

Full Length Research Paper

Academic Quality Assurance Practices in Ghanaian Public Universities: Experience from University for Development Studies

Seniwoliba, A.J.

University for Development Studies, P. O. Box TL 1350, Tamale, Ghana

Correspondence Author's Email: attiajoseph@yahoo.com

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The study seeks to bring to bare the concept of quality assurance in higher education from the Ghanaian perspective, quality assurance model for higher education in Ghana, the internal quality assurance practices of the University for Development Studies and quality assurance challenges facing higher education. This was to ensure that higher education institutions in the country will consistently and efficiently assure quality standards in Higher Education. The research design was geared towards examining the quality assurance practices of the University for Development Studies. The study was descriptive qualitative research. Documents that were analyzed include the National Accreditation Board (NAB) Act (Act 744) of 2007, the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) Act (Act 454) of 1992, NCTE Norms for Tertiary Education (Universities), UDS Academic Quality Assurance (AQA) questionnaire for evaluating lectures and the Junior Members handbook on General Rules and Regulations on Examinations for Diploma and Undergraduate Programme. The purposive sampling technique was adopted. It is a non-probability sampling method in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria which may include specialist knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness to participate in the research. The findings revealed that the University for Development Studies has put in place strategies to assure quality in its operations. Among others, the researcher recommends that as part of the UDS's strategic plan to ensure quality standards, an appropriate balance must be maintained between student numbers, the physical infrastructure, staff capacity and teaching and learning equipment. This will address problems associated with the student/lecturer ratio and excess teaching load. Lecturers will also have more time for research, a very important function of Higher Educational Institutions.

Keywords: Quality, Quality Assurance, Quality Assurance Practices, Quality Assurance Challenges, University for Development Studies Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

Quality higher education has now been found to be important to national development. Indeed, the World Bank had recognized higher education as a critical element of development in which developing countries must build in earnest, if they are to make progress in a world that feeds on knowledge and breeds on competition. Bloom et al., (2005) provided evidences to show the positive impact that tertiary education can have on economic growth and poverty reduction in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The term quality assurance in higher education is increasingly used to denote the practices whereby

academic standards, i.e., the level of academic achievement attained by higher education graduates, are maintained and improved. This definition of academic quality as equivalent to academic standards is consistent with the emerging focus in higher education policies on student learning outcomes the specific levels of knowledge, skills, and abilities that students achieve as a consequence of their engagement in a particular education programme (Brennan and Shah, 2000).

The issue of higher education quality and the need for effective quality assurance systems beyond those of institutions themselves is becoming increasingly

important in national strategies of higher education. There are more people involved in investigating, researching, auditing, applying, analyzing, controlling, assessing and writing about quality than ever before. (Roffe, 1996). This is driven by a multitude of interrelated factors (Vught and Westerheijden, 1994) such as: the change in the relationship between higher education institutions and the state; the rise of the knowledge economy and the importance attached to higher education as the engine of economic growth; the increased participation of private higher education providers as a result of the increased demand for higher education coupled with the growing cost of higher education.

This has triggered Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) over the years to play pivotal roles in the socio-economic development of nations. In order to guarantee the sensitivity of Higher Education to national situations and offer value-for-money education, there is the need to consistently and efficiently assure high standards in the provisions of the institutions that deliver HE (Anon, 2008). To achieve this, a number of HEIs have put in place internal mechanisms and policies to ensure quality standards. Quality assurance agencies have been set up by various countries to coordinate the proper development of such institutions.

Learning outcomes are indeed key to a meaningful education, and focusing on learning outcomes is essential to inform diagnosis and improve teaching processes and student learning. While there is a long tradition of learning outcomes' assessment within institutions' courses and programmes, emphasis on learning outcomes has become more important in recent years. Interest in developing comparative measures of learning outcomes has increased in response to a range of higher education trends, challenges and paradigm shifts.

A useful distinction is therefore drawn between internal and external academic quality assurance. Internal quality assurance refers to those policies and practices whereby academic institutions themselves monitor and improve the quality of their education provision, while external quality assurance refers to supra-institutional policies and practices whereby the quality of higher education institutions and programmes are assured. Individual universities have always possessed policies and practices designed to assure the quality of education, but academic institutions have also always operated within a national policy framework designed by the state to assure academic standards. This entry reviews the new forms of external quality assurance that have accompanied recent reforms in national policies and the issues they raise for higher education.

Literature on higher education quality assurance indicates that improvement and accountability are believed to be the two main purposes of national quality

assurance agencies. However, at the moment most national quality assurance agencies seem to focus on the accountability aspect rather than the improvement (Vught and Westerheijden, 1994). The issue of balancing accountability and improvement in higher education quality assurance has become a major concern in recent times and many scholars have contributed to the debate (Wilger 1997; Vroeijsdijk 1995; Vught and Westerheijden 1994). According to Vught and Westerheijden (1994) a national quality assurance agency needs to combine both internal needs of higher education institutions (improvement) and external needs of society (accountability) in quality assurance, as mentioned before. Cambell and Rozsnyai (2002) also argued that if external quality assurance (e.g. requirements for the approval and design of programmes) is very rigid, then higher education institutions may not have the flexibility to respond rapidly or in an innovative manner to new demands.

Statement of the Problem

The establishment of the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) by an act of parliament (Act 454) of 1993, operating with the vision of "leading tertiary education to greater heights", the NCTE strives to promote quality, equitable access, relevance, sustainable funding, good governance and management with excellence in tertiary education that support national development. The Council also publishes information on higher education. The subsequent establishment of the National Accreditation Board (NAB) by the government of Ghana in 1993 with the enactment of the NAB LAW 1993 (PNDC 317), was to contribute to the furtherance of better management of tertiary education as a Quality Assurance Agency.

In Ghana, apart from the standards put in place by the quality assurance bodies to ensure quality in Higher Education, each institution has its own internal policies and mechanisms for ensuring the fulfillment of its mandate as credible Higher Education Institutions. In spite of these policies and mechanisms put in place by the University for Development Studies in its four satellite Campuses to ensure quality in its operations, quality culture is not embedded and challenges remained unresolved.

This study seeks to examine the internal quality assurance practices of the University for Development Studies. The study focuses on mainly on how students are turned out of the University. Most writers on quality assurance refer to this principle as "Student Lifecycle framework" (Chambers and Paull, 2008). Students are monitored from the point of admission into the University through being taught and assessed and to graduation, considering the quality indicators at each stage of the student during his/her stay in the University.

