempt is always made to do so through existing structures:

Well most of these things will come in to the university through the Vice-Chancellor's office and his office manager will send it to who, he thinks the key people are. If there's already an existing structure within the university, some sort of working group, where it fits well, then it will - it will go through them. So we try to use whatever structures and not to create too many *ad hoc* working groups where possible so it generally works like that. - Administrator A3

There's a finance department so they will deal with certain issues. There are quality assurance unit which will deal with certain issues. But the coordination of all of this and to get a grip on all of this and how it hangs together, it's obviously at an institutional level, it must be interpreted, and there must be coherence in the institutional response to all of this. ... management would look at us and say "There's this new thing from government, can you help us to interpret it?" - Administrator B1

Policy translation

The development of the implementation strategy at the institutional level appears to be in the form of policy interpretation - or policy translation, as discussed in the *Theoretical approach* chapter - which becomes possible through the implementation of broad policy frameworks, rather than distinct policies:

And then once a policy is formally adopted, yes then we look at that policy and look at trying to develop an implementation strategy, which would involve extracting implications for us as an institution and then looking at how we would address those. - Administrator A2

The central administration functions as the interpretation mechanism of the institution, and the interpretation of the policy could just as well be understood as the institutional translation of it:

Last week I spent the morning in parliament where in a new bill was being discussed, so to be part or to know, to be ok, to know what's going on there, and on the one hand we have this function, you have the ministry and the department sitting up there doing all kinds of things and you need an interpretation mechanism between that and the institution, so a lot of that is done. - Administrator B1

This is further discussed in the micro setting, as it pertains to how units within the institution function. This also raises questions of shielding, or the central administration acting as a buffer between external demands and internal activities.

Consultative process

Policy interpretation was described as a consultative process, cascading through the entire institution. This appears to be necessary because while the central administration is the translation mechanism for national policies coming into the institution, it is not able to implement policies by itself, but requires the consultation and buy-in of the operational levels of governance.

And the reporting requirements, you know, are done, so that's why the institutional planning department has a very good institutional information unit which deals with all of those sorts of things, but then the - where there are implications - those implications would then be interpreted and understood by the institutional planning department and they then be taken to the faculty boards and if necessary to the senate too, for

discussions. So the institutional planning department has a facilitating role, it's not - it doesn't really have the right to execute those new policy implications. - Administrator A1

After policy translation takes place, mediation to the institution or filtering of the policy to the relevant institutional layers takes place. Therefore, the central administration is seen as playing the role not only of policy translation, that is, translating how the policy makes sense to the institution, but then also to mediate this translation to the rest of the institution:

We filter, basically see ourselves as agents who mediate policy within the Institution. ... And we would, depending on the policy, we would handle it very differently. But mostly we try and identify people who are the appropriate people in the faculties who would really need to know what that policy is and what the major implications are for them and... - Administrator A2

And people like me see ourselves as providing this interpretive interface so that we do speak to the external forces, we interpret it, but we also understand the institutional contexts and communicate the institutional contexts to them, so we play this mediating role. - Administrator B1

The policy process, from the national to the institutional level, does appear to be dynamic, rather than adhering to the typically top-down conception of policy. As is the case with the participative policy making (discussed above), so too, once a policy has been passed, should there be reason to react to it rather than implement it, then that bottom-up response to the policy falls to the central administration as well.

Well we take issues up, it goes back the other way, I mean where something seems to be unreasonable then the responsibility of the institutional planning department is to make representations to the Department of Education. - Administrator A1

There appears to be, at the national and institutional levels, a cooperative approach to the policy process and governance. The institutional governance itself though may vary in terms of internal affairs, and may not reflect all the modes of governance found at the higher levels of the system. Before looking at the micro setting, quality assurance at the institutional setting will be discussed.

5.1.2.2. *Quality assurance*

The implementation of a national policy of quality assurance, as expressed through a variety of different public documents, was inevitably affected by the response of the higher education institutions. Within the institutional setting, respondents from the central administration of institutions A and B identified a number of factors important to them in terms of quality assurance.

Institutional ownership

One respondent at institution A placed a weight on institutional ownership of the HEQC audit process and improvement plan. Administrator A1 said that a lot of work was put into preparing the communication chain within the institution, as they “wanted to ensure institutional ownership of it”. Administrator A1 also said it was important that the process allowed for dissent, and that an attempt was made to “be as inclusive as possible”, with a particular emphasis on the inclusion of academic staff. The result of these guiding tenets was the ownership of the self-review and the quality improvement plan:

So we - it had already become a university document before it was actually submitted to the HEQC, so we owned it in that sense, it was ours before it ever went in to them ... it's our plan and not their plan. In the sense that it is the university quality improvement plan so its - and its deliberate that its our plan and not the HEQC's external plan. - Administrator A1

The respondent stated further that:

...we emphasized all the way through that there wasn't going to be an institutional position, so we weren't afraid of dissenting voices. ... And we didn't seek to present an institutional line, so we allowed there to be dissent in it. - Administrator A1

Administrator B1 expressed a similar sentiment, conceding that institutional ownership does not mean institutional unification:

There isn't such a thing as a unified institutional voice on such a controversial issue so some people would say 'Yeah, it's not strong enough in this way, it's not strong enough in that way'. - Administrator B1

A second respondent at Institution A suggested that when invited to participate in the process of preparing the self-review there was a general lack of voluntary participation. Calls for responses and involvement were made through newsletters and through working with associations.

...we had certain, quite, fairly open ended questions where we invited comments, we didn't get a lot of input through any of those sources. - Administrator A2

In addition, the author's interviews with lower levels of governance at both institutions suggested a lack of awareness of the respective improvement plans, and indeed in some instances that the plans were perceived as an administrative plan. In response to this Administrator A1 suggested that was due to the lower levels not having “read it properly”. Therefore, despite claims of institutional ownership and attempts to include several parties, there still appears to be a lack

of clear communication of the quality improvement vision. This may also be attributed to lack of voluntary participation by those who were not driving the process, but who were invited to respond to it. What also became apparent in the responses of central administration respondents was the conscious decision to shield academics from a lot of the preparatory legwork - perhaps with adverse effects.

The preparatory work for the HEQC audit was primarily carried out and coordinated by the central administration in both institutions. As stated above, there appeared to be mixed awareness of the audit, and participation by parties other than those directly responsible was on a voluntary basis. This approach to managing the process could be described as shielding. Respondents at both institutions said that academics were shielded from the process:

We - our approach was to try and not to involve academics if not really necessary. - Administrator B1

When we were busy working on compiling our self-review. From what I remember, we were actually told to leave the academics alone as much as possible. - Administrator A3

... the approach that we took was to try and shield the academic staff as much as possible, so. Most of the donkey work, assembling the evidence and the documents and so on. Then the actual writing of the - what we call the situational analysis in relation to the Institutional criteria, were done either by [Academic Development Unit] or admin type staff. - Administrator A2

This shielding was followed by opening up the draft of the self-evaluation report at the two institutions to comments:

We put together a first draft of the self evaluation report, we worked with people in the support units and we finished the project as far as we could and then we send it out for comments from many different people. - Administrator B1

So in a way, it was shielding them and then - suddenly, they were all invited to look at it and so they were aware of it then but, you know, from what I recall, it was received in a very positive way which might have been different if they'd had more of the burden then on the other hand this sort of absorption, you know, putting it into their thinking and planning might have been deeper. - Administrator A3

The challenge with the way in which this process presents itself is that to ensure motivation and compliance, an authority mode of governance is ideal. However, this does not fit with traditional ideals of academic collegiality - where the persuasion mode of governance may be seen to better describe academic debate and consensus building.

Indeed, this dilemma was further supported by the third respondent within the central administration at Institution A, suggesting that the problem lies in both how individuals perceive the quality assurance process, as well as how aware they are of it:

I think very mixed. I think mixed awareness, you know, there'll be people who say, 'Oh, HEQC, but we've been reviewed,' you know, whereas others are far more aware of it as a process and understand that, and the same with regard to the sort of - sort of work burden versus benefit issue. And you see the same in the academic review, is that we do, which, you know, obviously, you know, we are aligned to the HEQC. There - certain areas where people see it as a real opportunity to look at what they're doing critically and take their area forward whereas others are quite negative about it, you know, this is just a huge burden and it's eating into my research time and so it's, you know, I really couldn't say that there's any one set of awareness' or ... perceptions. - Administrator A3

Administrator A1 further underlined that full exposure is needed for successful implementation, saying “the execution of it is going to rest overwhelmingly in the academic departments” as they are the operational units. Administrator A1 identified that part of the problem is the autonomy of the faculties, saying that it is “actually quite difficult to reach beyond the deans into the heads of department, it's one of the challenges of having a high degree of faculty autonomy”. In essence, this would suggest that due to the institutional structure a lot of the power to implement lies with the deans of the faculties.

Only if the deans exercise that because that's the filtering situation, so the leadership needs to come from the deans to take it seriously. - Administrator A1

The concept of filtering, and the power of the deans, was further explored in interviews with them at both institutions, the results of which will be discussed in a separate chapter focusing on the faculty level.

Defining quality

As discussed earlier, in the *South African context* chapter, quality, as defined by higher education legislation in South Africa, as well as other public documents, is a combination of *fitness for purpose* and *fitness of purpose*. These two concepts encompass transformation imperatives and an institution's ability to achieve them, amongst other things.

The discussion with Administrator A1 included discussing a definition of quality, and how appropriate this understanding of quality is for the country.

... fitness for purpose essentially leaves you free to define you own purpose. But in a country like South Africa it's not clear to me if that's actually, in the national interest, I mean you've got a relatively small higher education system, relatively low levels of participation, huge persistent inequality. ... So I would not - I would tend to think that there is work to be done in reconciling fitness for purpose with fitness of purpose, that wouldn't be a popular view of course. - Administrator A1

Later stating that “fitness for purpose is good for the institution but probably not good for the country” (Administrator A1)

Quality assurance tends to be driven by a mixture of process and content.

Administrator A1 summarised this perspective of quality:

So first of all we define our own purpose and then we get evaluated against what we say we are, and then entirely it's process driven, do you have in place the right processes for external examination or not - whether or not the external examiners say the courses are good or bad. I think the way the two things come together though is that some of the processes themselves determine the quality of the content. - Administrator A1

Administrator A1 suggested that “...if you've got an appropriate system for dealing with external examiners reports it will include a process that makes sure that the external examiner reports are satisfactory.”

The fine balance between process and content within quality assurance was also discussed at other levels of governance. As mentioned in the *Analytical framework* section the process component of quality assurance can be easily related to external mechanisms such as audit, whereas the content component can be seen in light of internal mechanisms such as self-review.

External mechanisms

Within an institution structured on devolution implementation of any initiative can be seen to be challenged by autonomous units. As discussed above, the leadership role of autonomous units becomes increasingly important if the institution is to adopt an initiative comprehensively. While the central administration may be fairly reliant on lower levels, such as faculties, for the implementation of institutional initiatives, it is harder to argue with external requirements made of the institution. If used wisely, external quality assurance measures could be used as a lever for change:

I think it [the relationship between internal and external quality assurance] is absolutely crucial. I mean, if you don't have, you know, external quality assurance for a person in my position [external quality assurance] is absolutely invaluable because it allows me to use it as a lever for change... within the institution. And I just don't believe quality

assurance is taken seriously unless there is external public interest audit. You know, you just - it just doesn't work. - Administrator A1

Further adding:

... and it's very difficult for people in leadership positions to impose anything so you need the external agency to hold the institution to account. ... Unless there is an external audit and unless it is basically done in a public interest basis. - Administrator A1

Internal mechanisms

While the HEQC audit marked the beginning of external quality assurance mechanisms for institutions as a whole, internal mechanisms, such as departmental reviews, appear to have been regular features at the institutions for quite some time. There was suggestion by both Administrator A3 and Administrator B1 that the central administration provides support to departments who are going through a review, particularly in terms of preparing the self-evaluation portfolio. Administrator B1 stated:

... whenever there are programme evaluations or departmental evaluations, they obviously need a lot of institutional information which is provided then from the same environment. A lot of energy goes into the annual review of programmes - Administrator B1

The devolved structure of the institutions, as mentioned earlier, can have a substantial impact on the implementation of quality assurance systems. Administrator A2 deemed internal quality assurance systems to be "very devolved" although there are "minimum policy requirements" which must be adhered to. Administrator A2 also said "it's obviously correct and appropriate that things are contextualised. The specifics and different contexts are taken into account and Deans need to have the authority to adapt things." This would suggest that internal to the institution a transaction mode of governance exists, where management via outputs, which are in this case the minimum policy requirements, give the deans a fair degree of autonomy within a certain broad frame. The danger, in terms of being able to implement initiatives, would lie in governance becoming too liberalised. Administrator A2 also underlined the importance of strong leadership, saying that "...if you don't have that buy-in at the top that says this is a thing that we throughout the Institution really need to be using ... It will happen unevenly depending on the individual's commitments."

