NEWSLETTER: WSU INTITUTIONAL AUDIT 3-8 APRIL 2011

JANUARY 2011

OUR VISION

Walter Sisulu University (WSU) will be a leading African comprehensive university focusing on innovative educational, research and community partnership programmes that are responsive to local, regional, national development priorities, and cognisant of continental and international imperatives.

OUR MISSION

In pursuit of its vision as a developmental university, WSU will:

- Provide an educationally vibrant and enabling environment conducive to the advancement of quality academic, moral, cultural and technological learner-centred education for holistic intellectual empowerment, growth and effective use of information;
- Provide and maintain the highest possible standards in innovative learning and teaching, applied, basic and community-based research and community partnerships in cooperation with development agencies, the public and private sectors;
- Provide affordable, appropriate, career-focused and professional programmes that address rural development and urban renewal with primary emphasis on science, technology and development studies;
- Create a new generation of highly-skilled graduates capable of understanding and addressing complex societal challenges, with critical scholarly and entrepreneurial attributes grounded on morally sound work ethics and responsible leadership.

OUR VALUES

In pursuit of its Mission, WSU commits to the following values which are an affirmation of the eternal principles which will inform all dealings of the University:

- **Academic Freedom:** In line with our vision and mission as an accountable institution, we acknowledge our right to exercise academic freedom in a responsible way, in teaching and learning, in research and in community service.
- **Quality:** We commit to institution-wide quality management, value and reward excellence and uphold and protect the integrity of the University.
- **Access and Success:** We provide equitable access to higher and continuing education at all stages of adult life to students who have a potential to succeed.
- **Transformation:** We are committed to addressing equity imperatives, diversity, and entrepreneurship and to democratic governance.
- **People Development:** We are committed to the optimum development of the human resources potential and leadership capacity of all staff.
- **Caring University:** We commit to mutual respect, ubuntu, humility, good citizenship, student centredness and endorse and uphold all principles of Batho Pele.
- **Resource Consciousness:** We commit to utlising the University's resources prudently and responsibly at all times with a view to adding maximum value to the institution.

WSU Institutional Audit: From 3-8 April 2011

Be informed!
Go to www.wsu.ac.za for information

Be prepared!
Your university needs your support

For further information contact the Institutional Audit (IA) office
Mr Naicker - Tel: 043 703 8574 / Cell: 083 560 3187 / Email: knaicker@wsu.ac.za or
Mrs Manqina - Tel: 043 703 8547 / Cell: 083 265 3699 / Email: smanqina@wsu.ac.za

WSU
Walter Sisulu University

THE WSU HEQC INSTITUTIONAL AUDIT: 3 – 8 APRIL 2011

Taking into account the response to the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) from members of the university community, a revised version of the report was presented to SENEX, SENATE and COUNCIL for consideration and approval during November 2010.

A final version of the Self-Evaluation Report was submitted to Council for approval on 17 November 2010 and to the HEQC on 27 November 2010. WSU met the submission deadline with the HEQC with almost a week to spare. So the next few weeks are very important in the overall preparation process.

WSU engaged the assistance of external "critical readers" to read the report and help us to identify how we can improve it and identify important concerns to consider in preparing for the audit. In addition to collating and considering the response from the campus community to the draft report, the Project Team will also facilitate a number of activities to strengthen our final report and prepare for the audit.

These will include:

- Information sessions with members of the university community
- Preparation of the audit venues
- HEQC visit on 21 February 2011
- HEQC site visit from 7 – 10 March 2011
- Finally the HEQC Audit from 3 – 8 April 2011

UNDERSTANDING QUALITY THROUGH THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF WSU 'S ACADEMIC ROLE

The HEQC's approach to quality is strongly orientated towards assessing the fitness of the institutions (reflected through their quality assurance arrangements) to carry out and take forward their stated purpose. For any institution then, the starting point is how it defines its role, mandate and responsibility through its mission and strategic goals. Mission statements are always developed in particular historical circumstances, but they must be able, under new and changing circumstances, to continue to guide the institution towards a desired future. An institution's purpose and character are then informed by the stated mission that is always given meaning through its interpretation and application in an ever-changing context.