Literature on quality assurance has been extensively discussed both at the global and national levels but it appears there is no specific work nor empirical research on quality assurance practices on Public Universities in Ghana, particularly the University for Development Studies and this study seeks to fill this knowledge gap.

In view of this objective, the study seeks to investigate the quality of higher education from the Ghanaian perspective, Ghana's quality assurance model for higher education, the internal quality assurance practices of the University for Development Studies and quality assurance challenges faced by the higher education.

Concepts of Quality and Quality Assurance Perspective

The term 'quality' migrated or was imported from its more familiar industrial and commercial settings of the 1980s into the domain of HE and also to other professional and public service settings (Newton, 2002). Defining quality in HE is a challenging task since quality is a rather vague and controversial concept. In the literature there is no single definition of the term which is absolutely agreed or universally accepted. Tammaro (2005) observed that quality is a value judgement, differently interpreted by different stakeholders, such as governments, employers, students, administrators, lecturers, etc. Like 'beauty' quality is subjective, a matter of personal judgement (Doherty, 2008).

Although it is difficult to define quality especially in Higher Education, Mishra (2007) argued that the term has a few central ideas around which the whole concept revolves; quality as absolute (is given and considered as the highest possible standards), quality as relative (is described in relative terms), quality as a process (is the outcome of systems and procedural requirements), and quality as culture (recognizes the importance of organizational view of quality as a process of transformation, where each entity is concerned and acknowledges the importance of quality). He noted that educational institutions are particularly concerned with quality as a culture, though other ideas of quality have their respective places. Harvey (1997) identified five broad approaches to quality identifiable in relation to Higher Education. These are quality as exceptional, quality as perfection, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as value for money, and quality as transformation. Most of these definitions however, do not seem to apply to Higher Education. For example the dimension of quality as perfection cannot be applicable since Higher Education does not aim to produce defect-free graduates (Watty, 2003).

In another perspective quality, as a concept, has been defined differently by different stakeholders. This is

because it is multi-dimensional and means different things to different stakeholders. Also, different countries may tend to define these terms differently. This document adopts the following definitions of quality, quality assurance, accreditation, and licensing from Materu (2007) "Quality technically refers to –fitness for purpose. It encapsulates the concept of meeting commonly agreed precepts or standards. Such standards may be defined by law, an institution, a coordinating body or a professional society. In the diverse arena of higher education, fitness for purpose varies tremendously by field and programme.

Quality in the context of higher education refers to fitness for purposeful meeting or conforming to generally accepted standards as defined by an institutions, quality assurance bodies and appropriate academic and professional communities. In the diverse arena of higher education fitness for purpose varies tremendously by field and programmes. In a broad range of factors, quality in tertiary institutions include their vision and goals, talent and expertise of their teaching staff, admission requirements, assessment standards, the teaching and learning environment, the employability of its graduates (reference to the labour market), the quality of its library and laboratories, management effectiveness, governance and leadership (Marjorie, 2002).

A broad range of factors affect quality in tertiary institutions including their vision and goals, the talent and expertise of the teaching staff, admission and assessment standards, the teaching and learning environment, the employability of its graduates (relevance to the labor market), the quality of the library and laboratories, management effectiveness, governance and leadership.

Quality assurances is a planned and systematic review process of an institution or programme to determine whether or not acceptable standards of education, scholarship, and infrastructure are being met, maintained and enhanced. (Hayward 2001). A tertiary institution is only as good as the quality of its teaching staff- they are the heart of the institution that produces its graduates, its research products, and its service to the institution, community, and nation.

- **Accreditation** is a process of self-study and external quality review used in higher education to scrutinize an institution and/or its programmes for quality standards and need for quality improvement. The process is designed to determine whether or not an institution has met or exceeded the published standards (set by an external body such as NAB, NCTE, or other professional bodies) for accreditation, and whether it is achieving its mission and stated purpose. The process usually includes a self-evaluation, peer review and a site visit. Success results in the accreditation of a programme or an institution.

- **Audit** is a process of reviewing or vetting of an institution or programme to determine if its curriculum, staff, and infrastructure meet its stated aims and objectives. It is an evaluation of an institution or its programmes in relation to its own mission, goals, and stated standards. The assessors are looking primarily at the success of the institution in achieving its own goals. An audit focuses on accountability of institutions and programmes and usually involves a self-study, peer review and a site visit. Such an evaluation can be self-managed or conducted by external body. It is an evaluation and assessment of an institution or its programmes in relation to its mission, goals and stated standards. The assessors are looking primarily at the success of the institution in achieving its goals.
- **Licensing** is a process for granting a new institution or programme permission to launch its activities. It is sometimes a phased process whereby an institution goes through various stages before been granted a full license.

Establishment of the National Accreditation Board

Making inference from the challenges of higher education in Ghana, the question asked is whether national quality assurance agency is fulfilling its mandate in line with the intentions behind its establishment in 1993? Which, among others, is to ensure the quality of higher education in Ghana?

The National Accreditation Board (NAB) was established by the government of Ghana in 1993 with the enactment of the NAB LAW 1993 (PNDCL 317), to contribute to the furtherance of better management of tertiary education as a quality Assurance Agency. It is a public service institution under the Ministry of Education (MoE), responsible among other things for the accreditation of both public and private tertiary institutions with regards to the contents and standard of their programmes and also to determined, in consultation with the appropriate institutions or body, the programme and requirements for the proper operation of their institutions and the maintenance of acceptable levels of academic or professional standards. It is also responsible for the determination of equivalents of diplomas, certificates and other qualifications awarded in Ghana and elsewhere.

The passage of the National Accreditation Board Act, 2007, Act 744 of the Parliament of the Republic of Ghana retained the above mentioned mandate but also assigned NAB additional responsibility to:

1. Publish as it considers appropriate the list of accredited public and private institutions and programmes at the beginning of each calendar year; and
2. Advice the President on the grant of a charter to private tertiary education. Perform any other functions

determined by the Minister.

The agency is governed by a board composed of a chairman; representative from the University of Ghana (UG), representative of University of Cape Coast (UCC), representative of the University for Development Studies (UDS), representative of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), representative of University of Mines and Technology (UMT), representative of Conference of Polytechnic Principals (COPP), representative of Heads of Assisted Secondary Schools (CHASS), representatives of Association of Professional Bodies (APB), representative of Public Service Commission (PSC), representative of National Board for Professional and Technician Examinations (NABPTEx), representative of Ministry of Education (MOE), representative of Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) and the Government nominees.