Devolution presents a challenge in terms of exposure to the quality assurance systems. Administrator A1 suggested this to be a particular challenge in “an institution like this ... where the hierarchy works down through the system.”

The question then becomes how is it possible for the central administration to affect change? It would appear that in a bottom-heavy organisational structure, such as universities tend to be, change can only successfully be implemented from the bottom-up, unless there is strong transformative leadership, or a change in organisational structure. Administrator A1 mentioned two routes that are used. The first is through academic development, particularly in terms of new staff and their adapting to the institution. The second is through finding “your best people” and using “all those sorts of mechanisms to persuade people to come with you”. This would suggest that, for ‘buy-in’ to be successful, key figures - that is the “best people” - need to be onboard, and staff need to be trained appropriately from the start. There too was a concession that “you’ve actually got to have quite strong central mechanisms of control” in a “transforming environment” like that of South Africa. Administrator A1 suggested that committees could work as implementers, saying they “can be quite effective ways of keeping issues alive and pushing things along.”

Administrator A1 went on to further suggest that ensuring compliance, a necessary feature, might require sanctions. Weak internal accountability mechanisms meant that heads of operational units, such as departments, would not be sanctioned for not following through the plan. Administrator A1 said that “...unless you’ve got some effective sort of internal sanction mechanism it’s not really going to work”. However, this desire for stronger compliance is in contradiction with the devolved institutional structure.

Perception, purpose, outcome

Administrator B1 described a collegial and non-interfering perception of the HEQC audit process. Administrator B1 said the audit was not seen as:

... external interference. Some thought, ah, it’s nonsense but some would per definition feel like that, and that depends on how the HEQC does it and they were very careful to come in collegial, consultative, careful. Sometimes some of the auditors did overstep a little bit but mostly they were very careful not to interfere in a crude manner but rather to work in a collegial manner. - Administrator B1

Such an approach would be crucial to building a positive perception of the entire quality assurance initiative. Administrator A1 also had a positive response:

... so that [audit] I think worked very well. So I think, you know, monitoring success and performance has worked well. - Administrator A1

However, Administrator A1 went on to suggest that the follow-up from the audit process was not necessarily as successful:

Yeah, at the time we were very successful, whether we've been sufficiently successful in getting people to follow up on the quality improvement plan is a different issue. - Administrator A1

The positive perception may also have related to how the process was carried out. The majority of the workload at Institution A appears to have been placed on the administration, where consultative processes were built in, "to get the input of academics" - Administrator A2. The HEQC audit was seen by the administration as the start of the quality assurance process, and indeed, Administrator A1 went so far as to say that "the only value in an audit is - the audit visit - and the audit report - is the start of the process, not the end of the process."

The purpose of the HEQC audit, as expressed by Administrator B1, was about management and systems processes:

But then you must remember that the auditors are not concerned in the first place with the academic processes, they are [concerned] with the management processes ... It's not intended to be academic process; it's a management process, system process. - Administrator B1

Administrator A1 brought into the discussion the developmental purpose of the audit, yet also conceded the process-focus, versus content-focus, of the audit:

Because the purpose of an audit in our system is developmental and engagement with the institution, so if you don't start off with very effective communication mechanisms, the exercise is simply an exercise in bureaucracy. - Administrator A1

... the audit is entirely about process and the audit of course is entirely about how we define our own sense, sense of purpose. - Administrator A1

Essentially, here we see the potentially conflicting notions of improvement and accountability coming forth. Improvement would relate to the developmental notion of the audit, whereas accountability would be more aligned with a focus

on management and system processes. Administrator A3 recognised both as potential purposes of the audit:

We are accountable for the way we use public funds and for our clients and stakeholders, whoever they may be, so that's the one side of it but certainly we see the benefits and, you know, how this, the exercise can be used to improve the student experience and what it is we're doing. - Administrator A3

Strategic alignment

There is a desire for institutional autonomy and a certain amount of unease with the prospect of increased steering through quality assurance, as it might be seen as giving in to government demands, thus sacrificing institutional independence:

The institution feels quite strongly about being seen as just jumping in response to external pressures, and you would find the same sentiment at Wits and [Institution A], the older universities. It's the old Victorian classical model of the university, which is autonomous collegian of academics. Who are not happy to be seen as stooges of government or just doing what we've been told. We'll decide what we do. - Administrator B1

I think that the South African system is primarily one of state steering and the steering is largely done through funding, and through the approval of qualifications and then increasingly will probably be done through quality assurance mechanisms. So it's quite an uneasy relationship at [Institution A]. - Administrator A1

This strong desire for institutional autonomy was further illustrated through the preparation for the HEQC audit, discussed in some detail earlier, and the formulation of an improvement plan in response to the audit report. The institutions are also required to monitor their improvements, in order to be able to submit a mid-cycle report to the HEQC. At Institution B Administrator B1 described the full integration of the improvement plan, prepared in response to the HEQC audit report, into the university's existing strategic framework, in order to ensure institutional ownership.

So we don't run it as a separate thing. It's fully, fully integrated and we feel quite strongly about that, if you don't do it like that, we don't even use separate names, we wouldn't say "This is a project in [Faculty X] and that part of it is in response to the HEQC." We'd simply say "This is the projects and plans of [Faculty X] and this is their reporting on what they do in their faculty." That's it and then from the totality of reporting, we then, can cut and paste and put it in another frame as response to the audit report. - Administrator B1

Administrator B1 further explained the integration of HEQC recommendations into the institutional plan:

... We said the whole HEQC thing must be fully incorporated in terms of our own planning and all of it. So last year when we worked on our normal institutional plans we just made sure that we included the stuff from the HEQC. ... It's built into the normal

institutional process and at the moment we have a monitoring process. We've asked the different line managers and the deans to report on those aspects of their plans which speak specifically to this. So we can see where they are ... - Administrator B1

What this tells us is that at the lower levels, and operational levels, of governance there should be no perception that there are two sets of plans: institutional and response. There should only be an awareness of one strategic plan for the entire institution. Administrator A2 at Institution A similarly said that the current strategic framework for the institution was based on a merger of high-level strategic objectives and plans with the institution's quality improvement plan. Administrator A2 further went on to say that the plan:

... allocates accountabilities. So most of it lies with the Deans and they then have to report on it once a year. It's very devolved, virtually no co-ordination at a central level, the only time it's picked up at the central level ... is the annual progress reports meetings. - Administrator A2

The HEQC audit was taken to be one factor influencing policy review at Institution B:

... the audit, is one of the factors why we continuously reconsider our policies. We went through a major process last year and towards the end of the year, we changed the policy. - Administrator B1

This integration should ideally further the institutional ownership of the process, moving forward from the audit to the implementation of improvements.

5.1.3. Micro setting - Street level

5.1.3.1. Policy translation

As discussed within the institutional setting, the role of the central administration and particularly the departments responsible for institutional planning includes policy translation, or mediation, or interpretation. This translation role also affects how such departments function within the institution, and not only in inter-organisational relations.

Within Institution B the translation function was described in terms of interpretation and development of, and response to, policies and initiatives:

We're not in the first place here necessarily specialists in all the different fields, it depends on what the initiative is and where it is but the first entry into the institution, the first level of *interpretation* and the decision where to put the response is... is facilitated from here. - Administrator B1 [emphasis added]

There's a sort of a buffer between the department and the institution as far as policy is concerned. ... the knowledge about the policy and the implication of the policy and the development of policies actually is located in this section. - Administrator B2

Within Institution A the translation function was tied to the generation of administrative and/or bureaucratic work, as well as to the concept of interpretation.

... a lot of people out there would say I think that [department responsible for institutional planning] generates the bureaucracy which is probably unfair because they are really just a *translating* mechanism but yes, I mean, I think we could do better at protecting people against the weight of bureaucracy, here... I mean it's very difficult to manage - I mean, it also goes down to how effective your information systems are, you know, so we try. We don't necessarily get that right, so I think one of the biggest challenges is the simple weight of bureaucracy. - Administrator A1 [emphasis added]

... and it is quite a lot in the sort of development process, some that's being Gazetted and some of it is still to be implemented so things like the higher education qualifications framework and the classification of disciplines, those sorts of things come to this department and our role is often an *interpretive* one. - Administrator A3 [emphasis added]

This furthers the argument for including policy translation in a revised depiction of the policy process, a component that should be understood to include the interpreting and mediation of a policy, both prior to and after the commencement of implementation. It is this dynamic feature of the policy process, as suggested by Enders et al. (2003) that allows some overlap between components.

5.1.3.2. Governance

Discussion of university governance raised several interesting topics, including centralization, devolution and shielding, as well as prompting thoughts on the roles of departments responsible for institutional planning, departments responsible for academic development and/or research, and how the relationship between the two is governed.

Centralisation and devolution

Respondents at Institution B described the administration in the university as a fairly strong "centralized system" (Administrator B2), in particular "when it comes to information" (Administrator B1). In terms of the financial distribution process, the authority of the deans was emphasised, "so in that sense, it's more decentralised" (Administrator B1). In conclusion, Administrator B1 said that it

wasn't "a purely centralized management system, or purely decentralized, this is a mixed model".

At Institution A, Administrator A2 supported this, explaining that "...you can't just have a central steer because people will resist, you've got to find ways of building ownership, building commitment, etc." suggesting an awareness of the challenges faced by devolution.

Respondents at both institutions reflected on devolution, in terms of collegiality, the extent to which the institution is devolved, and how such a structure may affect the flow of communication:

... we try to work quite collegially within the institution. - Administrator B1

...the faculties are not like separate colleges or independent units, in that sense, it's a very well coordinated system but collegial. - Administrator B1

I think devolution in this place has gone far too far, that's my personal view. - Administrator A2

...it depends on who the Dean is. If there is a Dean who is passionate about X then that Dean, ... would make sure that those kinds of things are addressed in his or her faculty, they all make sure that the minimum standards, which are agreed centrally are addressed. But that does mean if you have a particular strategy ... some faculties could just ignore it completely and nothing would happen to them. ... That is the nature of the devolution. - Administrator A2

...we've assumed that things filter down to a far greater extent than they actually do so, you know, one might assume that - giving a presentation to all of the deans, they would then feed information to the HODs and we've actually found - it really doesn't happen. So I think we're sort of more changing - changing the way we do things ... So it's interesting and that's sort of communication flows in a big institution of any kind I would think. - Administrator A3

A mixed model of governance within the institution can be conceptualised as a combination of the authority and persuasion modes of governance. While certain things have strong central steering (authority) others are so highly devolved that convincing operational units to implement something becomes a game of consultation and consensus, as tends to be the case with collegiality (persuasion/deliberation). This sort of a governance model, and the problems that may ensue, is not unique to these two universities but can safely be said to be common amongst higher education institutions.