Such a process is by its very nature complex and brings together a number of very different commitments and goals which are significantly in tension with one another. In pursuing their purpose, academic institutions are constantly called upon to understand, balance and manage these tensions and the challenges that arise from them. Nowhere is this truer than in South Africa, where higher education institutions are shaped by and must respond to the tensions between the imperatives of democratic transformation and unremitting pressure of global competitiveness. If the relationship between quality and purpose noted above is recognized and acknowledged, then assuring quality must also be a dynamic process involving ongoing reflection and adaptation in pursuit of continuous improvement.

Chapter 1 of the Self-Evaluation Report begins to explore what this means for WSU's purpose and thus how we reflect on its "fitness for purpose" in the context of the HEQC audit. It opens with a consideration of WSU's Mission from this perspective, reflecting on the debates and priorities that informed its adoption in 2005, and exploring how its central elements were brought into sharp focus through the Institutional Operating Plan (IOP) process in 2005. Drawing from the latter the chapter shows how the essential elements of the mission and the challenges associated with taking forward these commitments come together in the notion of WSU as a "developmental comprehensive" university. For WSU this means "transcending past identities (Bush College, Struggle University, historically black institution, historically disadvantaged institution) in an unequivocal orientation to meeting current and future challenges".

To meet these challenges WSU is guided by the core political and moral imperatives of the social justice and critical citizenry that have been at the heart of WSU's struggle in the past and have laid the foundations for what it aims to be in the future. To do this the university is called upon to recognize, balance and manage the inherent tensions that arise from the "congruencies and contradictions between transformation and global competitiveness, accelerated by technological advances". These challenges are significant and require that the university on an ongoing basis must make difficult strategic decisions, often where there are no clear-cut answers.

Chapter 1 argues that we should not underestimate the challenges associated with pursuing such a purpose. However, it is also argued that by understanding, embracing and managing these tensions and the challenges they generate we create "opportunities for excellence and innovation, for generating new and exciting knowledge and scholarship. In fact achieving and sustaining an ever-changing balance brings out the distinctive characteristics that make WSU a special university."

Out of such reflections on our mission and how we understand and respond to our purpose, four definitions of quality emerge. These provide a framework for considering our policies and practices and the extent to which they take forward what we seek to do as a higher education institution in South Africa.

- Our mission locates WSU firmly as a "national university, alert to its African and international context. This means that we have a responsibility to recognize and respond to the needs of a national and African context characterized by massive socio-economic and education deprivation and to develop our talents so as to be able participate with confidence in a competitive global environment.

- Our mission also commits us to the pursuit of excellence in teaching and learning. In a society in transition, beset by historical inequalities this requires balancing the mutually sustaining relationship between teaching and research, so that productive scholarship stimulates good teaching and academic success, especially of educationally disadvantaged students.

- WSU's mission also implies that quality is achieved through sustained commitment, embedded in the culture of the institution, to developing an intellectual environment where there is solid respect for what students and staff bring to the institution and an excitement to engage creativity and critically with a wider, complex world.

- All these understandings of quality suggest that it must by its very nature be transformative - so that in the pursuit of quality we bring about sustained and beneficial change that is empowering for students and staff and has meaning for the broader society of which we are part.

Reflecting on WSU's mission in this way and what it means for how we understand quality and thus evaluate our "fitness for purpose", is central to our preparations for the Audit. To help guide institutions in this process of self-reflection the HEQC, in addition to the 19 criteria referred to earlier, specifies four "open ended" questions that are aimed at stimulating debate and discussion within institutions about their role and purpose. These questions (see box below) have also been placed on the IA webpage for consideration by the Walter Sisulu University community.

THE HEQC OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

- What are the unique and distinctive ways in which WSU enriches and adds excellence to the higher education sector and society, nationally, regionally and internationally?

- What does the institution do to produce a vibrant intellectual culture within the institution and in society at large?

- In what ways does the institution act as an incubator of new ideas and cutting edge knowledge and technologies within the national system of innovation?

- What are some of the notable examples in the last three years of institutional success in prompting and enhancing quality?