NAB has two main committees with respect to its activities: the Accreditation Committee which comprises the institutional visits and the monitoring, and the Assessment Criteria sub- committees, as well as the Finance and Administrative Committee made up of the Appointment/ Promotion and Disciplinary, and the Budget sub-committees.

The agency has its office in the capital, Accra, and is financed on government subvention for personal emoluments, administration costs and service cost. This is also augmented with Internally Generated Funds from fees charge from accreditation exercises and evaluation of certificates.

Quality Assurance in Higher Education

The quality assurance system in higher education refers to the mechanism by means of which the university grants, both to the internal clients (employees, students) and to the external ones, confidence that all the conditions are met to attain the assumed standards. It can be defined as a set of policies, systems and processes directed at the maintenance and enhancement of educational quality, relying on constant assessment and comparison between intended results and obtained results, with a view to identifying sources of dysfunctional activities. Among the definitions given to quality in higher education, the following stand out:

- **Fitness for purpose:** describes the extent to which universities are capable of meeting their standards and of fulfilling their declared or implicit mission. This implies the existence, at university level, of mechanisms meant to make sure it constantly meets its objectives, within the framework of its declared purpose: that of conveying and assessing perfection. This definition acknowledges both the diversity of assumed missions in higher education, and its importance in the general education system;

- **Value for money:** offers the possibility of calculating a series of indicators such as: drop-out rate, the ratio between the number of students and of teaching staff, etc. This definition is associated with an increase in institutional autonomy, in the context of enhanced transparency and better fund management;

- **Quality as Exceptional:** This view of quality is linked to the idea of excellence and to exceptional high standards of academic achievements. According to Harvey (1999) quality in this approach is achieved if the standards are distinguished. This traditional view of quality is linked with elitism, it does not offer criteria against which to measure quality and does not attempt to define quality. The distinctiveness and inaccessibility of elitist education for most people is of itself 'quality'.

- **Quality as Perfection or consistency:** This notion of quality sees quality as consistent or flawless outcome. This idea means there should be a 'Zero error'. As higher education does not aim at producing standardized, free of defects graduates, this view of quality is not really applicable to higher education (Watty, 2003).

- **Quality as Transformation:** This notion sees quality as a process of qualitative change, which in higher education adds value to students through their learning (Harvey, 1999). According to this concept of quality, higher education is not a product or service for a customer but an ongoing process of transformation of the participants. Transformation in education refers to enhancement and empowerment of students or the development of new knowledge. Students are enhanced in higher education through the provision of an educational experience that enables the development and improvement of their knowledge, abilities and skills (Harvey, 1999). Empowering students means not only engaging them in selecting their own curriculum, monitoring the quality of education they are provided or constructing their own learning contracts but also empowering them as critical, transformative learners (Harvey and Knight 1996). Thus higher education is "first and foremost about the enhancement and empowerment of students as participants in process of learning" and "even more than that, higher education is about participation in a process of learning for transformation" (Harvey and Knight 1996;2). In his contribution to the quality debate, Gola (2003) defines quality in higher education as "specifying worthwhile learning goals and enabling students to achieve them" "it involves articulating academic standards" to meet: society expectations, student aspirations, the demand of the government, business and industry and the requirement of professional institutions. This definition of Gola (2003) seems to be in line with Harvey and Green's (1993) conception of quality as 'fitness for purpose'.

The difference in these conceptions seems a matter of emphasis either on the intrinsic and/or the extrinsic

values of higher education institutions. It can therefore be argued that different definitions of quality are likely to be prioritized by different stakeholders according to their interest and at different circumstances, and quality of higher education is not static, rather it is dynamic and expresses itself in a continuous innovation (Bruggen et al, 1998).

However, according to Harvey and Green (1993) the fact that there are many different definitions or understandings of quality does not mean that we should withdraw from the responsibility of maintaining and enhancing quality. To Henkel and Little (1999) 'higher education has its traditional language of quality reflecting notions of standards, of academic coherence and progression of attainment and understanding' which is not readily communicable to people outside the discourse of the specialist discipline'.

- "A transforming process by means of which the students perception of the world is changed via the learning process";

- "A lasting process meant to relatively even out and consolidate / enhance values, beliefs, customs, traditions and practices that the university shares with its students, generation after generation";

- "A relation between university and society"; - "in the long run, quality has to be looked on as practice, use and experience";

- Excellence, or maintaining the highest standards - established on the basis of benchmarking criteria; and

- Educational process of creating a "good quality product", obtained by defining a set of minimal standards.

Out of the multitude of criteria by means of which quality in higher education is described, we can conclude that there is no definition, but we all recognize it when we find it, as a result, not an action, and we also recognize that "quality is a never-ending journey".

Regardless of the definition ascribed to quality, a consensus has been reached in the international academic communities as to:

- attaining and maintaining the highest possible standards, proved by mechanisms of identifying and meeting social needs;

- a commitment to the systematic identification of opportunities, of strong suits and weak areas;

- the efficient use of resources;

- renewing the education curricula and teaching methods;

- developing permanent programmes of staff specialization and training;

- the capacity to adjust rapidly to the needs of students and other interested parties;

- the elaboration of realistic assessment procedures; and

- supplying adequate financial resources.

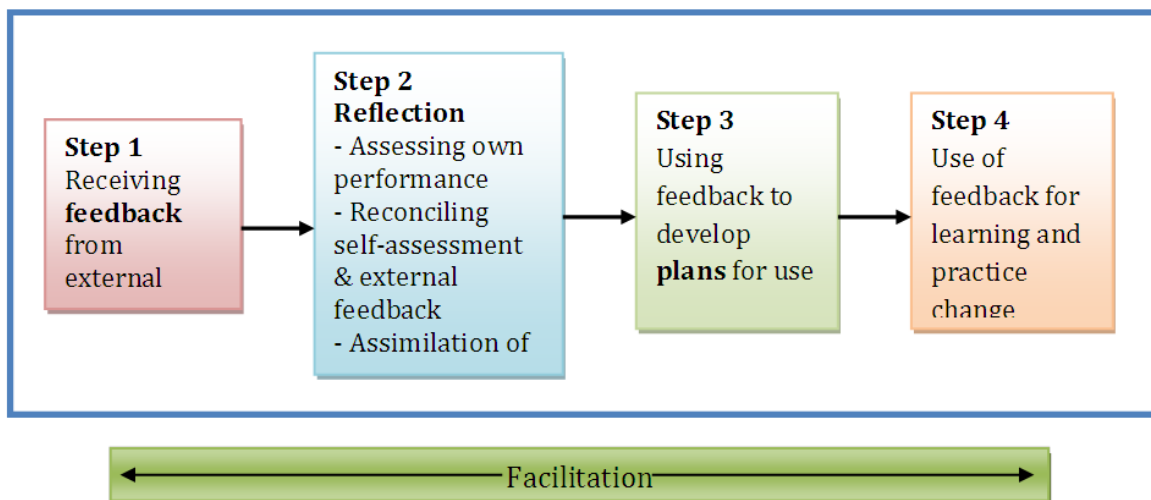


Figure 1: 'Model for 'directed' self-assessment'