In Institution B there was some discussion of shielding of academic departments. This did not relate directly to a discussion of quality assurance, but rather to

general implementation and governance activities. When asked whether they sometimes shield from the deans or if they are always involved, Administrator B1 said sometimes central administration shields from the deans as well as department heads:

Sometimes, whenever we can, we try to do the things and just inform them, not with the purpose of keeping information away from the deans but with the purpose of not burdening them with stuff that's not really... - Administrator B1

Administrator B1 further elaborated on the communication chain in terms of shielding:

Deans are quite protective of their heads of department, so we try not to ever communicate directly to the department heads, we would usually, through the line managers, communicate to the dean and then request the dean to talk to the people in the faculty. ... any new initiative, the route would be advise to the rector to one of these people who would then talk to the deans and ask them to inform the others. So shield is the word to use sometimes, we shield the stuff because we want the academics to concentrate on the academics so we shield quite a lot of stuff. - Administrator B1

UADR and DIP

During the course of the interviews with members of the central administration the role of units responsible for academic development and/or research (hereafter referred to as UADR) was discussed, as well as the role of departments responsible for institutional planning (hereafter referred to as DIP), within each university. In addition, the relationship between the two was raised, to shed some light on how each may contribute to implementation, and how they collaborate.

When asked whether the DIP, in terms of its role, focused on enforcement or development and support, the response of Administrator B1 was that “it’s a mix”, saying, “to interpret and provide strategic advice to management, whether to do this or not to do this or how to do this and so forth, so the unit is mixed between.” In general, if the DIP were to provide support to an academic unit in preparation for a review, the faculties would accept such support, with the exception of one or two.

In terms of policy, according to Administrator B1, the UADR does not get involved unless the issue is directly related to support or staff development. Administrator B2 explained that UADR would also only contribute to “implementation of the policy” if it were “institutional policy but not national

policy". Administrator B1 concurred, saying the DIP would "interpret it and then ... they [UADR] will be involved in the implementation".

Administrator A2 emphasised the compliance and accountability aspects of their role, saying "we have accountability for making sure that people adhere to certain national requirements when it comes to the submission of applications for new programs", in contrast with the ADR who were described as "involved in more developmental side working with staff". Administrator A2 reiterated the point, saying "we have to ensure that the compliance side is addressed."

However, Administrator A1 did point out that there is some tension, as DIP "doesn't want to see itself as the police force." In fact, the DIP "seeks to protect the faculties and the deans from unnecessary bureaucracy". Administrator A3 supported this, explaining that the role of the DIP, as has previously been brought up, often lies "in interpretation", and communicating new initiatives to the university community, in part through "a lot of presentation work". This tension could arise from the fact that the UADR, as described by Administrator A1, would view itself as a "development agency" and an "enabler", but not as a "regulator", and there can hardly be two units both involved in development.

The ideal relationship, as Administrator A1 described it, would be that the DIP "should highlight through information, particular areas of the problem which need attention" and then the role of UADR would be to "provide the remedy". Administrator A3 concurred, saying "we're sort of two parts of a whole", so while UADR views their role as "being very developmental" the DIP views theirs as being "more on the management and implementation side." Despite the UADR potentially viewing themselves as "developmental", Administrator A2 pointed out that the philosophy of the DIP is "embedded within a developmental approach, although we obviously are more responsible for some of the compliance aspects", which UADR "wouldn't be responsible for."

Reflecting on how the roles of the two different types of departments are described by members of the central administration show interesting results in terms of governance. It is evident that the compliance and accountability aspects of the DIP would place such departments within the authority mode of

governance, while the UADR would more likely be located within the persuasion mode of governance. This is a balance we have come across before. What is of further interest, although in a sense quite logical, is that the DIP display management functions at the institutional setting, whereas the description of how the UADR may function is within the micro setting. This shall be borne in mind when the responses of members of the UADR are discussed in the next chapter.

5.1.4. Summary of results

Results from the central administration focused heavily on general policy process and governance issues within the institution, and between the institutional and national levels. Quality assurance was discussed primarily at the institutional level, which is in accordance with seeking to understand the institutional response to it.

Policy setting. Analysis of results from the central administration within the policy setting highlighted the ideal of cooperative governance, as was the original intention of the new government, functioning within a context of state steering. In terms of operational governance, there appears to be a persuasion mode in terms of ongoing policy making, unfortunately destabilised to some extent by *ad hoc* remedies.

Institutional setting. Analysis of results focusing on the institutional setting reinforced the argument made earlier, in the *Theoretical approach* chapter and *Analytical framework* section, that the policy process must be viewed as dynamic, and the insertion of *policy translation* is not without good cause.

The need for stronger central steering in order to more successfully implement initiatives was in contradiction with the devolved structure of the institutions. In terms of quality assurance this was in some sense overcome by aligning the initiative with the institutions' strategic frameworks, thus encouraging institutional ownership of any change process that was to occur. The external mechanisms of quality assurance did provide central administration with some leverage and authority to drive through quality assurance measures, but without buy-in they would become exercises in compliance rather than development.

Micro setting. The concept of *policy translation* was further examined at the micro level, as one of the functions of the departments responsible for institutional planning within the universities. Street-level discussion and analysis of governance within the institution looked at issues of centralisation versus devolution, a topic also visited at the institutional setting. The role of centrally located departments, those responsible for academic development and research, and those responsible for institutional planning, was discussed. Results suggest that despite the desire for a developmental approach from the DIP, there is inevitably more of an accountability and compliance focus in their work, versus the more enabling, developmental focus that the UADR can allow themselves.

5.2. Academic development and research units

Interviews with members of units responsible for academic development and research addressed both broad institutional policy issues, as well as looking at micro-level governance, and the units' relationships with departments of institutional planning. Findings showed strong views on the developmental approach required by academic development and research units, with the accountability emphasis falling more to the part of institutional planning. Respondents are identified as Developer A1, B1, etc.

5.2.1. National setting

Results pertaining purely to the national setting were virtually non-existent, and therefore are not discussed and categorised in the same manner as the other settings. However, a description of the rapid and extensive changes that have been happening in South African higher education policy did provide some insight into what might be resistance to new initiatives:

I think that one of the points about South African higher education is that we were cushioned from real world pressures, international pressures, way beyond most countries because of the apartheid set up. It isolated us in all sorts of ways. So this had to be a, big demand for readjustment here. It's happened very quickly and has disturbed people. So it's partly, what people have called, a change fatigue, it is so much. Including all the social change, particularly for, you know, this is a white middle class world still. In terms of the staff. So it's that group, if you like, that has felt most battered by change. - Developer A1

Findings primarily addressed issues falling under the institutional and micro settings.

5.2.2. Institutional setting

5.2.2.1. Policy process

Developer A1 displayed a great awareness of needing top-down initiatives from the national level for use as leverage at the institutional level, saying “there’s got to be ... some top-down” although conceding that “top-down by itself is not enough”. Institutional initiatives have an increased chance of getting going if they are mirrored in national initiatives.

The institutional policy process, as described by respondent Developer B1, reflected the devolved structure of the institution and how best to implement an initiative, describing the use of policy frameworks with “broad guidelines and requirements” that give faculties the freedom to “adapt to their particular situations”, making provisions for the differing departments within faculties. Framework policy formulation is characteristic of a transaction mode of governance - somewhere between strong hierarchy (authority) and strong autonomy (persuasion).

Policy translation

The role of policy translation was discussed earlier in results from respondents of the central administration. Policy translation was also alluded to by ADR respondents at Institution B.

In terms of the role of ADR units, policy translation was taken a step further, as bolstering the development of “university policies to fit in with national requirements” (Developer B2), thus not only involving a response to a national policy, but a complementing policy development at the institutional level.

Policy translation was also described as a function of DIP by Developer B1, explaining that:

...yeah, I think mainly that function has come because of the jargon and because of the complexity of the requirements. People, teaching, researching, every day in their own disciplines. They wouldn't like to be bothered with all these intricacies of policy documents and so forth. They want to know as I said to you, they want to know how we should do it and when we should do it and when should it be finished and that kind of

thing. So the exact almost guidelines, and I think in that sense, [DIP] has been quite good in interpreting it and simplifying it and putting it in the context of the institution and saying this is what we need. This is what we'll provide you with and this is what we need from you and we need it by then. And then we'll rework it. So that's the interpretation part. But that has a danger in the sense that it can lead to compliance. We say okay, we just need to do this and get it over and done with. - Developer B1

Developer B1 went on to say that the “translation part” is “needed and ... necessary”, but that implementation “also needs some monitoring and evaluation”, lest it run the risk of becoming a “paper exercise”.

The above suggests a less coherent view of policy translation than that encountered within the central administration. This should not be surprising, as ADR respondents are less at the executing and implementing helm, thus potentially less aware of the processes developed at the institutional level.

5.2.2.2. Quality assurance

The debate on how quality can and should be defined has not been resolved, particularly not in higher education. Developer B1 suggested that when people started discussing quality in terms of “transformation quality and fitness for purpose” that it brought about “new angles” and people started “rethinking ... the whole notion of quality”. However, Developer B1 explained the existence of a second view of quality as transformation, one that involves changing “white faces with black faces”. While transformation is to some extent based on that, “one [transformation] should not be done to the detriment of the other [quality]”. It is this that so greatly complicates the implementation and governance of quality assurance in South African higher education.

The link between *fitness of purpose* and transformation is clear when considered in light of national objectives. The HEQC looks at mission statements of institutions in their quality assurance audits, not only to establish “how well you’re meeting them”, but as described by Developer A1, to also see “what they are themselves”. Logically, within an institution that views itself in a certain positive light, this approach to quality assurance could engender some serious tension between institutions and national bodies. Developer A1 described this tension:

Now it's a very interesting issue of institutional autonomy which hasn't actually been tested ever in a real battle, although it's hovering around under the service all of the time

and there's real anger about the way, in central areas, about the way some institutions are doing things. - Developer A1

Developer B1 further discussed these tensions, describing a reaction by the institutions in terms of a “threat” to “academic autonomy ... institutional autonomy ... programme autonomy”. This makes sense in historically white institutions that previously had great freedom to implement their own agenda. Developer B1 maintained though that it wasn’t necessarily the “idea of quality assurance”, but rather of people coming in “from outside”.

Despite these tensions existing underneath the surface, Developer A1 believed that on the whole, institutions are “sensitive enough to what's going on”, and will therefore not create absurd institutional missions for themselves.

The threat to the success of quality assurance lies not only in how institutions as a whole respond to perceived threats to their autonomy. It lies also in how academics, particularly within historically white institutions, view outside interference into their work. As Developer A1 pointed it, it has been equated with a “managerialism”, with those forces “that are trying to destabilise academe”. Developer A1 suggested that in order to get around this resistance to change there needs to be an increase in accountability, a “push factor” for it to become important.

Developer A1 suggested that in order to truly bring about change in the institution, in terms of quality improvement and processes, that the “environment and the mindset” need to be changed, and quality assurance needs to be made more “important” in order to bring about such change. Developer B2 talked about the importance of internal quality review mechanisms, and that external mechanisms “should just ... give you that confirmation”. Establishing such a balance within institutions would require a cultural shift in favour of quality assurance.

Perspectives on quality assurance have shifted since it was first introduced, according to Developer B1. During the time when qualifications were being shifted to an outcomes-based format, Developer B1 described it as an “exercise of compliance”. However, when the HEQC processes such as audit and

accreditation got underway, Developer B1 describes them as “a different kind of ball game”, using terms like “improvement oriented” and “co-operative” to describe the shift in perspective. Developer B1 specifically describes the process of review of a particular programme, saying that initially participants were “not quite sure what was going to happen” but “as the process went on ... everybody could see the value of that”, and as time has gone on it is now “much more accepted as part of programme ... and quality development”.

Institutional audit

Respondents at both institutions saw value in the institutional audit, but the degree to which it might be a lever for change varied. Developer A1 described trying to “use the audit to maximum advantage”, in order to “try and infuse changes in policy and attitudes and behaviour”, given the developmental and improvement role of academic development and research work. Developer B2 believed that on its own, the audit did not function as a lever to change the level of quality at an institution, describing it as just “one factor within a set” that could affect institutional change. Developer B2 described the audit as “supporting much of what we do”, thus engendering a positive attitude towards it. The audit was further described as “critical” by Developer A1, in terms of defining quality. An understanding of quality that encompasses fitness *of* as well as fitness *for* purpose would support the work of the “developers”, as Developer A1 puts it.

