

MOCK Institutional Audit

University of Zululand

22-24 February 2010

Observer's Notes

Preparations

1st day

- Check spelling of names on name badges
- Coffee/catering came late; coffee water wasn't hot
- Well organized to have someone receiving and referring the interviewees
- Make sure one is in time; it's too disturbing when some of a larger group arrive after the others at the meeting.
- Suggest or recommend interviewees to bring Internal self-survey (shows they are well prepared).
- Organizers to know beforehand if any absentees can be expected so they can inform the committee timely and formally.
- Indicate on the overview of Interview Sessions to which Faculty interviewees belong (if applicable); name badges to contain the 'body' one represents.
- Due to time limits it isn't strictly needed to have staff at the mock showing up several times even in different capacities, as it is to give them a feeling of what it entails.
- Fridge with cold drinks excellent!
- Sloppy impression that a meeting (of the research committee) was planned at the same time in the same room and reported to another room on a handwritten piece of paper).
- No running water in the loo and flushing toilets
- Sessions description form sometimes speaks of 'to interview members' whilst there is only one person to be interviewed.

2nd day:

- Sound system (microphones) not working properly in council chamber. System nicely put on but a little late (and not well used by several interviewees)
- There were 2 Ms MN Chalufu badges (and only 1 'occupied').
- Degree of participation in self-survey of Faculty of Education somewhat confusing. May be more use could (have) be(en) made of the results of another national audit from Education that was taking place at the time of the self-survey.
- Allow some time for changing audiences in the schedule.
- Unfortunately an error in the timing of the schedule (not a major problem for the panel ☺)
- Be careful in submitting new tables, print-outs, or lists to panel; it confuses (at least it confused me)
- The new venue may not really invite participants to speak out; it's a little too spacey to support confidentiality. Smaller venues may contribute more to a feeling of confidentiality.
- Venue is also acoustically less convenient, even when the micro's function.
- No backspace for the panel in the new venue.
- Toilets flushing and taps now providing running water and the fridge even moved to new venue and available in new venue (though occupying limited back-space).
- The mix of staff (lecturers, supervisors, students) doesn't always allow to sufficiently assess differences between faculties and even departments.

3rd day

- Panel moved back to room 407 which is acoustically better
- The fridge didn't (in the beginning)
- The shorter the sessions, the more the changes and the more difficult it becomes to respect the time schedule.
- The sessions at the end became a little rushing (only 20 minutes)

Generally speaking, job well done! Congrats to the whole team!

Panel

- Good introduction as to objectives of the Mock
- Sometimes more 'interactive', more 'debate' or 'critical further investigations on provided 'window-dressing' and escaping answers'
- Proper distribution of tasks
- A question: is it thinkable that in the real audit concrete 'cases' will be provided as evidence for discussion? For example trailing finalization of almost completed PhD; good quality staff that was not retained, etc. If so, interviewees should be prepared that panel members have much more knowledge of what's happening (and not) at the University from other sources than the self survey. (I do recall that something in this direction was advanced at the launch of the self survey in January 2008)
- Second session: more probing additional questions to substantiate certain answers and thus more critical and thus revealing); good cross-checks!
- Nice concrete questions, like for example: 'what did you do since....', 'what did you do before this interview?' 'Look, outside there are....', etc.
- Excellent chairmanship and very valuable support from the panel members.

Overall very professional, consistent approach; relentless commitment; job well done.

Topics and issues covered

Note: the following is a more or less chronologically compiled list of issues addressed during the mock. Though an effort was made to avoid too much repetition certain topics or issues may be mentioned several times and in different wording. In theory, any group of interviewees can expect to be interrogated about any of the listed topics, none of them being the exclusive domain of one particular 'group' representing a particular University body. The audit is (also) about inter-university collaboration!

- Language policy (and practice!)
- Security issues as to marking
- Management RBay campus; ICT-management RBay-campus; other services
- Institutional Planning: what plans and programs to cover identified 'gaps' at all levels of the institution
- Quality management policy at various levels (attention to operational terms; also the role of 'external' bodies)
- Factors affecting performance, including those that are (partially) beyond control of the directly involved (no classrooms allocated, no teaching staff available, vacancies not timely advertised, filled up).
- Interfaculty collaboration
- (Involvement in) Enrolment planning
- Strategic plan and how it is being implemented in operational terms (concrete practices; "trickling down")
- What strategy to promote research? Incentives? Monitoring? Quality Assurance?
- Community service training; consultation of the work field. How? When? Who?