Quality assurance is meant to be achieved at three levels: at a primary, institutional level, raising awareness towards achieving quality, towards a quality-oriented culture and creativity projects; at a national, ideal level, by creating a partnership between higher education institutions, government and agencies, with the intention of developing procedures and requirements to assess conformity; and at the Global level, aiming at the universities being attested by other higher institutions of learning, in order to turn these universities into strong competitors to those in the world.

The Global Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education include requirements both for internal and external quality assurance within higher education institutions. In the case of internal quality assurance, formal statements are required about the expected practice in a university, regarding: policy and procedures for quality assurance; approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards; assessment of students; quality assurance of the teaching staff; learning resources and student support; information systems and public information. The external quality assurance is assessed on the basis of the following standards: use of internal quality assurance procedures, development of external quality assurance processes, criteria for decisions, processes fit for purpose of reporting, follow-up procedures, periodic reviews and system-wide analyses.

In view of the standards set, the quality of the educational process cannot be measured solely by calculating quantitative indicators of the type: number of students per professor, the capacity of lecture rooms, laboratories, libraries etc. There are a series of specific indicators in this domain, among which: the academic, psychological and pedagogical competence of the teaching staff, the capacity to satisfy the social needs

and demand, the moral aspects of a university's activity; student satisfaction; the cultural, ethical and social responsibility of a university; employment and labor conditions offered to staff; academic mobility etc. cited in Baryeh, (2009).

Quality Assurance Models

From the literature there seems to be three prominent approaches of quality assurance in Higher Educational Institutions. These are the Command and Control Model, the Self-regulation Model, and the Market Regulation Model. Jamieson (2008) observed that the Command and Control Model is an attempt by the state to control Higher Educational Institutions. In this case the state has prescriptive rules and/or standards to ensure quality in Higher Education. Higher Educational Institutions are sanctioned for failure to observe these rules and/or standards. An example of this model is how US state universities are regulated. In the Self-regulation Model, Higher Educational Institutions are autonomous. They design their own curricula and award their own degrees. Higher Educational Institutions are ruled by professionals and it is trusted that these professionals will do the right things.

In the Market Regulation Model there is a relationship between market competition and Higher Educational Institutions. Market competition for Higher Education causes consumers (students) to make informed choices. The best Higher Educational Institutions flourish and the worst fails. Jamieson's (2008) observation is in line with Clark's (1983) classic triangle of coordination which suggests three principal modes for coordinating or controlling behaviour in academic institutions: state regulation, professional self-regulation which was termed

“the academic oligarchy” and market forces. Clark’s (1983) model is used to determine how Higher Educational Institutions are steered and how influential each force is in relation to the steering of these systems. Michael (2001) agreed with Clark when he observed that the state, the academe, and the market are the primary forces influencing quality in Higher Education. A view supported by Becket and Brookes (2008).

SCOPE OF RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

Research is a complex process which requires the researcher to follow certain procedures in collecting, analyzing data so as to validate the findings. Therefore a researcher before embarking on a research needs to develop a research design. Such a design is viewed as “overall planning and preparing the methodological procedure for obtaining the intended knowledge” (Kvale, 1996).

The research design was geared towards examining the quality assurance practices of the University for Development Studies. The study was descriptive qualitative research. Babbie, (2004), stated that there are many different approaches to the qualitative research method and this study used the case study approach focusing on one or a few examples of a social phenomenon. Case studies make it possible to give a certain level of overview and make the differences between HEIs visible. Review of document content and analysis of norms and modalities set by NAB, direct observations on the current practices in the satellites Campuses of the University for Development Studies, participatory implementation of some of the quality assurance best practices and semi-structured interviews for both lecturers and students were employed to collect data for the study.

Documents that were analyzed include the National Accreditation Board (NAB) Act (Act 744) of 2007, the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) Act (Act 454) of 1992, NCTE Norms for Tertiary Education (Universities), UDS Academic Quality Assurance (AQA) questionnaire for evaluating lectures and the Junior Members handbook on General Rules and Regulations on Examinations for Diploma and Undergraduate Programme.

The purposive sampling technique was adopted. It is a non-probability sampling method in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria which included specialist knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness to participate in the research. This research design necessitated researcher to take decisions about the individual participants who would be most likely to contribute appropriate data, both in terms of relevance and depth

The method enabled the researcher to draw unquantifiable but rich data, that is, comprehensive and in-depth, that helped deepen the understanding of this social phenomenon (Anderson, 1998).

In view of the above, the researcher choose to base the study on NAB published documents and other government papers on higher education as well as both published and unpublished documents related to the topic. The NAB website is the only official site for the agency (NAB) that offers detailed information about the agency as well as the methods that they use in carrying out their operations. Besides, the site also covers various aspects of quality in higher education. Accredited and unaccredited institutions in the country can also be assessed from the site.

Another reason for using the NAB documents was related to feasibility and easy accessibility. It also offers current information on the quality of education in the country.

Again, the purposive sampling strategy was used for selecting both published and unpublished documents for the study. This was done based on the following criteria:

First the documents were selected on the basis of whether their content is related to the area of higher education quality assurance. Secondly, preference was also given to the empirical cases the researchers have studied.

There are two basic strategies of collecting data for research purposes. These are the qualitative and quantitative methods. Bryman (2004) and Cohen et al, (2000) indicated that quantitative and qualitative research differ with respect to their epistemological and ontological orientations, which concern the question of what is regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline, and, in particular, whether the same principles and procedures as used in the natural sciences can/should be applied to the social world. The authors differentiate between two epistemological positions known as positivism and interpretivism.