As discussed in the *Central administration* section, faculties were shielded from the weight of the bureaucratic work required by the audit process. Developer A1 suggested this displayed the central administration’s understanding of a negative attitude towards quality assurance. The process was carried out in such a fashion as to “create minimum demands on the faculties”. Information was mediated to the faculties about what was going on but “a huge amount of the work was done centrally”.

In terms of audit preparation, academic developmental and research units were involved. Developer B1 said that certain institutional policies were developed prior to the audit, as they were required by the HEQC audit criteria, such development being a “direct ... outflow” of the process. This work was carried

out by ADR individuals. In addition, Developer B2 described being “very involved” in the preparation of the audit report itself. Developer A1 described their academic development and research people as being “quite involved”, “providing professional input and support into the process” but that the process was ultimately driven by the DIP.

The audit itself at Institution B was described as being carried out in a collegial fashion, that the auditors “did not want to push too hard” thus making people defensive, and that there “was a kind of cordial and respectful engagement” (Developer B1), and that it was seen as “both” an exercise in accountability and improvement (Developer B2).

5.2.3. Micro setting

5.2.3.1. Policy process

Describing the policy process at Institution A, respondent Developer A1 suggested that the institutional translation process involves top-down mediation to faculties and possibly departments, where feedback is received from the bottom up. Once that process has run its course it is possible to roll out the initiative or programme. Formally such a process is run by academic planning, but informally the central administration could be in discussion with UADR and deans to prepare the response.

A level of informality was also described by Developer B2, saying that when a policy is being developed the collaboration of people “that already have knowledge and have shown an interest in the policy” is sought. The importance of policy development in consultation with academics was emphasised, in order to ensure ownership and avoid the risk of negative reactions.

5.2.3.2. Governance

Governance in the micro setting, in general terms, was only briefly touched upon by respondent Developer B2. Observations included that due to the devolved structure of the institution, faculties and deans have a fair amount of power. This devolution, coupled with autonomy, makes it easy for street-level individuals to resist change. Therefore, in order to accomplish anything, the UADR have to “get their [faculty] support”.

UADR and DIP

Developer B1 described the role of departments responsible for academic development and research as being “clearly support”. Developer A1 said that “putting it very simply” the ADR units see themselves as “affecting both policy and implementation”, and work as well to assist the faculties when needed.

ADR respondents at both institutions discussed the need to emphasise the developmental approach in their work, not to be conflicted with enforcement:

I mean our view is that you can't be, the kind of the magistrate and the social worker in the same thing, it doesn't work. - Developer A1

... we are meant to be the development people. ... We are not the police. - Developer A1

We're happy to do that work, policy work. ... But we don't want to be seen as the policy police, or the police. ... More developmental. - Developer B2

... you cannot be a ... police person and a support person at the same time. You can be one of the two but not both. - Developer B1

The nature of the role presents challenges with implementation, because as Developer A1 put it, “implementation is hard because even if you wanted to police stuff, you can't”. However, there was some suggestion that on occasion ADR become “a little bit police-ish” in order to move things along and shift people out of their “comfort zones”.

Developer A1 described a good working relationship between UADR and DIP at Institution A, in part attributed to the DIP people being “in an education mould”, and “not just ... bureaucrats”. In terms of policy responses, initiatives tend to be led by the DIP, but UADR would submit opinions and reports for the institutional comment.

The DIP at Institution B was described as previously having served more of a support function, but has developed into a “management tool”, in some sense still “serving both purposes” (Developer B1). In a similar fashion, at Institution A, Developer A1 described the DIP as “implementers” of policy, the “administrative executive arm that actually does the stuff”.

5.2.4. Summary of results

Results from departments responsible for academic development and research focused solely on the institutional and micro setting, and were primarily

concerned with the nature of quality assurance, and hindrances to implementation.

Institutional setting. Results further supported discussion in the *Theoretical approach* chapter regarding the role of policy translation in the policy process. Findings further developed *policy translation* to apply to how institutional policies are developed in response to national policies, and not only how national policies require ‘translation’ at the institutional level.

Discussion of quality assurance showed a concern with linking a transformational definition of quality to UADR work, in order to leverage change.

Micro setting. Discussion of the institutional policy process suggested the presence of a level of informality, and a need for participation in order to ensure ownership.

Governance at the micro setting centred around discussion of the roles of UADR and DIP. There was general consensus that in order to be effective developers there cannot be a policing element to the work of the UADR. However, this negatively impacts the ability of the UADR to effectively implement, given levels of faculty autonomy and devolution.

5.3. Faculty level

Results at the faculty level are based on interviews with deans at the two institutions. Deans are identified by institution, e.g. Dean A1 is the first dean from Institution A, and Dean B3 is the third dean from Institution B. Discussion tended more towards the micro setting than with the previous two groups. This is logical given the position of deans within the two institutions, and their greater focus on operational matters.

5.3.1. National setting

Briefly addressed, and only by respondents at Institution B, national governance was described in terms of funding as steering, and as explicit state steering. For instance, Dean B3 suggested that steering through funding would be subtle, and reallocation of funds would thereby “coerce institutions” to change if that was the desire of the government. Therefore, academic autonomy, in the sense of

how academics should think, is still present. However, academic programme offerings are not autonomous as such, as they are subject to a process of approval through the CHE, HEQC and Department of Education. As Dean B2 put it, there is potential for negotiation in most cases, but “if government doesn’t change their mind about something then you will have to, in the end”.

5.3.1.1. Policy process

As was the case with governance, the national policy process was only discussed with respondents at Institution B. The discussion centred around policy translation and response.

The issue of the need for policy translation was touched upon by Dean B2 in an indirect manner, describing the difficulty in understanding policy documents. Dean B2 explained that policy documents are “often quite lengthy” and “nobody even bothers to read them”, and the challenge lies in trying to understand what the policy in question means “on the ground”. The importance of context, too, was emphasised by Dean B3.

... policy is never cast in stone. It is dictated to by the conditions which prevail and you cannot have a ubiquitous policy where the policy is applicable every way to every situation in ... exactly the same way. So if you work at [Institution B], the policy should be adapted to the conditions of [Institution B]. That way ensures that the policy’s implemented defensibly. - Dean B3

Dean B3 went on to give an example of a national policy that did not work, due to the fact that resources, conditions, etc. were not taken into account for implementation, thus emphasising the importance of context in policy making.

In terms of policy response, Dean B3 said that policy was engaged with in a “critical way”, and that there was a resistance to implementing “policy blindly”. Dean B2 said there was an attempt to be proactive in responding to national level initiatives, in order to foresee how things will develop. However, “we don’t really change the policies” said Dean B2, but they are involved in fashioning a response. This response would potentially fall into the *translation* stage of the policy process, as the original policy is not being altered, as such, but inevitably it is altered throughout the policy process.

A dynamic example of the national policy process was illustrated by Dean B2, where they gave an example of a policy that was to be implemented from the top down, but prior to that happening it was sent back up to be reworked, prior to implementation.

5.3.1.2. *Quality assurance*

Quality assurance at the national level was discussed in historical terms, to some extent. For instance, as previous literature suggests, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) was seen in a negative light, and was tied with quality assurance. Dean A2 described the hope that SAQA would “die a natural death”, calling it “interfering bureaucracy”. However, the “HEQC is a little bit different”, thereby showing what is hopefully a shift away from a negative connotation of quality assurance authorities. Dean A2 expressed an understanding with the need for accountability when accepting public funds, but nonetheless saying that in terms of academic freedom there is a “very strong suspicion ... about any government authority ... wanting to intervene”, and this to some extent includes the HEQC.

With a slightly different tone, Dean B4 described why they believed the quality assurance process has been so greatly emphasised since 1994. The problem, as described by the dean, lay in the low quality of degrees from “newer less well-established universities”. The idea was that in order to increase equality amongst institutions, and quality of institutions, everyone should have to undergo the same quality assurance processes. “It resulted in a revamp of the quality assurance systems for everybody”. This one size fits all approach was deemed to be of questionable value by Dean B4, who nonetheless conceded that it was “an honest attempt” to try to “solve that problem”. According to Dean B4, Institution B previously had their own set of quality assurance procedures, prior to the government initiating “uniform quality assurance procedures ... across the country”.

5.3.2. Institutional setting

5.3.2.1. Policy process

Dean B1 said that to some extent the effect of policy on an operational or implementation level functioned well, due to members of the institution's central administration being involved in the national policy process.

The existence of a translation level in the policy process was further supported by comments made by Dean B2, saying that policy is "translated at the central level", which then communicates it within the institution in terms of specific impacts. Likewise, if there are any problems with institutional communication, Dean B2 described an "open door policy" where deans can seek advice or further understanding.

The idea of the institutional response to a national policy involving policy translation was mirrored at the faculty level. Dean B2 suggested that when a national or institutional policy reaches the faculty level there is some freedom in response prior to implementation, and that deans can ask for further discussion prior to implementation, saying that deans are "in a position where we can negotiate", particularly in order to get clarity on certain points.

Dean B3 developed this viewpoint, giving an example of an institutional policy framework, which allowed for faculty-specific adaptation. Framework policy formulation is less hierarchical, and is a macro-level characteristic of the transaction mode of governance. Dean B3 further stated:

Well I don't consider policy as a product. In other words, it doesn't merely exist in text. Policy for me is a process, which means that it is shaped through your insights and your contributions. ... We invariably shape policy as we go along. So policy is not set upfront but policy is always in the making. So it's a continuous process. - Dean B3

Dean B1 advocated querying governmental initiatives prior to implementation, and emphasised the need to "be able to make adjustments on ground level ... where things happen", describing in a sense translation and adaptation of national policy at the institutional level.

In addition, the institutional policy process at Institution B showed elements of dynamism, as consultation occurred in a top-down fashion, from the central

administration to the dean, who would communicate the initiative to the department heads. From there a response would be prepared and it would go back up, according to Dean B2. If there is a need, “you can go back up”. At the same time, however, if department heads do not take the opportunity to respond when asked for their views prior to formalisation, their complaints are not taken into account once the new policy has been formalised. Dean B3 concurred, saying that when initiatives are presented by central administration, they are discussed with and engaged with at a faculty level, with department heads.

Dean A3 described a similar process at Institution A, where “policy discussion” is brought to the faculty, where ideas on implementation are discussed. The response then goes back up to the executive, where the policy is refined and confirmed. Likewise, communication of policy initiatives to department heads is considered an important part of the process, both in terms of feedback, and once it is finalised, as they are truly the “operational management” and function as a “feedback mechanism”. Dean A1 explained that any new initiative, institutional or national, is “always discussed extensively” at the executive level.

Implementation

At Institution A, Dean A3 deemed the department heads to be the “key implementers” of policies “at a departmental level”, saying that department heads are responsible for ensuring that policies are implemented and adhered to, although there are “checks and balances in place”. Dean A1 discussed a dependence “on the line managers”, saying that with the “implementation of any policy you need to be able to persuade the people who are going to implement it that it’s a good idea”, but nonetheless maintaining that the deanship has “quite a lot of influence”.

Dean A2 described a policy that is implemented by the department heads, despite them being in opposition to it, as it is an institution-wide policy. This is in stark contrast with traditional conceptions of consensus building within universities.

At Institution B, Dean B2 described an involvement by deans in terms of making sure that policies are adhered to, saying “there are certain things in place”. Dean

B2 also described a difficulty with motivating colleagues - department heads - in instances where there are uncertainties with policy outcomes.

5.3.2.2. Governance

At Institution B, Dean B1 talked about the importance of a consultative form of governance at the faculty level, using terms such as “give-and-take”, “push and pull model”, “advisory power”, “cooperation by consulting” and “not enforcing”, describing the institution as a “rational place where you can talk rationally”, saying “this is how universities should function”. This is strongly reminiscent of the persuasion mode of governance. The dean also suggested that top-level governance within the institution is also based on a consultative approach, saying that most issues can be “debated at ... executive level”. The problem lies in faculty allegiance, and representing the faculty to the central administration, or representing the central administration to the faculty. “You have to straddle both those roles.”

