



The Effectiveness of External Quality Audits on Australian Universities: A Study with 30 Australian Universities

A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy (by Publication)

From

University of Canberra

by **Mahsood Shah**

Advanced Diploma in Quality Management
Bachelor of Vocational Education and Training
Graduate Certificate in Quality Assurance
Graduate Diploma in Vocational Education and Training
Master of Management

Faculty of Education

2011

Acknowledgements

In completing this thesis, I would like to express my deep appreciation to my principal supervisor, Professor Ione Lewis, co-supervisor Professor Robert Fitzgerald and my external supervisor, Professor Sid Nair for their encouragement and ongoing guidance throughout my studies. The co-authoring of research papers for various journals with my supervisors has played a key role in my enhanced understanding of research, theoretical frameworks, critical inquiry and the use of qualitative and quantitative methods.

I would also like to thank all friends and colleagues who have co-authored and published peer reviewed papers with me in the last five years. I appreciate the opportunity provided by the University of Canberra in offering the Doctor of Philosophy (Publication) program to all staff; this has given me an alternative choice in completing higher degree research studies.

I would like thank Petronella Nicholson who provided assistance in editing my thesis on areas such as language, formatting and consistency.

Thank you to my family, including my wife Amina Shah, my son Adnan Shah and my daughter Shaista Shah, for their love and support at a time when I was working while undertaking research and travelling between Sydney and Canberra. My great appreciation goes to my parents who have supported me during my studies, particularly in looking after my children.

Glossary

AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
CEQ	Course Experience Questionnaire
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
EQA	External quality agencies
ESOS Act	<i>Education Services for Overseas Students Act</i>
Go8	Group of Eight universities
GSS	Generic Skills Scale on the Course Experience Questionnaire
GTS	Good Teaching Scale on the Course Experience Questionnaire
HE	Higher education
IPP	Institutional Performance Portfolio
LTPF	Learning and Teaching Performance Fund
NZUAAU	New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit
OS	Overall Satisfaction scale on the Course Experience Questionnaire
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
UWS	University of Western Sydney

Abstract

This research study investigated the effectiveness of external quality audits on 30 Australian universities. The main aim of the study was to determine the extent to which external quality audits by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) have improved quality assurance in core and support areas of the universities.

The study explored the following research questions.

- 1. Has government policy on quality assurance and external quality audit been effective in improving the core business of higher education institutions?**
 - a. Can government policy on quality assurance and external quality audit be credited for change and improvement in core areas of institutions?
- 2. Is there any evidence that quality assurance and an external quality audit improve student satisfaction and retention in institutions?**
- 3. Are higher education institutions satisfied with the process used by the external auditing agency (AUQA) in Australia?**

The study examined the experience of 30 universities who had participated in cycle 1 external quality audits by AUQA, with some universities having also completed cycle 2 audits. This is the first time such a study has been undertaken in Australia and internationally using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Most literature on the topic is based on opinions and predictions with anecdotal evidence rather than the systematic collection of data.

The study found that government policy on external quality audits has played a key role in improving systems and processes for quality assurance in core and support areas of universities. There is a strong belief that the self review process, as part of external quality audit preparations, has been beneficial for universities in identifying areas of good practice and areas needing improvement. The study also suggests that the improvement-led approach of external quality audit (rather than a compliance or inspectorate regime) is seen as supportive of the tertiary sector, and results in the effective engagement of universities.

Some of the key findings are outlined below.

- a. External quality audits have played a significant role in improving quality assurance in core and support areas of universities. However, the study strongly suggests that it is not the audit process alone which has been responsible for improved quality assurance. Changing government policies and the impact of the internal and external operating environments, together with the external quality audits, have been drivers of change and improvement.
- b. External quality audits have been instrumental in improving systems and processes for quality assurance in core and support areas of universities.
- c. The areas where external quality audits can be credited for change and improvement include: quality assurance for offshore international education; the overall development and implementation of quality assurance frameworks across universities; using data to track and monitor university performance; review and improvement processes; and quality assurance for course development, approval and ongoing reviews.
- d. Despite these improvements, ten years of external quality audits have not contributed to the enhancement of the student experience in Australian universities.
- e. External quality audits in Australia have also failed to monitor academic standards and outcomes. Ten years of external audit have focused more on input and quality assurance processes. The consequence is that, wherever poor outcomes exist, they have been hidden by the excessive concentration on processes, and by a complacency that arises because good processes are easier to achieve than good outcomes. External quality audits have also failed to ensure compliance against national policies such as the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes and the Australian Qualifications Framework.
- f. Notwithstanding (d) and (e) above, the process used by AUQA in its external quality audit is seen as satisfactory. Two areas for improvement are: setting up audit panels composed of more relevant and appropriate members tailored to each university; and decreasing the large volume of supporting materials currently required with the self review documentation.