From the positivist perspective, the research world is external and objective, where the observer is independent of what is observed; the focus is on facts; research is directed to identify causality; the researcher formulates concepts for measurement; the sample used for research are usually large; this type of research attempts to discover general laws explaining the nature of reality (Coleman and Murphy, 1999). However, from the perspective of interpretivism, the world is regarded as being socially constructed and subjective with the observer being a part of the world observed; the focus is on deducing understanding and meaning; the samples used for research are small and explored in depth and during certain time-period; the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis; and the research findings are descriptive, not arrived at by means of statistical procedure (Coleman and Murphy, 1999).

Deducing from their definitions, quantitative research emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data which includes the practices and norms of the natural scientific model. The model adheres to the positivistic ideology while qualitative research can be explained as research strategy that usually emphasizes on words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data. It has rejected the practices and norms of the natural scientific model and of positivism in particular in preference for an emphasis on the ways in which individuals interpret the social world (Bryman, 2008: 22).

The qualitative techniques of data analysis were used in the study. According to Anderson (1998) qualitative data are analyzed in interpretative ways whereby the researcher makes judgments and interpret meaning within a particular context. Kvale (1996) perceives that there are five main approaches to qualitative data analysis. These are: meaning condensation, meaning categorization, structure of meaning through narratives, interpretation of meaning and ad hoc methods for generating meaning. Meaning categorization means to reduce long statements to simple categories (Kvale, 1996). That is, long statements are categorized into reduced form of simple categories like symbols, numbers or scales. Meaning condensation, as defined by Kvale, means “an abridgement of the meaning expressed by the interviewees into shorter formulations”. Meaning structure focuses on drawing structure and plots of stories told by the interviewee, or creates „a coherent story out of the many happenings reported throughout the interview“ if there are no stories told. Meaning interpretation means to go “beyond structuring of the manifested meanings of a text to deeper and more or less speculative interpretations of text” This approach requires a certain distance from what is said, which is achieved by methods or theoretical stance, re-contextualizing what is said in a specific conceptual context (Kvale, 1996:201). The ad hoc approach to generating meaning means “a variety of commonsense approaches to the text under analysis, as well as sophisticated textual or quantitative methods, can be used for generating meaning” (Kvale, 1996:193). No standard method is used for analyzing the whole of text material. The study considered the ad hoc and meaning interpretation methods of data analysis to describe, interpret and draw meanings from the data presented for this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quality of Higher Education from a Ghanaian Perspective

The interpretation of the main results and findings are

presented here. Quality assurance programme in higher education is an integral part of the working definition of quality (Wilger, 1997). Review of policies and other documents revealed that the concept “quality” has been used in several state documents but the word has not been clearly defined in any of these documents. For instance the Government White Paper on the reform of Tertiary Education System that was published in 1991 and subsequently established NAB does not state a definition of quality higher education that will guide NAB in its operations. Regarding the quality of education the document only focus on how to improve the quality of education in general by increasing the expenditure on educational factors. For example the White Paper gave one of its aims as the provision of “quality education for increasing number of students through efficiency in the utilization of space, resources and personnel” in this way, it appears efficiency in resources use alone would lead to quality of education. Although there is a connection, little attention was given in the paper as to offering greater clarity, nor to define the academic quality and standard. Besides, the white paper outlines the conditions for the establishment, organization and closure of higher education institutions; it states the qualification requirements for study programmes.

The final report was clear on the need for “forth cycle” of education, including the development of a “knowledge and research industry” to find solutions to the problems of development and the promotion of centers of excellence in research. However, it was not clear as to how these might be achieved. The white paper states that the National Accreditation Board is responsible for evaluating periodically the quality of study programmes and also has to be resourced very well in order to carry out its activities fully.

Examination of the NAB strategic plan revealed that, the vision of NAB is to ensure the maintenance of an acceptable standard/quality of programmes in the tertiary educational institutions. However, the document does not give the definition of higher education quality. The document only lists the action plan of the agency. That is to become, among other things, the badge of quality assurance and the reference point for quality education and scholarship; achieve nationwide coverage; to enhance public awareness; achieve international recognition and acceptance; to establish the standing and competitiveness of every tertiary institution; to provide data to facilitate informed choices and to promote the realization of the country's manpower needs. However, the NAB document clearly suggests that quality of higher education is conformance to qualitative requirements determined by the board. For example, according to NAB Legislative Instrument (L.I 1700 PP.7) “for grant of accreditation, an institution has to comply with the relevant standards prescribed by the board”. Besides, (Pg.8 of L.I.1700) also states that these

standards should be maintained at all times.

The Government White Paper also clearly states that all institutions would be required to:

- Review periodically all programmes and courses with a view to upgrading and the continuing relevance to national needs;
- Introduce new programmes and courses in relation to national development priorities, as required;
- Rationalize existing programmes and courses within the institutions as a whole as required; and
- Make provision for practical training by attachment of students to industry

Although the Government White Paper does not give a clear definition of quality of education, it clearly suggests that quality of education is fitness for purpose. The word "Purpose" in this wise means relevance of education to the development needs of Ghana, employability of graduates, and relevance to expectations of stakeholders. This meaning of purpose seems to be in accordance with the above statements in the Government's White Paper. Besides, the NAB legislative document clearly considers quality of education as conformance to the qualitative requirements (standards) determined by the board. In this sense, there is quality of education if an institution meets the minimum threshold that has been set by NAB.

According to Harvey and Green (1993) quality as fitness for purpose sees quality as, meeting the requirements or needs of customers on the one hand and on the other, placing emphasis on the institutions fulfilling its stated objectives or missions. Reeves and Bednar, (1994) also argues that a global definition of quality does not exist and that different definitions of quality are appropriate in different times.

The process of external quality assessment and accreditation in Ghana takes the following procedure (NAB, 2013):

- Submission of relevant NAB Questionnaire on Institution Accreditation (NAB/INFO A.1) and present a prepare self-assessment report for NAB;
- An Institutional site-visit by expert group (NAB Sub-committee) appointed by NAB;
- NAB issues an evaluation report which includes decisions taken, suggestions and recommendations to Higher Educational Institutions;
- NAB Communicates the decisions taken within 60 calendar days to the Higher Educational Institutions on the visit;
- Application for review, if any, is done within 15 calendar days of communication; and
- A final report is sent to the Ministry of Education for the final decision relating to accreditation or no accreditation (LI 1700(20).

External quality assessment and accreditation of all new and operating programmes in Ghana is compulsory.