So it's, I think there's a very much give-and-take situation at the University, that makes for a good well-lead University. Not enforcing their view, and for us. I mean, this is how Universities should function. It's a rational place where you can talk rationally about issues and direction and jobs. - Dean B1

Dean B3 echoed these thoughts, saying that just because a dean initiates something it does not mean it is done “in a dictatorial way”, saying it “has to be done in a deliberative way”, using terms like “engage” and “consensus”, and rejecting the idea of exclusion from the process. Dean B2 supported this view at the institution, describing a venue for inclusive discussion on issues. Likewise, people are given the chance to give their input into issues, and whether they do or not is the decision of the individual.

Deliberative governance was further described by Dean B4, in terms of a devolved structure and consultative nature of decision-making. The problem lies in having decisions “as transparent as possible” yet allowing for debate. The debate can slow down the speed of decision-making, and dissuade interested parties from attending such forums for discussion.

Dean B3 did point out, however, that while involving staff on all issues, “paradoxically you provide leadership but you are also limited by what is already happening” as there is no direct authoritative power.

At Institution A, similar sentiments were expressed. Dean A2 talked about constantly communicating with and being aware of people within the faculty, saying that the role of department heads “developed along with the devolution model”. Along with this devolution development arose issues of tension and faculty allegiance, but as Dean A2 put it, “if there’s a final conflict between the centre and the faculty, you’ve gotta be with your faculty. Because if you do not enjoy the confidence of your colleagues with whom you work on a daily basis, you’re not going to survive.” In tandem with this line of response, Dean A2 said that if the deans say to the central administration that an initiative will not work in the faculties, then the authority of the deans means that particular initiative is “unimplementable”.

Yeah, I think you’ve got to be incredibly hard working and incredibly committed to talking, discussing ... Constantly talking to people. Constantly being aware of people. -
Dean A2

Dean A1 agreed with Dean A2, saying “if I were forced with a metaphorical gun to my head it would be the faculty.” Dean A1 further described consultative and cooperative forms of governance. At the faculty level, “real discussion takes place”. Likewise, implementation “is by its nature consultative”, and requires persuasion. Put aptly: “...the wisdom at the very [Central Admin] is that nothing will happen unless the deans are on board, and from my perspective nothing will happen unless the [department heads] are on board. And I guess the [department heads] say nothing will happen unless the staff are on board” thus tying the entire governance structure together in a consultative fashion, describing communication as going in both directions. As Dean A3 put it, “we have a decentralised model”, describing that in order to get something through in the faculty, there may sometimes be the need to step back from the process, “rephrase and redefine your approach”, in order to get things done.

5.3.2.3. *Quality assurance*

In discussion of quality assurance, it is challenging to distinguish between those perspectives that apply to the institutional setting, and those that apply to the micro setting. In determining the division between these perspectives, comments regarding processes that take place within the institution were generally placed in the micro setting.

At Institution A, Dean A1 described the need for standards and frameworks:

Of course there are going to be negatives, and the negative is the time it takes. But I don't think that these *ad hoc* - make up the rules as you go along, assume everybody knows them [procedures] - I don't think they work in a world of mixed cultures and different backgrounds and so on. So I think those were very peculiar to a previous age. - Dean A1

Dean B4 suggested that awareness of quality assurance has increased over time, and it has a “much higher profile now” than it did about ten years ago. This was attributed to “external things”, which is logical given the large changes in the higher education policy environment since 1994.

Dean B3 believed that external quality assurance mechanisms are necessary in contemporary South Africa, in order to ensure that institutions change and transform. However, they deemed it should be a “temporary measure” because “quality assurance mechanisms should be intertwined with the process of transformation”, becoming “part of the system” rather than being “an enemy”. In turn, Dean B3 maintained that universities should have their own quality assurance systems, “not just to please the state”, but because of a care for their profession, thus needing such systems to be internally driven. This would require a cultural change at the institutional level.

The relationship of quality assurance to development and/or accountability was succinctly described by Dean B1, in saying that bringing in external experts with the purpose of improvement was one facet, but that the accountability of what is happening at the institution is tied to public funds. Dean B4 agreed that internally quality assurance is about improvement but externally it is about accountability. Dean B3 concurred with this view, saying “first accountability because this institution is a national asset and it has to be accountable to the

public ... but it's an ideal opportunity for an institutional improvement." Dean B3 advocated internally driven processes:

And then the institutions need to develop their own quality assurance mechanisms not just to please the state. I don't have to please the state to do good teaching. Good teaching should be because I care for my students. - Dean B3

The link between transformation and quality was discussed by Dean B3, who believes that "excellence ... can coexist with diversity". The dean explained that to the state, transformation is measured in different skin colours, but that "colour doesn't necessarily mean change", and that different skin colours can "perpetuate the same ideas". The dean believes that "quality assurance should be integrated in the transformation process", and that essentially quality assurance can function as "a vehicle towards achieving" transformation, and not "as a form of inspection". Interestingly, Dean B2 appeared to only vaguely link transformation with quality, saying "one can look at it in many different ways", which may be attributed to the fact that in Dean B3's view, quality assurance and transformation are "currently separate".

The HEQC institutional audits, carried out at the two institutions in 2005, was discussed. While some general perspectives pertain to the institutional setting, other results are presented within the micro setting.

At Institution B, Dean B2 said there was an awareness of the self-evaluation report prepared for the institutional audit. The dean pointed out that there was a level of uncertainty prior to the audit, as the institution was amongst the first to be audited. Dean B1 described the preparation process for the audit as having been centrally administered, with faculties needing to contribute details and information when asked. The dean described the process as "very thorough", going "right down to the bottom level". According to Dean B3, the "criticism" the institution received in the HEQC report has been taken into account, and is bringing about some changes within the institution.

At Institution A, Dean A2 voiced scepticism about the value of the institutional audit, saying that an informal review carried out at the faculty prior to the audit was a more valuable learning experience. In addition, the size of the institution contrasted with the handful of people that came from the HEQC, made it seem

like something of “a joke, actually”. The dean did not deny the need for quality assurance, but was sceptical of institution-wide audits. Dean B4 concurred to some extent with the views of Dean A2, suggesting that the self-evaluation preparation prior to the actual audit was good for the institution.

In terms of preparation at Institution A, it was described by Dean A1, like with Institution B, as being centrally administered, and to some extent academics on the ground were protected from the process by a strong performance centrally. Without such a strong central administration the workload for other parties would have increased.

5.3.3. Micro setting

5.3.3.1. *Quality assurance*

Results on quality assurance at the micro setting touched on a number of issues, some critical and others descriptors of process. Within the institutions, governance of quality assurance was discussed in terms of how things are run, and how communication and relationships function.

In Institution B, Dean B4 said if something was not working for the faculty in terms of quality assurance, a collaborative approach was taken, where the dean could deliberate with the central administration to establish a solution that would suit the faculty’s purposes. However, this is based on a hierarchical system of institution-wide frameworks, where requests and coordination comes from central administration to faculties, and on to departments.

Dean A2 described quality assurance in terms of there being “two sides of the coin”. Improvement had resulted from the initiation of quality assurance processes, but it was described in terms of being “forced” to review certain aspects. However, the dean conceded that the processes tend to not be too time consuming for the faculty, as they are run by the central administration. Dean A1 believed the systems and structures at Institution A are “very robust”, indicating though that there is room for deliberation on certain issues.

Administrative overload

Results suggested an increased administrative overload with the introduction of quality assurance systems at the institutions. Dean A1 said that although extra administrative work may irritate academics, it's the "new accountability of academia worldwide" and that on the whole it was necessary and "accepted that it was part of a new education system". Despite this, they "complain" about increased administration. Dean A2 said that in their tenure as dean they had spent "an enormous amount of time" on paperwork, suggesting that it gets to the point where "you spend all your time worrying about quality assurance and assuring quality and you just don't get on with the job". However, they displayed a tolerance of the situation, suggesting that the perceived generation of increased administrative work by the DIP within the institution could be attributed to the DIP being the "messenger that very often gets beaten".

Dean B4 suggested that the introduction of quality assurance systems and processes was not valuable enough to merit the increased administration, saying "...on the whole the increase in quality improvement is not worth the amount of time and effort that's been spent on it." However, Dean B4 did concede that "they [academics] understand the necessity for it". Dean B2 described quality assurance as "adding quite a lot of paperwork", so while it does not interfere in academic freedom as such, it "takes up valuable time" that could be spent on academic activities, as "it needs proof of that you are doing everything right". Eventually though, Dean B2 agreed with B4, saying "you are sort of asking yourselves whether you are adding value".

Quality assurance processes

At both institutions, time with respondents was spent discussing institutional quality assurance processes, both internal and external mechanisms. Dean A2 said that in an ideal world, quality assurance and academic could benefit each other, thereby not fuelling the notion that quality assurance is a threat to academic autonomy. Dean B3 believed that quality assurance should be an integrated process, "situated in the process of transformation".

In Institution A, Dean A1 said they were aware of quality assurance within the faculty on a daily basis, also explaining regular processes such as memoranda of

understanding between students and supervisors that are reviewed once a year, and how various developmental processes are going on within departments. Dean A1 maintained the faculty places a “strong emphasis” on quality assurance, and that automatic structures in place are “very robust”. However, Dean A1 did point out that some of these processes and monitoring are “relatively new”, only having come about in “the last couple of years”.

Dean A2 described process improvements since the advent of quality assurance, describing how reports by external examiners are now more effectively and efficiently processed through departments, faculties, and eventually the central administration. However, previously, informal measures ensured a certain level of quality, such as whether or not graduates of the faculty were able to receive employment, and were considered good employees. Dean A2 said that informal processes were previously present, they just were not called quality assurance.

Generally, there would be a positive view of quality but you see the argument would be but - which I don't necessarily agree with - but we've always been worried about quality, you know, that's why we're here. We are striving to be better and so on and so on. I think the - I think there's value in formalizing it ... I have learned a lot and I, you know, so I'm not a complete philistine as far as quality assurance is concerned but I - I think there is a considerable danger or temptation that it can go overboard. - Dean A2

Dean A3 said that quality assurance needed to be done on a continuous basis, viewing it as a “critical component” of daily operations and management. Dean A3 also emphasised the need to embed continuous improvement into the institutional culture, saying that three-year internal and five-year external reviews are already part of the system, but that it should become part “of their thinking”. Just as the input to quality assurance should be continuous, so too is the monitoring. Dean A3 suggested this is partly accomplished through committees.

In Institution B, Dean B1 explained the improvement-oriented nature of support from the central administration in terms of quality assurance, and once external evaluations of departments have been received that they are reviewed in a consultative manner. General quality assurance processes are routinised, and “on a rolling basis”, including performance appraisal.

Dean B2 was of the view that the process of departmental evaluation was “adding a lot of value”, and that once a process has run its course it has “always been a positive one” at the end. In terms of monitoring, Dean B2 pointed out that change “takes place slowly” but that things are monitored as they go along, and that the central administration has an open-door policy for support on quality assurance matters. Likewise, in an informal manner, conversations between deans and department heads serve as an informal monitoring mechanism.

Within Institution B, a central command running standardised processes was described by Dean B4, for instance, in terms of the routinised departmental evaluation, run on a schedule kept by the central administration, and organised according to outlines applicable across the institution.

In Institution A, departmental reviews are followed by reports, followed by improvement plans, which are discussed in a consultative fashion, but is monitored by the central administration, according to dean A1. However, there is some suggestion that such reviews engender too much administrative paperwork.

The same process was described by Dean B4 in Institution B, adding that there is a follow-up a couple of years after a review, to ensure that recommendations are being implemented. The importance of the internal self-evaluation was emphasised - again - as well as the importance of the follow-up.

According to Dean A2, informal internal mechanisms include peer review, due to rotating positions at the level of department head/chair, and reallocation of teaching when academics go on sabbatical.

The process of internal programme evaluation was deemed “valuable” by Dean B2, in the sense that the internal self-evaluation process, preparing for the external evaluation, was a “good exercise”, but that external affirmation of the self-evaluation “also adds value”. Once the process is complete it leads to internal improvements. However, Dean B2 went on to suggest that visit of external evaluators to campus tends to be too brief to add much additional value beyond the internal process.