- What is a comprehensive University (is there shared common understanding)?
- Involvement and role in self survey! What role did the unit/entity play in the self survey (how involved/how did they take this opportunity and what did it with the information collected?)
- Use of website/internet (Public relations)
- Performance management systems
- What did your Department do or is it doing to become a Department of a comprehensive university
- Nature of (Academic) support received and provided .(For example: received by Departments to enhance quality of teaching and learning and to raise research output and quality and support provided to students to improve quality).
- How is feed-back from students organized (for example as to course outlines; not limited to formal assessments; is feed-back provided on exams anyway? How?)
- Assessment policies and their implementation
- Student supervision policy and its implementation
- Assessment procedures with an emphasis on the role of external examiners; (in)consistencies between procedures/standards.
- Functioning and adequacy of research support resources (funds and structure, facilities)
- Student registration process(es)
- Quality of teaching programs and lecturing staff
- Assessment procedures (including feed-back mechanisms on assignments, exams /and lecturer performance evaluation)
- Program coverage (academic skills training, for example)
- Facility offering (Library and information support)
- Community Servicing (policy and practice)
- Working procedures and processes, including collaboration with other support structures (in view of quality promotion)
- Assessment of 'units' position in relation to other university bodies (intra-institutional collaboration and communication)
- Use of allocated budget (non-depletion)
- (Academic) Planning and resource allocation (procedures and processes)
- Registration and administration procedures and collaboration between various University bodies.
- Record keeping!

The Sessions

Vice-chancellor (Prof Mazibuko)

- Delayed arrival whatever the reason and whoever the person not acceptable
- Well done sticking to schedule

Senior executive Deans (Mr Govindsamy/Mr Maphisa)

- Early start (but no Prof Sibaya as indicated on the list; make erratum if needed)
- Maphisa seemed to suggest that he had a different view on RB-campus management: will possible differences be more highlighted.

Deans (Prof Ori, Prof Imenda, Prof Vd Bergh and Prof Makunga)

- Didn't show up together and two were not on time; this is a very good example of bad management.
- Prof Imenda referred very well to what issues of attention that came from the internal review

Vice Deans in charge of Teaching and Learning (Prof RV Gabela, Prof Ras, Prof Zobolo)

- Prof Shrestha not attending
- Group entered as a group; OK

Vice Deans in charge of Research (Prof D Ngidi, Prof DN Ocholla, Prof B Rawlins, Prof A Banjo)

- 3 Entered as a group; one arrived too late.
- First group to refer to NUFFIC-project

DVC academic & research (also in capacity of senior executive member; Prof PT Sibaya)

- Missed first session.
- (Good) Ideas.
- No mention made of NUFFIC-project when opportunity existed.

NEHAWU staff Union (Mr D Makhatini and Ms TP Mtshali)

- Responses in the beginning too 'obligatory' and not on facts where the questions were about.

Student Administrators in charge of SRC (Ms NN Mbatha)

- Mr D Makhatini didn't show up.

Institutional Forum (Prof MO Ndwandwe)

- Was not involved in the preparations of the institutional self-survey

Executive Directors HCM (Dr MJ Mokoele), Finance (Mrs C Nsibande), Facilities (Mr M Smythe) and Public Relations (acting; Mr T Leshoro)

- Didn't enter jointly; one arriving later and one yet later; disturbing in view of the introduction
- Was not involved in the preparations of the institutional self-survey

Heads of Department Faculty of Arts (13 pax)

- 11 (12) participants; there was one person not sitting behind a name badge.
- Reasonably well arriving in time; 2 somewhat late 1 much too late.

Heads of Department Faculty of Education (7 pax)

- Only 5 attending ; 1 also absent in other session
- However, there was one Department with 2 representatives (indeed one person was not sending behind a name badge).
- The relatively low attendance showed a particular light at the first question which was about the limited contribution of the Faculty of Education to the self-survey. It were not the people attending who are to be blamed.