Table of Contents

Glossary	iv
Abstract	2
1 Introduction	4
2 The Need for Such Research	7
3 Theoretical Framework of Research	10
<i>Figure 1: Theoretical Framework of Research</i>	10
4 Evolution of Quality in Australian Higher Education	11
5 Review of Literature	15
5.1 Defining Quality in Higher Education	15
5.2 Brief History of Quality Assurance	16
5.3 The Rise of External Quality Audits	17
5.4 Review of Literature on the Effectiveness of External Quality Audits Worldwide	18
5.4.1 <i>The UK Experience</i>	19
5.4.2 <i>The Scandinavian Experience</i>	20
5.4.3 <i>The New Zealand Experience</i>	22
5.4.4 <i>The South African Experience</i>	22
5.4.5 <i>Effectiveness Studies in Other Countries</i>	23
5.5 Review of the Australian Experience	25
5.6 Addressing the Current Gap in Literature: What is known already? Where are the gaps? What is yet to be discovered?	28
5.6.1 <i>Research Questions</i>	30
5.7 The Complexities of Measuring Effectiveness	32
6 Research Methodology	33
7 Discussion and Published Work	35
<i>Figure 2: Thematic Overview of Published Outputs</i>	37
1) Analysis of Government Policy on Quality Assurance and External Quality Audits	38
<i>Publication 1: The Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework: Its Success, Deficiencies and Way Forward</i>	38
<i>Publication 2: Private Higher Education in Australia: Growth, Quality and Standards</i>	38
2) The Effectiveness of External Quality Audits	39
<i>Publication 3: The Effectiveness of External Quality Audits: A Study with Australian Universities</i> ..	39
<i>Publication 4: Ten Years of External Quality Audit in Australia: Evaluating its Effectiveness</i>	39
<i>Publication 5: External Quality Audit as an Opportunity for Institutional Change and Improvement</i>	40
<i>Publication 6: Measuring the Impact of External Quality Audit on Universities</i>	41
3) Tracking and Improving Quality Assurance, Student Experience and Student Retention related to the Learning and Teaching Experience, Research Student Experience, Employer Experience and International Offshore Student Experience	41
<i>Publication 7: Trends in the Quality of the Student Experience: An International Perspective</i>	41
<i>Publication 8: Monitoring Student Attrition to Enhance Quality</i>	42
<i>Publication 9: Using Student Voice to Improve Student Satisfaction</i>	42
<i>Publication 10: Does Retention Matter? Improving Student Retention</i>	43
<i>Publication 11: Enrolling in Higher Education: The Perceptions of Stakeholders</i>	43
<i>Publication 12: Enhancing the Research Student Experience in a University</i>	44
<i>Publication 13: Employer Satisfaction of University Graduates: Key Capabilities in Early Career Graduates</i>	44
<i>Publication 14: Improving the Quality of Offshore Student Experience</i>	45

8 Thesis Requirements	46
8.1 Demonstrate the Contemporary Relevance of each Publication.....	46
<i>Table 1: Full Details of the Publications</i>	<i>49</i>
8.2 How the Published Research Output(s) make an Original, Scholarly Contribution to Knowledge at a Doctoral Level	50
8.3 Provide a Critical Analysis of Appropriate Literature in the Discipline	52
9 Key Findings	55
9.1 Research Question 1: Impact on the Core Business.....	55
9.1.1 <i>Quality Audit as a Driver for Change</i>	<i>55</i>
9.1.2 <i>Improvement in Quality Assurance of Offshore Programs</i>	<i>57</i>
9.1.3 <i>Private For-profit Higher Education Institutions</i>	<i>57</i>
9.1.4 <i>Identifying Areas Needing Improvement.....</i>	<i>58</i>
9.1.5 <i>A Decade of External Quality Audit.....</i>	<i>59</i>
9.1.6 <i>Limitations of External Quality Assurance</i>	<i>61</i>
9.1.7 <i>Summary of Findings in Relation to Research Question 1</i>	<i>62</i>
9.2 Research Question 2: Impact on Student Satisfaction.....	64
9.2.1 <i>Predictors of High Student Satisfaction</i>	<i>64</i>
9.2.2 <i>Limited Impact on Student Satisfaction.....</i>	<i>66</i>
9.2.3 <i>Summary of Findings in Relation to Research Question 2.....</i>	<i>67</i>
9.3 Research Question 3: University View of External Audit Process.....	68
9.3.1 <i>Level of Satisfaction with AUQA by Universities and Private Providers</i>	<i>68</i>
<i>Table 2: Academic Staff Views about External Quality Audit in a Private For-profit College.....</i>	<i>69</i>
<i>Table 3: Satisfaction of Universities on the External Audit Process</i>	<i>69</i>
9.3.2 <i>Areas Needing Improvement in the Audit Process</i>	<i>70</i>
9.3.3 <i>Summary of Findings in Relation to Research Question 3.....</i>	<i>72</i>
10 The Future of Quality Assurance in Australian Higher Education	73
10.1 Academic Rigour.....	74
10.2 Performance-based Funding	74
10.3 Political Interest in Quality.....	75
10.4 Social Inclusion and an Equity Agenda	75
10.5 Ranking and League Tables.....	76
10.6 Market Forces	76
10.7 The Engagement of Academics in Quality.....	77
10.8 Commitment to Quality and Improvement	77
10.9 The Cost of Achieving High Quality	78
10.10 Innovation and Creativity	79
10.11 Student Experience.....	80
10.12 Strategic and Quality Initiatives.....	80
10.13 Identifying the Value of Defining Quality.....	81
11 Future Research in the Area.....	82
12 Recommendations from the Findings	83
12.1 Recommendations related to the Effectiveness of Quality Audits in the Core Business of the University	83
12.2 Recommendations Related to the Effectiveness of Quality Audits on Student Experience and Satisfaction	84
12.3 Recommendations Related to University Satisfaction with the Audit Process.....	85
12.4 Other Recommendations.....	85