Dean B1 boasted good internal systems at the faculty, saying “necessary mechanisms” and “checks and balances” are built in. The dean went on to say that members of the faculty realise the importance of outside assessors, for validation.

Dean B4 viewed external mechanisms as being good for validation, in the sense that the unit should self-evaluate, and then have external assessors check and validate the self-evaluation, describing the self-evaluation process as “very, very positive”, again, not in terms of the contribution of the external reviewers, but in terms of the internal learning, saying the greatest value “of the exercise is you evaluating yourself.”

You want to assess your own systems according to certain principles, fix them yourself and just have the outside people come and validate your processes. - Dean B4

In terms of support for implementing improvements, Dean B4 suggested that it can either reside at the departmental, faculty or central administration level, depending on the extent of the improvement required.

Dean B3 also expressed a positive view of external programme review, saying the professional judgement of programmes was good.

External checks on quality assurance, such as external examiners’ reports, were deemed useful in order to see whether any concerns are raised, said Dean A2. The contributions of external examiners are both in terms of process and content, according to Dean A2, and it is a system that “continues to work well”, and “works a lot better now than it did”. However, as Dean A1 pointed out, the “accountability can never be perfect” when relying on external examiners to do the work required.

Dean A3 viewed quality assurance, both external and internal, as a continuous process. Described in terms of cycles, internal self-evaluation and external review should repeat itself on a regular basis, in order to ensure that improvement is occurring based on recommendations.

The HEQC institutional audit, a mixture of an externally initiated mechanism coupled with the requirement for an internal self-evaluation, was separately

from other general mechanisms. Dean A1 suggested that faculty involvement in the process was low, but there was a “fair degree of acceptance” of the need for such a process. Dean A1 suggested that quality assurance after the audit became a “living work in process” because of implementation of improvement objectives.

Dean B4 saw external imposition as negative, saying that it truly should be run by the institution. Dean B2 said the only requirement made of the faculty was to make sure things were in place in case the auditors were to come and ask questions. The self-evaluation report was communicated to faculties and departments.

International influences in quality assurance were considered to be of importance. Dean A3 was benchmarking not only against South African universities, but also overseas universities. Dean A1 explained that at the graduate level external examiners for theses and dissertations are both domestic and international. Dean B1 described the same process at Institution B, saying that reports tended to be more favourable from overseas than domestic examiners. Dean B2 agreed that international influence was of importance, particularly in terms of overseas evaluators. Dean B1 concurred describing the process as “beneficial”.

5.3.4. Summary of results

National setting. Results at the national setting suggested some scepticism with the role of education authorities in quality assurance, or increased steering efforts in general, for that matter. The policy process and governance were only briefly discussed, but supported a dynamic perception of the policy process, and the role of translation in the response of the institution.

Institutional setting. The policy process at the institutional level was described in terms of translation and discussion. This applies to both national policy as introduced to the institution, and initiatives within the institution.

Respondents described institutional governance with phrases such as “deliberative”, “transparent”, and “push-and-pull”. This suggests an open and consensus-oriented governance model. Difficulties with such a model lie in the ability to get agreement on initiatives, and to implement change.

Quality assurance at the institutional setting covered a variety of topics. In particular, the link between quality assurance and transformation was touched upon, displaying that the two are not yet automatically linked in the minds of respondents. The external audit was also touched upon, in general terms, with descriptions of a centrally administered process, and the shielding of academics from the workload and too much involvement. Some respondents voiced scepticism at the value of the audit itself, suggesting that self-review prior to the audit was of greater value.

Micro setting. Quality assurance was the main topic within the micro setting. Discussion included the general approach to quality assurance within the institution, its processes, and negative aspects that follow, such as an increased administrative workload.

Respondents generally believed that quality assurance processes were good, and had improved in the last decade. They were described as taking part on a rolling basis, with follow-up built into the system.

On the whole there was a greater appreciation of internally initiated self-review processes, suggesting they were of far greater value for the improvement of quality than externally initiated accreditations or audits. External mechanisms were considered to be positive, however, as validating mechanisms for internal self-evaluation.

6. Discussion

Table 9 displays key findings from the three different groups of respondents, categorised by setting. These findings will be discussed in this chapter. Overarching themes are identified by colour, and bold or italic.

Table 9: Overview of findings on policy and governance

	Central administration (Administrators)	Academic development and research (Developers)	Faculty level (Deans)
Policy setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ideal of cooperative governance - Context of state steering - Persuasion/deliberation mode of governance - <i>Ongoing policymaking</i> - Ad hoc remedies 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scepticism with national quality assurance authorities - Wariness of increased state steering - <i>Dynamic policy process</i> - <i>Policy 'translation' as part of institutional response</i>
Institutional setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Dynamic policy process</i> - <i>Policy translation part of process</i> - Stronger central steer required - Devolved institutional structure - QA aligned with institutional strategic framework for ownership - External QA mechanisms provide leverage - Internal buy-in required for proper change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Policy translation part of process</i> - <i>Policy translation as formal response to implementation of policy & as response through institutional policy development</i> - QA linked to transformation - Transformational QA leverage for change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Dynamic institutional policy process</i> - <i>Policy translation and discussion part of process</i> - Consensus-oriented governance (e.g. persuasion mode) - Consensus = slow change - QA not explicitly linked to transformation - Central management of audit - Shielding of academics - Sceptical of value of audit - Self-evaluation valuable
Micro setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Policy translation function of department for institutional planning</i> - Centralisation versus devolution - DIP must be focused on accountability - UADR can allow focus to be on development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informality present in policy process - Participation required for ownership - UADR must focus on development - Development focus hinders implementation due to devolution/faculty autonomy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Description of QA processes - QA negative through increased workload - QA generally positive/improving - Internal systems valuable - Self-evaluation valuable - External good for validation

This study has explored the nature of the so-called 'gap' between policy formulation and implementation in the traditional literature. With the aid of a theoretical overview and framework, the study seeks to answer the question:

- How does centralised policymaking and localised activity interact in ways that hinder or support the policy process?

Furthermore, in order to discuss the above question, it is of interest to explore:

- What is the relationship between the policy process and governance in South African higher education?

The answers to these questions are explored through case studies at two South African universities. Analysed interviews were taken with central administrators, academic developers and research, and deans. The implementation of a national policy of quality assurance in South African higher education, and institutional responses to it, was chosen as the common policy example for discussion in the interviews, in addition to which more general discussion was encouraged.

Findings suggest that a useful conceptualisation of the 'gap' between formulation and implementation is to understand this as a real stage in the policy process, and can be considered in terms of policy translation, one of the primary functions of the central administration in both institutions, and a term that endorses a dynamic view of the policy process.

The policy process and its relationship to governance in South African higher education showed a tension between external and internal initiatives. While governance embraced a cooperative ideal, government steering was on the increase. This was mirrored within institutions, where implementation of policy initiatives was hampered by the devolved structure of institutions. It is suggested that perhaps a stronger central administration is required to drive transformation imperatives in the South African context.

6.1. Policy translation in higher education

The *Theoretical approach* chapter set out to establish the primary concepts surrounding quality assurance in higher education, followed by an overview of the policy process and implementation literature. This discussion contributed to an understanding of how the 'gap' between formulation and implementation had been dealt with in earlier literature.

The resulting analytical framework, based on a dynamic conception of the stages heuristic (Enders et al., 2003), included the addition of *policy translation* as the stage between *formulation* and *implementation*. The existence of this stage in the higher education policy process was supported by results from all three levels of governance that were analysed.

Theoretical discussion of the nature of higher education (Gornitzka, Kyvik & Stensaker, 2007) suggested a shift towards market-based ideologies. This is in accordance with suggestions made by Cloete, Maassen and Muller (2007) on shifts in South African higher education, eventually leading to more steering or control.

There is evidence of a degree of freedom at the institutional level in how national initiatives are implemented, as policy translation appeared to occur both prior to and after completion of policy formulation. Therefore, translation could occur during the formulation stage, and also between formulation and implementation.

Within the central administration translation is displayed by an interaction between formulation and translation resulting in a consultative process of policymaking, and thus a more clearly defined final policy, within the national setting. This dynamic view was also supported at the institutional and micro settings, where policy translation was considered to be one of the main functions of institutional planning departments within the central administration.

Academic development and research respondents further elaborated upon the ever-broadening concept of policy translation. There, the dynamism of the policy process at the institutional level displayed elements of bottom-up perspectives. Respondents described how institutional policies may be developed in response

to national policies, as well as how national policies may require translation at the institutional level prior to being implemented. This institutional response, in the development of new institutional policy in reaction to national policy, supports the idea that studying a policy, as such, is greatly limited by focusing on a single piece of legislation (Sabatier, 2007a). Rather, a policy network of actors, reactions and implementation structures, appears around a policy issue.

This rather more bottom-up, and possibly horizontal, view of the process was enhanced by results from Deans. Again, a dynamic policy process was supported, and the role of translation for the institutional response was confirmed. Developers described translation at the institutional setting in a similar fashion. National policy requires translation, but it also stretches its meaning to encompass responding initiatives within the institution. This speaks to the “interactive processes” (Gornitzka, Kyvik & Stensaker, 2007, p. 53) discussed in the *Analytical framework* section, as the implementation of a national policy brings about an interactive process within the institutions, necessitating a response beyond straightforward implementation.

6.1.1. Dynamic policy process

Findings suggested that a dynamic depiction of the policy process is accurate for the South African context. In order to fully visualise the dynamics of the policy process, and the role of policy translation, a horizontal depiction is potentially more appropriate.

In the South African political context of transformation, where changes, responses and interactions occur throughout and across institutions and national bodies the visual image presented in Figure 4 better reflects the nature of the dynamic policy process as suggested by findings.

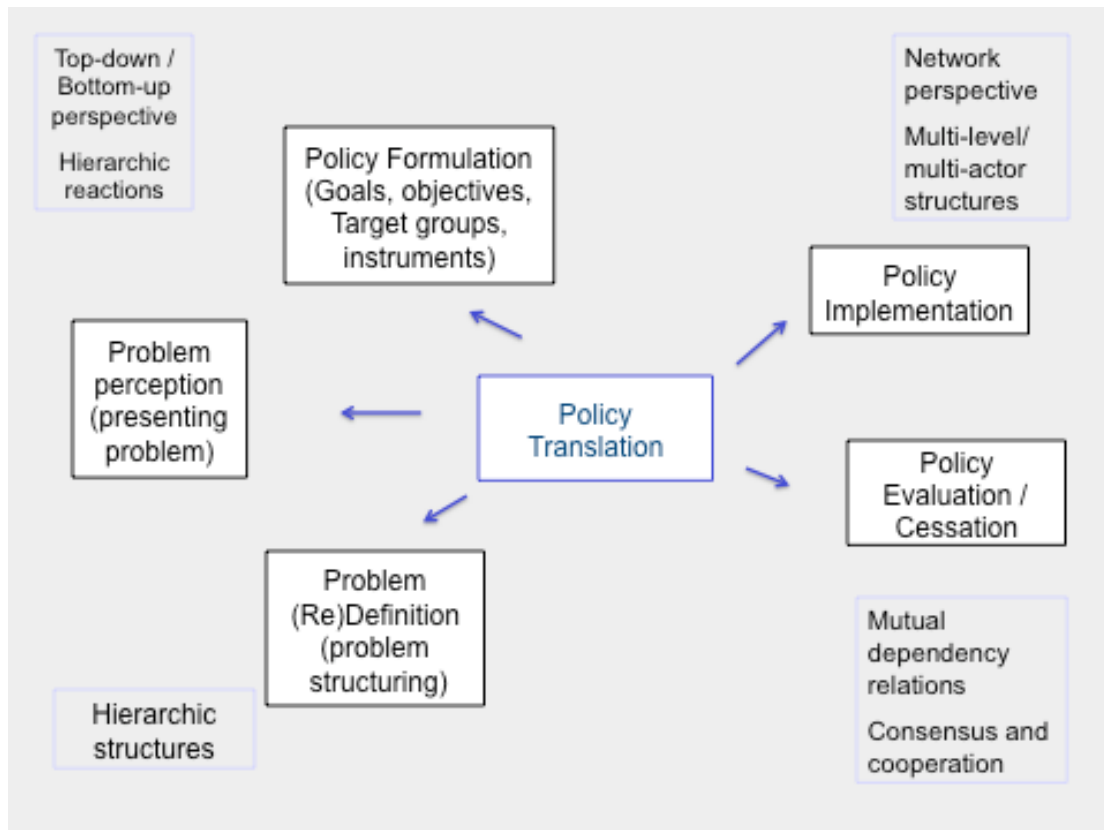


Figure 4: Depiction of dynamic policy process based on findings

6.2. Governance and quality assurance

The dynamic depiction of the policy process was coupled with a framework of governance, as presented in the work of Hill and Hupe (2002), in order to be able to understand governance trends in the results in terms of ideal types and combinations thereof. The results revealed a contradiction between the need for hierarchical control in order to successfully bring about change and implement initiatives, and the devolved, bottom-heavy nature of the institutions with their ability to resist change.