However, the Act establishing the law leaves room for either the Board itself or the higher education institutions to initiate it. This could be in relation to the institution or its programme or both. Where the initiation is emanated from the higher education institution, the institution writes a formal application to the Board. After receiving the application, the Board administers a standard questionnaire (the NAB Questionnaire) to all applicants to respond by way of self appraisal and to provide information on the existing or proposed institution and programme. Higher Educational Institutions draw up their self-evaluation reports based on the guidelines provided by NAB.

A self-evaluation report contains information on the university as a whole and on the faculty/department/college and its programmes. Institutional self-evaluation comprises five procedures: establishing a team for the self-evaluation; fixing a timetable for the self-evaluation; gathering and analyzing information for the self-evaluation; reporting the self-evaluation; and making use of the evaluation.

An institutional self-evaluation is mainly carried out by members of the respective academic community. As a recommendation some universities can work with experts from outside the university. The self-evaluation report presented by the applicant institution is the beginning of the evaluation process carried out by NAB. Depending on its type, the agency shall within sixty calendar days form an evaluation team specialized in the respective area. These specialists are drawn from among appropriate academic, professional, commercial and industrial fields.

The evaluation team then analyses the self-evaluation report presented by the applicant

institution, and, if necessary asks the institution for additional information. The next step is the fact-finding visits by the experts to the institution under evaluation that includes the commission specialist and the external experts. The visiting team is normally made up of members not exceeding eight. In special cases the team can be more.

Their task is to find out whether or not the data and information presented by means of self-evaluation reports are consistent with the reality observed in the applicant institution. As briefed by the interviewees, the visiting team examines whether the criteria and the standards stipulated by NAB are fulfilled. In addition the evaluation team can also observe teaching in the classroom, hold discussions with the students and teachers of the institution. First-hand comments are made regarding teaching activity and certain recommendations to the institution under evaluation with a view to improving various aspects and eliminating dysfunctions. Usually, according to NAB, the average amount of time for Ghana's higher education quality assessment takes five days. The information requested

in the self-evaluation reports is based on the following focused areas as identified by NAB: particulars of the proposed institution with its assumed mission and objectives; organization and governance; code of ethics; academic and administrative leadership; academic/professional programmes; research policy; student matters; quality assurance; distance education; additional documentation; assessment of libraries; and assessment of financial stand of new tertiary institutions

For programme accreditation/evaluation, the key areas of concern for the experts are, programme philosophy, admission policy, curriculum, staffing, examinations, external moderation, academic regulation, provision for student assessment of course content and teaching and for peer and professional assessment of content of teaching, physical facilities (lecture halls, library, workshops etc (NAB, 2013).

The final stage of the external assessment is the reporting stage. The visiting team draws up a report and presents it to the management of the higher education institution under evaluation. The management of the institution is made to sign the report and to list any objections, in writing, if any. The expert group presents the final report to NAB that in turn presents the report to the council of experts at NAB. The council of experts reviews the degree to which quality criteria and standards have been met and make the final suggestion to the Ministry of Education regarding accreditation. The council of experts makes one of the following suggestions regarding accreditation for study programmes: a full accreditation; interim accreditation and not accredited. The full accreditation is given for a period of five years and the interim accreditation may be given for a period between one to three years. The report also presents recommendations for the higher education institutions evaluated. By means of periodic controls, NAB makes sure that these recommendations are observed by the Higher Educational Institutions.

The reports of NAB and the expert commission along with the Ministry of Education approval is then send to the higher education institutions that was evaluated. According to the NAB Act 2007, Act 744, the final report may be published as it considers appropriate. Where the operations of an institution are adjudged to be far below acceptable standards, the Honourable Minister of Education is advised to use his powers under the Education Amendment Act, 1965 to close down the institution. In some instances, institutions which fail accreditation exercise are “punished” with the withdrawal of public funds, student loans or the transfer of students to another institution. Offences ranging from operating an unaccredited institution or programmes, to the provision of false information are punished by a fine or to a prison term of not more than two years or both (NAB Act, 2007: 23).

The process of external quality assessment and

accreditation in Ghana takes the following procedure (NAB, 2013):

- Submission of relevant NAB Questionnaire on Institution Accreditation (NAB/INFO A.1) and present a prepared self assessment report for NAB.
- An Institutional site-visit by expert group (NAB Sub-Committee) appointed by NAB
- NAB issues an evaluation report which includes decisions taken, suggestions and recommendations to Higher Educational Institution.
- NAB Communicates the decisions taken within 60 calendar days to the HEI on the visit
- Application for review, if any, is done within 15 calendar days of communication
- A final report is sent to the Ministry of Education for the final decision relating to accreditation or no accreditation (LI 1700(2010).

Internal Quality Assurance Practices of the University for Development Studies

Student admissions

The University has an admission brochure known as the “Prospectus” that contains the programmes of study and the admissions requirements for each programme. The admissions requirements conform to the established standards set by NAB.

The University as part of the Standing Committees has an Admissions Committee made up of Deans of the various Faculties, Faculty Examination Officers, the Programme Analyst, Head of Academic Affairs Section, Director of Academic Quality Assurance, the Pro-Vice Chancellor, and the Registrar. This is a sub-committee of the Academic Board chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor. The Committee’s mandate is to ensure that only students who meet the minimum requirements of the various programmes are admitted into the University (NCTE, 2010). The Committee meets regularly especially during the admissions period to select qualified applicants. The Academic Affairs Section of the University organizes entrance examinations to screen mature applicants before they are admitted into the University

To ensure that only qualified students are admitted into the University, online software is designed to set up the cut-off points for each programme which are usually determined by the Admissions Committee. Post admission audit are done to ensure that qualified students are those admitted. The Committee decides on the number of students to be admitted for each programme and also ensures that no unqualified applicants are admitted.

Quality Teaching and Learning

Adequate infrastructure, good lighting systems and teaching and learning equipments are core materials necessary for effective teaching and learning. Unfortunately, it has been observed that the University for Development Studies does not have adequate classrooms, lighting systems, library facilities, science laboratories, internet facilities and audio-visual technology for teaching and learning as required by NAB. However, based on the monitoring strategies put in place, the Directorate of the Academic Quality Assurance notifies the Management of the University about these challenges so that appropriate actions could be taken to address them.

The Directorate of the Academic Quality Assurance assesses lecturers' performance by design forms for students to assess every teaching course on each study area on semester basis. To ensure quality teaching, provision has also been made for monitoring lecturers' attendance, regularity, appropriate pedagogical strategies, provision of course outlines with references, adequate coverage of course content and use of learning material among others in the first three weeks of resumption of the University. An orientation programme is also set aside for newly appointed lecturers to enable them kick-start without problems

Quality Graduate Output

The university employs external examiners to ensure quality. These categories of staff ensure the moderation and standardization of the exam questions. It is also a routine task that before examinations are conducted, invigilators, supervisors, examination officers and security personnel are given orientation on their roles and responsibilities expected during the examination.