Heads of Department Faculty of Arts (7 pax)

- 6 attended and almost all arrived on time.

Heads of Department Faculty of Science and Agriculture (10 pax)

- 6 attending (only)!
- One retired Prof figured on name badge, allegedly having confirmed (not on the list of participants though)

Lecturers (12 pax; 3 per Faculty)

- Only 7 or 8 attended
- Probably many last minute changes as various badges were handwritten
- All were in time (but the programme delayed)
- Unfortunately not visible from which faculty or department

Supervisors (12 pax; 3 per Faculty)

- Due to error in schedule delayed start not much of a problem
- 8 supervisors attended; unknown which faculty they represented
- Namelist in session overview not correct
- One person attending for the 3rd time
- Here too not all seemed to have read or even know of the existence

Undergraduate Students (12 pax; 3 per Faculty)

- 10 attending; unknown from which Faculty; an 11th arrived belatedly
- 4 2nd years; 3 3rd years; 4 4th years students
- Namelist mentions more than 3 representatives from the Faculty of Education
- I found students surprisingly positive assessments (or moderate in their criticisms) as regards staff and programs (facilities excepted). How has recruitment been done? However, many critical observations were quite 'implicit' (like for instance the misunderstanding about 'challenging': "everything at this university is challenging, you have to fight for yourself")

Postgraduate Students (12 pax; 3 per Faculty)

- 4 students attending; unknown from which faculty and how identified
- Number of students on list not proportional per faculty
- Were not really informed on what is going on
- More critical than undergraduate students

Researchers (8 pax; 2 per Faculty)

- 4 Researchers attending

Library Management (Ms Vahed and Ms Van Wyk)

- On time; adequate answers; well prepared (with self-survey document and referring to it)
- Mentioned contribution of the Wuzulu-project

Library Staff (8 pax)

- A little shy
- Tasting tensions

Dean of Students, Counselling and FAB (Mr P. Mbatha and Mr V Naidoo)

- Dean not attending
- What is FAB?

3rd Day

Community engagement working group (Ms Dodd, Dr J Boughey, Dr NH Ntombela; 3 without names, amongst them Acting Head Public Relations)

- No full namelist
- Additional documents provided at the interview

University Teaching and Learning Committee (Prof PT Sibaya, Dr MM Hlongwane, Prof DC Sibaya and Prof Beesham)

- Arrivals: interviewees dropping in one by one (partially caused by fact that team was needed to take photographs)
- Last person not attending

Higher Degrees Committee (Prof PT Sibaya and Prof C Kistan)

- Good answers: 'identified gaps processes'

(Research) Ethics Committee (Prof CA Addison, Prof C Kistan, Mr I Kaseeram)

- Timely arrivals
- Is it the Ethics or the Research Ethics Committee?
- Unlike many others, this Committee is very well aware of what the whole self survey is about.

Research Office (Prof PT Sibaya, Ms D Viljoen)

- 2 listed people not attending
- 2 additional docs distributed.

ICT-staff (Mr S Aalto, Ms Y Canham)

- Or is it ITC?
- No mention made of Wuzulu-project support (eLab, eLearning classes).

Admissions, examination and graduation offices (Mr V Kungune, Mr BS Vezi, Mr MM Nzuzo and Mr M Ngubane)

- Student and Academic Administration
- Slightly defensive; one person talking for the others.

Academic Development Unit, Staff Professional development and Faculty Coordinator (Dr J Boughey, MS F Mahuni, Mr NM Nsele, Mr S Naras)

- One person arriving very late.

Student Housing, Health Clinic and International Office (7 pax Mr S Gumede, Dr BN Vilakzai, Ms AM Shezi, Ms N Makalima, Ms NG Dlamini, Ms T Nisibande, Mrs LGN Gule)

- More people attending than listed
- Entering in 2 groups (just in time though as the panel was behind schedule).