Results suggest that cooperative governance as an ideal still pervades within these two institutions - and interestingly appears to be strong within the institutional governance structure. Central administration respondents, in particular, highlighted the ideal of cooperative governance as expressed by the new government, but placed it within a context of state steering. The more operational aspects of governance suggested a networked approach in ongoing policy making. This cooperative and continuous mode was partly destabilised by

ad hoc remedies, which would be the prerogative of the state with a stronger steering emphasis.

While incrementalism at institutional and lower levels of governance is evident in the descriptions of respondents to development, discussed below, the overwhelming change which took place in South Africa in the mid-90s continues to the present day, that 'moment' being considered no more than a punctuation. Central administration respondents mentioned this rapid change in the national policy environment. This matches suggestions of punctuated-equilibrium theory, discussed in the *Theoretical approach* chapter.

The concept of conditional autonomy, as discussed in the *South African context* chapter, is fitting to understand the relationship between external and internal quality assurance mechanisms, as there does not appear to be much encroaching on academic freedom (substantive autonomy). The procedural autonomy of institutions, while still appearing to be great in terms of framework implementation of certain initiatives, is perhaps lessened due to state requirements.

Mutually interdependent actors, as envisioned by the network approach, and exemplified in the network, or persuasion, mode of governance, appeared to be a common trend in the findings. Within the faculties, consensus-oriented phrases such as "deliberative" and "push-and-pull" were used to describe governance structures. As will be the challenge with achieving outcomes and results in an environment based on partnerships, the deans pointed out that getting agreement in order to implement change was a slow process, but was based on ownership and buy-in.

The fragmentation and cooperation combination identified by Adam and Kriesi (2007) would suggest a horizontal type of policy network at work within the two higher education institutions studies, with elements of the hierarchical type at the centre. This is due to the very nature of the different entities interviewed. The departments responsible for institutional planning have an inevitable focus on accountability and compliance in their work. Departments responsible for academic development and research, results suggested, have a more enabling,

developmental focus. However, in terms of implementation, the lack of a policing element amongst the academic development and research departments also proves challenging when attempting to implement initiatives. Instead a level of informality and participation is adopted, in order to attempt to ensure ownership of an initiative, thus encouraging change in a softer manner.

This combination of fragmentation and cooperation suggests low to moderate potential for change. Interestingly though, the 'bargaining' type of interaction identified by Adam and Kriesi (2007) strikes a resemblance to the transaction mode of governance described by Hill and Hupe (2002), an ideal mode occasionally identified in the results. Again, we are struck with the problem of typologies and modes, where the reality reflects a hybridisation. Despite this, bargaining within a concentration of power, and cooperation within both a concentration and fragmentation of power, suggest low, at best moderate, potential for change. This would be in accordance with results, because as change is achieved it is gradual, and is not fully inculcated into the institutional cultures, or does not appear to be. However, 'external' changes, in terms of national policies and initiatives, have been very fast, but the results would suggest some question as to how greatly they have truly changed the institutions, or whether they have simply altered the way they present themselves.

The constant tension between external and internal, accountability and development, and central control and devolution, does not necessarily have to be conceptualised as a tension. Rather, parallel operations of such functions may be a more useful way to see how good governance can be achieved. Ideal modes of governance are just that - ideal - and do not exist in actual practice. Hybridising the normative may be more useful for actual practice than determining what the best fit is in each situation.

For instance, external quality assurance mechanisms served as leverage to the central administration, giving them authority to drive through measures that otherwise would not have been taken. However, without buy-in it would make for very gradual changes, as hierarchical control would result in compliance, whereas cultural change through persuasion might result in a developmental

mode. Likewise, results from the central administration reflected how the need for central steering was in contradiction with devolution within the institutions. In accordance with research findings mentioned in the *Theoretical approach* chapter, alignment of national initiatives with strategic emphases at institutions was present in the results (Gornitzka, Kogan & Amaral, 2007). The central administration discussed aligning recommendations by the HEQC audit reports with institutional strategic framework, in order to ensure that the process belonged to the institution.

In accordance with the case study (Cloete, Maassen & Muller, 2007) discussed in the *South African context* chapter, there appears to be stronger emphasis on accountability experienced at the institutional level. Deans expressed scepticism at increased steering efforts by the government authorities.

There was some suggestion that institutional autonomy allowed for a more developmental approach to external quality assurance mechanisms, as suggested in the HEQC founding document (CHE, 2001). Particularly at the faculty level, a positive view of quality assurance was broadly expressed, despite the admission that such systems increased the academic workload of many parties. The preparation for the HEQC was also considered to be valuable, to a large extent a centrally run enterprise where institutions appeared to have great freedom in how they prepared their self-review. The audit itself appeared to be less valuable, in the estimation of the deans. Again, any internally initiated self-review process was put in a more positive light than an external process. External mechanisms were considered positive only in terms of validation for self-evaluation.

Despite developmental emphases, a persistent emphasis on accountability was present, such as the need for external validation. Within academic development and research departments, there was a concern with linking a definition of quality to transformation, and linking this definition to the work of the departments as a lever for change. However, no respondent suggested that accountability was not a necessary feature.

As discussed in the section on quality assurance in the *Theoretical approach* chapter, results in this study indicate an agreement with suggestions made by Stensaker (2007), regarding a balanced quality assurance system, combining external and internal mechanisms. Results on the whole suggested an acceptance of the need for QA and audit in terms of public accountability, but expressed a positive view of the process of such internally initiated mechanisms, such as departmental review.

6.3. Key issues

Policy translation in higher education in South Africa serves as a useful conceptualisation of the 'gap' between policy formulation and implementation. A dynamic view of the policy process allows for an interactive understanding of the stages of the policy process. Seeing how these stages interact, particularly in terms of the functions of national government as they communicate with central administrations of institutions, allows one to see how the policy process functions in practice.

The practical functioning of the policy process is closely related to higher education governance in South Africa. Clear tensions were displayed between internal and external factors. The government seeks to embody ideals of cooperative governance while at the same time increasing steering of the higher education sector. Within institutions this hybrid mode of governance is mirrored, as the stronger central administrations contend with autonomous operational units.

7. Conclusion

This study focused on the responses of two higher education institutions in South Africa to a national policy of quality assurance. Overall governance structures, conceptions of the policy process, and responses to a national quality assurance policy were explored. The study sought to explore a useful conceptualisation of the proverbial 'gap' between policy formulation and implementation, asking:

- How does centralised policymaking and localised activity interact in ways that hinder or support the policy process?
- What is the relationship between the policy process and governance in South African higher education?

7.1. Notable outcomes

Two primary sets of conclusions were identified:

- Within the national higher education policy process in South Africa, there is a role for the conceptualisation of the policy formulation-implementation 'gap' as one of *policy translation* in order to aid an understanding of how a dynamic policy process works.
- Within the institutional implementation of, and response to, a national policy of quality assurance in higher education, hindrances to comprehensive institutional ownership and adoption lie in the institutional structure, and in dichotomies between a strong central administration and highly autonomous and devolved operational units.

In general results reflected traditions of higher education. The bottom-heavy nature of universities, the negative view of increased administrative workload, the tension with externally imposed initiatives, were all to be expected within two well-established historically-white universities, with a history of academic achievement and ties to western Europe and the English-speaking world. One might even speculate on a conflict between transformation and traditional

academic governance in the western world. Institutional change is gradual, and in large part lies in devolved structures. For institutions to truly transform there might be cause to review such devolved, autonomous structures of governance.

The evidence of a dynamic policy process in the findings supports the analytical framework presented in the *Theoretical approach* chapter. A key facet of such a dynamic depiction lay in the idea of policy translation. Institutional responses in terms of interactive processes and feedback loops confirmed that policy translation is a useful conceptualisation of the 'gap' between formulation and implementation in the South African higher education policy process. An understanding of this would allow such an element to be advantageous in policy practice in South Africa. A responsible use of the autonomy of institutions in negotiating the implementation of initiatives for institutions should improve institutional ownership of the process, while at the same time supporting the adoption of national transformation imperatives.

The idea of policy translation needs to be further studied in higher education policy processes around the world, in order to establish whether it usefully contributes to academic discussion and debate on the policy sciences, and policy implementation in particular. As this study shows, policy translation not only contributes to a dynamic depiction of the policy process, but also has roots in a particular style of national governance. Therefore, as this study advocates in its intertwining of governance and policy literature, any further inquiry should continue to link the two in order to be able to understand one, the other, or both, in any given national context.

7.2. Avenues for further research...

While these conclusions are certainly of interest, they allow for limited generalisation. The weakness of the study lies in its very specific context of South African higher education policy, and the response of two historically white universities in South Africa's Western Cape. This is the lot of implementation studies, however, as established early on. At best, one might muse about the applicability of conclusions to other historically white universities in South Africa, or similar institutions in former European colonies in southern Africa.

Such musings however should be empirically tested, in order to establish whether shared or similar backgrounds result in similar policy experiences.

... implementation studies have to be transformed, for example, into studies that examine the relationship between the authority responsible for policymaking and the policy object, that is, from policy implementation to policy interaction. Implementation studies should include a much more careful analysis of the processes of formulating governmental policies, and ask, for example, how the nature of the policy relationship affects the way the policy object is involved in the policy making, feels responsible, and feels committed to the agreed upon policy (Gornitzka, Kyvik & Stensaker, 2007, p. 54).

As this quote suggests, a more thorough understanding of the policy process would also necessarily include those involved in policy making at the highest level. Initial plans for this project included a mixed methods approach, with the inclusion of a quantitative survey to examine whether similar trends appeared at other higher education institutions in South Africa. While further research would do well to broaden the base from which data are collected, a first step would be to complete a second project, analysing the results of the 16 department heads interviewed, to challenge or confirm the above results, and to broaden the understanding of the institutional responses. Certainly, any such endeavour would be strengthened by the experience gained by the author in working through this project.

References

- Adam, S. & Kriesi, H. (2007). The network approach. In P. Sabatier (Ed.), *Theories of the policy process* (pp. 129-154). Boulder: Westview Press.
- Anderson, J. E. (1975). *Public policy-making*. New York: Praeger.
- Ball, C. (1985). What the hell is quality? In D. Urwin (Ed.) *Fitness for purpose: Essays in higher education*. Guildford, UK: SRHE and NFER-Nelson.
- Badat, S. (2004). Transforming South African higher education 1990-2003: Goals, policy initiatives & critical challenges & issues. In N. Cloete, P. Pillay, S. Badat & T. Moja (Eds.), *National policy & a regional response in South African higher education* (pp. 1-46). Cape Town: David Philip Publisher.
- Barrett, S. M. (2004). Implementation studies: Time for a revival? Personal reflections on 20 years of implementation studies. *Public Administration* 82(2), 249-262.
- Barrett, S. M. & Fudge, C. (Eds). (1981). *Policy and action: Essays on the implementation of public policy*. London: Methuen.
- Cerych, L. & Sabatier, P. (1986). *Great expectations and mixed performance: The implementation of higher education reforms in Europe*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
- CHE (Council on Higher Education). (2001). *Higher Education Quality Committee: Founding document*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.
- CHE (Council on Higher Education). (2005). *Towards a framework for quality promotion and capacity development in South African higher education*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.
- CHE (Council on Higher Education). (2006). *Executive summary: Audit report on the University of Cape Town*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.