Students' identification Cards are used to regulate the sitting arrangement of students to prevent any form of examination malpractice. The identification cards are inspected during the examination to prevent impersonation. Also, strict invigilation is done to prevent any form of examination malpractice. An Examination Malpractice Committee, a sub-committee of the Academic Board sits at the end of each trimester and students caught engaged in any form of examination malpractice are sanctioned to serve as a deterrent to others. These sanctions range from cancellation of papers to rustication for a stated period.

The University for Development Studies has also instituted an Examination Vetting Committee, made up of Faculty Examination Officers and staff of the Directorate of Academic Quality Assurance and Chaired by its Director. The mandate of the Committee is to vet marked examination scripts and results in all disciplines

to ensure that they have been correctly marked and properly recorded. Students who satisfy all general requirements of the University and the standards set by NAB are awarded Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees after the completion of their studies.

Appointments and Promotions

There is a standing Committee on Appointments and Promotions in the university which ensure that only qualified applicants who meet the selection requirements are employed and those who meet the waiting period are promoted respectively. Both newly recruited staff and existing staff go through formal interviews before they are appointed or promoted.

The NCTE has come out with a policy document specifying those qualifications required for lecturing and serving as professional and administrative senior members. Again with the inception of the Single Spine Pay Policy (SSPP), criteria have been set for the placement of staff on their rightful scales.

Criteria for Appointment and Promotions

According to the University for Development Studies Statutes, appointment and promotion of teaching and research grades for the first time shall go through an interview, their engagement shall be at the level the applicant is currently and an applicant shall be assessed on the basis of evidence of continuing performance in respect of: scholarship, research and contribution to knowledge, teaching, community service, academic leadership and inventiveness and resourcefulness.

An applicant shall be supported by publications including books, technical reports, referred articles in journals and manuscripts submitted to journals, plus evidence of acceptance for publication in the journals, papers from publicized proceedings, systematized teaching materials and creative works evidenced by patents, music scores, contributions to community service, etc. The following shall also be taken into account by the Appointments and Promotions Board: contribution to University Boards or Committees and contribution to national development (Draft UDS Statutes, 2013)

In the same vein, all first appointments to non-teaching positions shall normally be by interview. For appointment or promotion to the administrative/professional grades, evidence of promise or continuing performance in respect of the following requirement: academic qualifications, proven ability/knowledge of work, promotion of work, human relations and service (other schedule of duty).

Quality assurance challenges facing higher education

Immediately after independence, most states in Africa adopted a state-organized system of education. The case in Ghana is not different. A formal education structure modeled on the British system was set up during the colonial period. Since independence, however, the higher education system has gone through a number of reforms in an attempt to make it more modern, effective and able to serve the socio-economic needs of the country.

In spite of the fact that there have been many reforms in the Ghanaian higher education to make it more responsive to the society, the system is still confronted with a number of serious problems and challenges. Notable among them are: the increasing demand for tertiary education coupled with the rate of population growth, the poor financial conditions and budgetary constraints and the external quality assurance system.

The increasing demand for tertiary education coupled with the rate of higher education population growth in Ghana without any expansion and improvement of existing physical facilities such as lecture halls, residential facilities and laboratory facilities for science education has created a state of malaise hindering the enhancement of efficient and effective higher education system. Although there has been an increase in the number of private universities in order to shoulder the excess demand, these universities charge very high fees and for that matter have become attractive to only the rich in the society. According to a World Bank report on Africa (World Bank, 2000:27) "expansion in both public and private university has been uncontrolled, unplanned and often chaotic resulting in deterioration of average quality.

Higher education has witnessed a long period of relative neglect and stagnation. Unfortunately, the neglect has resulted in a gross decline in the quality of higher education in Ghana. This decline came up at a time when higher education was experiencing escalating enrolments, declining resources, academic brain-drain among others.

The World Bank (1994) noted that fiscal constraints, faced by many countries, coupled with increasing demand, has led to overcrowding, deteriorating infrastructure, lack of resources for non-salary expenditures, such as textbooks and laboratory equipment, and a decline in the quality of teaching and research activities, in many countries.

In his presentation at the 58th Annual New Year School, Awuah (2007) cited in Baryeh (2009) pointed out that "the drive to increase enrolment in Ghanaian higher education institutions has occurred at the expense of quality". In terms of financing, higher education in Ghana is funded largely from government resources. Over the past decade, education's share of the government

discretionary budget has not exceeded 40%. On the average, the higher education sub-sector share has been about 12% of the total recurrent education budget.

Effah (2003) stated that Education's share of the government approved discretionary budget for the year 2000 was \$ 204,824,621 (32%). Of this amount \$23,870,359 (15%) was allocated to higher education sector. The approved previous budget for universities in 1998 met 50% their estimated requirement. The corresponding figure for the year 2000 is 56%. In spite of these increases, the 2000 budget still leaves serious institutional budgetary gaps.

The poor financial conditions and budgetary constraints have remarkable effects on institutions in the teaching and learning environment, development of various projects and staff development and productivity. There have been minor efforts to expand the physical structures to cope with the increasing number of enrolment aspired by both institutions and state. Projects have been left abandoned because of budget shortfalls. Where the projects are completed, the structures are poorly finished with inefficient lighting systems, poor fixtures and lack of microphones to echo the voices of lecturers.

Due to the above problem, it is very common in Ghanaian universities to find students sitting in pairs on a single desk. In some cases, the lack of tables and chairs has forced students to stand in windows to take lecture notes. In addition, the universities have shortage of recommended literature on various programmes and that has necessitated some of the lectures to dictate notes to students. The practice encourages memorization and during exams, in most cases written exams, reproduction of what the lecturer has dictated.

Across disciplines in the University for Development studies, nearly 50% of staff are on study leave with pay within the country and overseas. Most of them after training fail to return, indicating looming challenges. This is as result of the absence of a career development plan and stringent measures taken against staff who fail to come back to the University to work.

Leadership and management is generally apathetic and inefficient, as expressed by an inability to place staff at their specialties, over utilized facilities, duplication of programmes, uneconomical procurement and inefficient allocation of scarce finance to non-instructional expenditures. Academic leaders tend to have inadequate preparation, orientation and training in skills required for the positions.