CEEL short courses (Ms RP Chonco, Ms NP Khumalo)

- A little short

General/various/personal

- Answers to be oriented towards real action: policies may exist but its their implementation that matters; also knowledge on what the policies entail (language!) is recommended.
- Presenting intentions alone won't do the job.
- Let interviewees more indicate at what point(s) they are already working on the outcomes of the internal self survey.
- Its important that the interviewees are able to show that they know the ISS-report; and know what is in it.
- Recommend interviewees bringing materials showing that they have well prepared for the audit.
- Emphasis on Richardsbay campus first 'puzzled' me but could well be an issue of attention for real audit.
- Some gaps where mentioned that could have been addressed through the project.
- Interviewees can safely assume that the panel members know what is in the ISS-report (and even more). It's more important to show what one is doing on it than blame although it is extremely important to indicate where it fails.
- I missed referring to activities the NUFFIC-project is undertaking (interfaculty collaboration for example)
- The insufficient institutional capacity (staffing) comes up; what is the university doing on it); Faculty of Education: 1:22 staff-student ratio required; 1:87 actual.
- For senior management it is imperative showing they are working on the identified needs as felt by the other units and entities of the University.

- One has to be aware that issues are cross-checked in different interviews and at different levels.
- When a question is asked of the type “what do you do”, “what is your strategy to, etc.”, avoid referring to just referring what the problems are or relate those problems to your actions.
- As element of strategy to address certain weaknesses one should more refer to projects of international cooperation (like Wuzulu-project).
- Low research production is not only a matter of heavy work loads; also a quality (capability) problem
- Education’s research output also low because it is more than the other Faculties providing ‘professional’ courses (outreach) that are often not part of classical universities.
- Executive Deans Finance and Facilities didn’t mention the NUFFIC-funding for the upgrading of lab facilities; there still are possibilities.
- Representatives/interviewees who were for one reason or another not directly involved in the institutional self-survey should do some preparatory work and inform themselves about how the process involved (in their absence).
- Answers were sometimes too much of what one thinks or how one sees issues and not how one actually tackles things.
- Take the opportunity to report on ‘good practices’
- From an organisational point of view: be prepared to last minute changes the panel may want.
- Working load is often blamed, but in my view there may be better arguments to be advanced. For example to questions of difference in research output between departments: some Departments are by nature ‘training service providers’ and don’t have an academic orientation at all. Their mission isn’t really academic. The demands of becoming a comprehensive university is not always compatible with the requirements of promoting a research culture.
- A lengthy introduction to a short ‘how’ or ‘what’ question that actually is asking to provide concrete examples about how one works doesn’t serve the case of the respondent.
- For senior management: there seems not to be a comprehensive shared view on what a comprehensive university actually entails or should entail.
- Several problems surfaced, especially regarding the academic support structure where the NUFFIC-project could have provided part of the answer.... Missed opportunity. Establishment/development/strengthening of an (existing) support structure to enhance staff performance (regarding teaching and research).
- Asking students to submit “chapter by chapter” is not an answer to the question *how* one monitors student progress. Monitoring is about checking the timely submission of those chapters as such.
- The self-survey is not always perceived as it should, namely as an opportunity to mobilise forces and address weaknesses. Some respondents postpone the implications of the self-survey too much to the future advancing that it will ultimately result in recommendations that will have to be implemented.
- Decide if it is good policy to allow submitting additional materials at the interviews; if everybody does so it will become pretty messy and doesn’t look organized. May be it is better to collect ‘additional materials’ beforehand.
- Personal remark: the procedure of having research proposals approved through the Higher Degrees Committee might well add more to red tap than to quality improvement. There may be a need to critically review the mandate of all “committees” and decentralize decision making.
- Last but not definitely not least: during the interviews a load of ‘issues’ gradually emerged. Logically several issues that only surfaced later, were not covered in

previous sessions, especially in those with representatives from senior management. It would be appropriate to create a feed-back and cross-checking opportunity for and with senior-management.

- So, organise proper feed-back to all participants on the self-survey (inviting stimulating them to work on a follow-up strategy to the outcomes of the self-survey) and on this very mock!! A one page 'lessons learned' thanking all the interviewees for their contributions and stimulating them to take the forthcoming audit as a not to be missed opportunity for the betterment of the institution could be distributed. I trust these notes contain sufficient building bricks to compose such a feed-back letter.

Ir André Boon
KwaDlangezwa, February 25, 2010