-
- CHE (Council on Higher Education). (2007a). *Executive summary: Audit report on Stellenbosch University*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.
- CHE (Council on Higher Education). (2007b). *Review of higher education in South Africa: Selected themes*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.
- CHE (Council on Higher Education). (2008). *CHE annual report 2007-2008*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.
- CHE (Council on Higher Education). (n.d.a). *Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC)*. Retrieved November 5th, 2008, from <http://che.ac.za/about/heqc/>
- CHE (Council on Higher Education). (n.d.b). *CHE – Overview*. Retrieved November 5th, 2008, from <http://che.ac.za/about/overview/>
- CHE (Council on Higher Education). (n.d.c). *CHE - Overview of higher education in South Africa*. Retrieved April 28th, 2009, from <http://che.ac.za/heinsa/>
- Cloete, N., Maassen, P. & Muller, J. (2007). Great expectations, mixed governance approaches and unintended outcomes: The post-1994 reform of South African higher education. In Å. Gornitzka, M. Kogan & A. Amaral (Eds.), *Reform and change in higher education. Analysing policy implementation* (pp. 207-226). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Creswell, J. W. (2004). *Research design. Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Daguerre, A. (2000). Policy networks in England and France: The case of child care policy 1980-1989. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 7(2), 244-260.
- De Jager, H. J. and Nieuwenhuis, F. J. (2005). Linkages between total quality management and the outcomes-based approach in an education environment. *Quality in Higher Education* 11(3), 251-260.
- Department of Education. (1996). *Green paper on higher education transformation*. Pretoria: Department of Education. Retrieved November 6th, 2008, from <http://www.info.gov.za/greenpapers/1996/highereduc.htm>

-
- Department of Education. (1997a). *Higher Education Act of the Republic of South Africa*. No. 101 of 1997. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- Department of Education. (1997b). *Education white paper 3: A programme for the transformation of higher education*. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- Department of Education. (2001). *National plan for higher education*. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- Dill, D. D. & Sporn, B. (Eds). (1995). *Emerging patterns of social demand and university reform: Through a glass darkly*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Easton, D. (1965). *A framework for policy analysis*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Enders, J., Jeliazkova, M., McGuinness, A. Jr. & Maassen, P. (2003, September). Higher education policy formulation and implementation: A framework for case analysis. Paper presented at *Consortium of Higher Education Researchers 16th Annual Conference*, Porto.
- Flick, U. (2006). *An introduction to qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Frederickson, H. G. & Smith, K. B. (2003). *The public administration theory primer*. Boulder: Westview.
- Genis, E. (2002). A perspective on tensions between external quality assurance requirements and institutional quality assurance development: A case study. *Quality in Higher Education* 8(1), 63-70.
- Gouws, A. & Waghid, Y. (2006). Editorial: Higher education quality assurance in South Africa: Accreditation in perspective. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 20(6), 751-761.
- Gornitzka, Å., Kogan, M. & Amaral, A. (2007). Introduction. In Å. Gornitzka, M. Kogan & A. Amaral (Eds.), *Reform and change in higher education. Analysing policy implementation* (pp. 1-14). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Gornitzka, Å., Kyvik, S. & Stensaker, B. (2007). Implementation analysis in higher education. In Å. Gornitzka, M. Kogan & A. Amaral (Eds.), *Reform and change*

-
- in higher education. Analysing policy implementation* (pp. 35-56). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Hall, M. & Symes, A. (2005). South African higher education in the first decade of democracy: From cooperative governance to conditional autonomy. *Studies in Higher Education*, 30(2), 199-212.
- Harvey, L. & Newton, J. (2007). Transforming quality evaluation: Moving on. In D. F. Westerheijden, B. Stensaker & M. Joao Rosa (Eds.), *Quality assurance in higher education. Trends in regulation, translation and transformation* (pp. 225-245). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Hay, D. & Strydom, K. (2000). Quality assessment considerations in programme policy formulation and implementation. *Quality in Higher Education* 6(3), 209-218.
- Hill, M. & Hupe, P. (2002). *Implementing public policy: Governance in theory and practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- Hjern, B. (1982). Implementation research: The link gone missing. *Journal of Public Policy*, 2(3), 301-308.
- Hjern, B. & Hull, C. (1982). Implementation research as empirical constitutionalism. *European Journal of Political Research*, 10, 105-115.
- Hjern, B. & Porter, D. (1981). Implementation structures: A new unit of administrative analysis. *Organization Studies*, 2, 211-227.
- Hogwood, B. W. & Gunn, L. (1984). *Policy analysis for the real world*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hood, C. C. (1976). *The limits of administration*. London: John Wiley.
- Jones, C. (1970). *An introduction to the study of public policy*. Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Kickert, W. J. M., Klijn, E-H. & Koppenjan, J. F. M. (Eds.). (1997). *Managing complex networks: Strategies for the public sector*. London: Sage Publications.

-
- Kiser, L. L. & Ostrom, E. (1982). The three worlds of action: A metatheoretical synthesis of institutional approach. In E. Ostrom (Ed.), *Strategies of political inquiry* (pp. 179-222). Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Kogan, M. (2007). The implementation game. In Å. Gornitzka, M. Kogan & A. Amaral (Eds.), *Reform and change in higher education. Analysing policy implementation* (pp. 57-66). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Lasswell, H. D. (1970). The emerging conception of the policy sciences. *Policy Sciences*, 1(1), 3-14.
- Lester, J. & Goggin, M. (1998). Back to the future: The rediscovery of implementation studies. *Policy Currents*, 8(3), 1-10.
- Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Majone, G. & Wildavsky, A. (1978). Implementation as evolution. In H. Freeman (Ed.), *Policy studies review annual* (pp. 103-117). Beverley Hills: Sage.
- Matland, R. E. (1995). Synthesizing the implementation literature: The ambiguity-conflict model of policy implementation. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 5, 145-174.
- Mintzberg, H. & Waters, J. A. (1985). Of strategies, deliberate and emergent. *Strategic Management Journal*, 6(3), 257. Retrieved March 6, 2008, from ABI/INFORM Global database. (Document ID: 431216311).
- Nakamura, R. (1987). The textbook process and implementation research. *Policy Studies Review*, 1, 142-154.
- O'Toole, L. J. Jr. (2004). The theory-practice issue in policy implementation research. *Public Administration*, 82(2), 309-329.
- Parsons, W. (1995). *Public policy: An introduction to the theory and practice of policy analysis*. Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Perellon, J.F. (2007). Analysing quality assurance in higher education: proposals for a conceptual framework and methodological implications. In D. F.

-
- Westerheijden, B. Stensaker & M. Joao Rosa (Eds.), *Quality assurance in higher education: Trends in regulation, translation and transformation* (pp. 155-178). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Peters, B. G. & Pierre, J. (1998). Governance without government? Rethinking public administration. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 8, 223-244.
- Pollitt, C. & Bouckaert, G. (1995) Defining quality. In C. Pollitt & G. Bouckaert (Eds.), *Quality improvement in European public services. Concepts, cases and commentary* (pp. 1-19). London: Sage Publications.
- Pressman, J. L. & Wildavsky, A. (1973). *Implementation: how great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland; Or, why it's amazing that federal programs work at all. This being a saga of the Economic Development Administration as told by Two Sympathetic Observers who seek to build morals on a foundation of ruined hopes*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Pressman, J. L. & Wildavsky, A. (1984). *Implementation: how great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland; Or, why it's amazing that federal programs work at all. This being a saga of the Economic Development Administration as told by Two Sympathetic Observers who seek to build morals on a foundation of ruined hopes*, (3rd ed.). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Richardson, J. (2000). Government, interest groups and policy change. *Political Studies* 48, 1006-1025.
- Ryan, N. (1995). Unravelling conceptual developments in implementation analysis. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 54(1), 65-80.
- Sabatier, P. (1986). Top-down and bottom-up approaches to implementation research: A critical analysis and suggested synthesis. *Journal of Public Policy*, 6(1), 21-48.
- Sabatier, P. (1991). Toward better theories of the policy process. *Political Science and Politics*, 24, 147-156.

-
- Sabatier, P. (2007a). From policy implementation to policy change: A personal odyssey. In Å. Gornitzka, M. Kogan & A. Amaral (Eds.), *Reform and change in higher education. Analysing policy implementation* (pp. 17-34). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Sabatier, P. (2007b). The need for better theories. In P. Sabatier (Ed.), *Theories of the policy process*, (pp. 3-20). Boulder: Westview Press.
- Sabatier, P. & Mazmanian, D. A. (1979). The conditions of effective implementation: A guide to accomplishing policy objectives. *Policy Analysis*, 5(4), 481-504.
- Sabatier, P. & Mazmanian, D. A. (1980). The implementation of public policy: A framework of analysis. *Policy Studies Journal*, 8 (special issue), 538-560.
- Scharpf, F. W. (1978). Interorganizational policy studies: Issues, concepts and perspectives. In K. I. Hanf & F. W. Scharpf (Eds.), *Interorganizational policy making: Limits to coordination and central control* (pp. 345-370). London: Sage Publications.
- Schofield, J. & Sausman, C. (2004). Symposium on implementing public policy: Learning from theory and practice. *Public Administration*, 82(2), 235-248.
- Smith, M. J. (1993). *Pressure, power and policy: State autonomy and policy networks in Britain and the United States*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Smout, M. & Stephenson, S. (2002). Quality assurance in South African higher education: A new beginning. *Quality in Higher Education* 8(2), 197-206.
- Stellenbosch University. (2007). *Fact book section 1: Student enrolments for 2007*. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University. Retrieved November 6th, 2008, from http://sun025.sun.ac.za/portal/page/portal/Administrative_Divisions/INB/Home/Fact%20Book/tab2007
- Stensaker, B. (2007). Quality as fashion: Exploring the translation of a management idea into higher education. In D. F. Westerheijden, B. Stensaker & M. Joao Rosa (Eds.), *Quality assurance in higher education. Trends in regulation, translation and transformation* (pp. 99-118). Dordrecht: Springer.

-
- Strydom, A. H. & Holtzhausen, S. (2001). *Transformation and institutional quality management with a South African university: A case study of the University of the Orange Free State*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Strydom, A.H. & Strydom, J.F. (2004). Establishing quality assurance in the South African context. *Quality in Higher Education* 10(2), 101-113.
- Strydom, J. F., Zulu, N. & Murray, L. (2004). Quality, culture and change. *Quality in Higher Education*, 10(3), 207-217.
- Symes, A. (2006). Democratisation and quality assurance in South African higher education. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 20(6), 762-772.
- True, J. L., Jones, B. D. & Baumgartner, F. R. (2007). Punctuated-equilibrium theory: Explaining stability and change in public policymaking. In P. Sabatier (Ed.), *Theories of the policy process* (pp. 155-188). Boulder: Westview Press.
- University of Cape Town. (2008). *About UCT 2008: A brief introduction to UCT*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town. Retrieved November 6th, 2008, from http://uct.ac.za/downloads/uct.ac.za/about/about_uct.pdf
- Van Meter, D. & Van Horn, C.E. (1975). The policy implementation process: Conceptual framework. *Administration and Society*, 6(4), 445-488.
- Westerheijden, D. F., Stensaker, B. & Joao Rosa, M. (2007). Introduction. In D. F. Westerheijden, B. Stensaker & M. Joao Rosa (Eds.), *Quality assurance in higher education. Trends in regulation, translation and transformation* (pp. 1-11). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Wilson, W. (1887). *The study of administration*. Course readings for Public Administration. Reykjavík: Háskólafröðun.
- Zahariadis, N. (2007). The multiple streams framework: Structure, limitations, prospects. In P. Sabatier (Ed.), *Theories of the policy process* (pp. 65-92). Boulder: Westview Press.