In the face of increasing enrollment - over four-fold between 1985 and 2005 in sub-Saharan Africa - quality of education and research is declining, relevance of teaching and research is not maintained, and institutional quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms are either not in place or are very weak and inefficient (Yizengaw, 2008; 2). This view can be supported by the rampant strikes of university and

Polytechnic lecturers on the book and research allowances which students and the general public seem not to see reason with because they claim lecturers use the same notes over the year without any innovative measures of improving their lecture notes. They further argued that lectures download information direct from the internet without even editing them.

Yizengaw, (2008), opined that research capacities are generally poor, due to shortage of senior faculty, poor infrastructure and facilities, lack of funding and strategic leadership. Though most research skills are acquired during graduate training – Master's and Doctorate Levels – Sub-Saharan African universities have a tiny proportion of their student enrolment in graduate studies programmes. Less than 30% of students are enrolled in the fields of agriculture, engineering and technology, basic and applied sciences, and health sciences – fields required for long-term society-relevant innovation and problem solving

CONCLUSION

Ghana employs a multiplicity of quality assurance models, which is the Command and Control Model, the Professional Self-Regulatory Model and the Market Model (Clark, 1983) but the Command and Control Model seems to play a more influential role. It is clear from the literature that structures have been put in place to address quality in HE primarily through NAB and NCTE. These two bodies have standard requirements that they expect HEIs to meet. The approach employed by NAB uses is the „threshold methodology“ model which seeks to identify the inputs (or threshold standards) required before offering accreditation to programmes/institutions.

The quality assurance practices of the University for Development studies are strategically structured to guard against falling below the national standards set by the two quality assurance bodies and also to fulfill its mandate. Despite these efforts the University for Development Studies still has a chunk of students who pass through the system but cannot graduate because the quality assurance culture has not been strictly adhere to making it remain a serious challenge.

A year ago the Executive Committee of the Academic Board put in place a Committee which came out with new and better strategies of tracking students performance. This move was to eliminate the tendency of student leaving the university without certificates. In view of these revelations, the author suggests a study on developing a framework for instituting a proactive structure of quality assurance in the University.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Many of the critical issues relating to quality and rele-

vance will need attention at the sectoral level.

Current structures suggest a very major role for both the National Council for Tertiary Education and its associated bodies, particularly the National Accreditation Board. They must ultimately provide policy advice and support to guide the institutions in developing appropriate academic structures, in promoting effective and relevant methods of teaching and in generating research - all of these in ways which will maximize the contribution of tertiary education to national needs.

The National Accreditation Board the National Council for Tertiary Education should intensify their monitoring visits to ensure sanity in the academic quality assurance. The University for Development Studies should also put in place internal controls to monitor the various faculties since they are not at a centralized point.

Planning for ways by which the full potential of information communication technologies can be developed and utilized within the constraints which Ghana currently faces will be critically important, particularly given the magnitude of the technical and infrastructural problems and service interruptions which Ghana routinely experiences.

The ability to access virtual library facilities and developments such as on-line access to journals has the potential to make an enormous difference to tertiary education in Ghana, both nationally, and in the country's ability to take up opportunities to participate in international developments at minimal additional cost. Positioning the sector to take advantage of these developments will however, require determined effort and foresight. It will also require a change of behaviour, as forward thinking and planning have not been widely-utilized to date. Major investments will be required, in terms both of physical hardware and the training and aptitudes necessary to use the new technologies. At present, there is great disparity between the institutions, in terms of their capacity (both technological and human) to undertake a high-technology initiative, and even the most highly-resourced institutions have low capacity in this sense. It is an area which should be of first priority if and when investment funding is available.

Full use of the potential of such powerful developments will be seriously curtailed if implementation is undertaken in isolation at the institutional level, or if any investment funding which may be available is used without great care and forward-planning. Strategies for sharing access across the sector will be important, as will the development of cultures of continuous flexible learning, and, of course, routine maintenance and routine repair. Failure in the attitudinal of the Ghanaian has affected several sectors of the economy and not education alone. It is very pronounced in the UDS Navrongo Campus as the computer laboratories have very faulty lighting systems

for a very long time without repairs. This has the potential to deteriorate the situation further

Within the teaching environment, teaching and learning strategies will also have to be re-considered to make effective use of new technologies. Even more than in the past, it will be important for students to be taught how to seek, acquire and use knowledge, rather than to act as passive recipients. This should ensure firstly that they are able to derive maximum benefit from the education they receive, but also that they are well-equipped for the working culture of the 21st century.

As part of the strategic development plan, the UDS should: (i) develop a flexible structure for knowledge generation, and the acquisition and management of internationally-available electronic information (i.e., development of a national information infrastructure); (ii) quality assurance and quality control mechanisms, and the clarification of academic standards; and (iii) access, lifelong learning and flexible entry/exit from learning opportunities within a coherent national structure, as a means of promoting both equity and the continuous generation of the skills necessary for the country's economic development.

There should be a balance between a centrally located quality assurance unit and what goes on in the various faculties. Quality assurance desks could be set up in every Campus to run the system and to report to the Directorate of Quality Assurance.

UDS in designing her annual plan, should include an appropriate balance must be maintained between the physical infrastructure, staff capacity and teaching and learning equipment. This will address problems associated with the student/lecturer ratio and excess teaching load. Lecturers will also have more time for research, a very important function of HEIs.

A comprehensive staff development plan should be designed by UDS as part of the University's strategic plan to replace staff, upgrade staff and improve their competences. Management should be committed to the plan because the plan will serve as a guide for management to determine the entry and exit of staff from training centres.

On the issue of succession planning, all faculty members should be involved in Committee work at the Faculty, Departmental, Sectoral and University levels, to expose them to strategic management. This could lead to the identification of staff with leadership potential. Such potential could be enhanced through participation in leadership development workshops and other formal programmes.

The University must come out with a policy on curriculum review. For instance the curriculum could be reviewed every five years. This should be done in collaboration with industry and NAB to make courses relevant and up-to-date.

It has been observed that issues related to exam

malpractices are delayed in implementing punishment after the committee had presented their findings. The University should be committed to ensuring that issues on examination malpractices are fast tracked and severe punishment emitted to them to serve as deterrent to others.

The Directorate of Academic Quality Assurance of UDS should be given adequate resources to work with. The competences of the staff should be upgraded through regular training and workshops to reflect contemporary issues in quality assurance.

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