13 List of Published Outputs.....	86
Publication 1: The Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework: Its Success, Deficiencies and Way Forward	88
Publication 2: Private Higher Education in Australia: Growth, Quality and Standards.....	102
Publication 3: Ten Years of External Quality Audit in Australia: Evaluating its Effectiveness and Success	115
Publication 4: The Effectiveness of External Quality Audits: A Study with Australian Universities	126
Publication 5: External Quality Audit as an Opportunity for Institutional Change and Improvement.....	146
Publication 6: Measuring the Impact of External Quality Audit on Universities. Can External Quality Audit be Credited for Improvements and Enhancement in Student Learning? How can we Measure?	153
Publication 7: Trends in the Quality of the Student Experience: An International Perspective based on Studies in Three Universities.....	159
Publication 8: Monitoring Student Attrition to Enhance Quality.....	166
Publication 9: Using Student Voice to Improve Student Satisfaction: Two Australian Universities, the Same Agenda.....	175
Publication 10: Does Retention Matter? Improving Student Retention: A UWS Case Study ...	186
Publication 11: Enrolling in Higher Education: The Perceptions of Stakeholders	197
Publication 12: Enhancing the Research Student Experience at University	204
Publication 13: Employer Satisfaction of University Graduates: Key Capabilities in Early Career Graduates	214
Publication 14: Improving the Quality of Offshore Student Experience: Findings of a Decade in three Australian Universities	226
References for the Thesis	235
Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire Used.....	245

1 Introduction

External quality audits have been introduced in many countries as part of higher education reforms. Governments have funded external quality agencies (EQAs) to undertake audits of universities and other higher education providers. The objectives of such agencies vary between countries, however overall, their purpose is to undertake quality audits of higher education institutions and to report to their governments on the effectiveness of the systems and processes for quality assurance and the assessment of academic standards. In countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), New Zealand, Sweden, Denmark and Hong Kong, external quality audits have been in place for more than ten years, while in other parts of the world, governments have only recently set up EQAs. In Australia, South Africa and the Middle East, some agencies have been operational for almost a decade. It is clear that higher education reforms have been integral in the establishment of these agencies. The progress in quality assurance made by many developed economies has motivated other countries to review their arrangements and to ensure that their higher education systems are competitive and comparable.

According to Kristoffersen and Woodhouse (2005), external quality audits are introduced for such reasons as:

- an increased number of students leading to a change in the nature of tertiary education, and a feeling that it is necessary to check explicitly that institutional quality assurance procedures are keeping pace with the change
- more money being spent on higher education by an increased number of students, leading to a greater desire to ensure that university funds are being well spent
- increased public funding for higher education, leading to governments wanting to verify the spending of their funds
- increased government attention on the national needs for graduates, leading to governments wanting to hold higher education institutions explicitly accountable for the nature of the graduates they produce
- growing demand for higher education, resulting in more private providers, some of dubious provenance, leading to a demand for stringent external checks
- globalisation, leading to transnational mobility of students and educational export, resulting in the need for a national quality assurance process that is visible to other countries (for educational export, this is akin to export quality processes in other industries).

In Australia, government policy on external quality audit was introduced in 2000 through the establishment of the Australian Universities Quality Agency. AUQA's constitution (AUQA constitution, 2007, p. 3) outlines the following four main objectives.

1. Arrange and manage a system of periodic audits of:
 - the quality of the academic activities, including attainment of standards of performance and outcomes of Australian universities and other higher education institutions
 - the quality assurance arrangements intended to maintain and elevate that quality
 - compliance with criteria set out in the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes
 - monitor, review, analyse and provide public reports on the quality of outcomes in Australian universities and higher education institutions.
2. Arrange and manage a system of periodic audits of the quality assurance processes, procedures, and outcomes of State, Territory and Commonwealth higher education accreditation authorities including their impact on the quality of higher education programs; and monitor, review, analyse and report on the outcomes of those audits.
3. Publicly report periodically on matters relating to quality assurance, including the relative standards and outcomes of the Australian higher education system and its institutions, its processes and its international standing, and the impact of the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes on Australian higher education, using information available to AUQA from its audits and other activities carried out under these objectives, and from other sources.
4. Develop partnerships with other quality agencies in relation to matters directly relating to quality assurance and audit, to facilitate efficient cross-border quality assurance processes and the international transfer of knowledge about those processes. (AUQA, 2007, p. 3)

Some key factors that have contributed to the implementation of government policies on external quality audits in Australia include: the growth of higher education; university accountability for the public funding of institutions; the growth of for-profit higher education; increased student diversity, and the access and equity agenda; increased use of ICT and other modes of learning; increasing tuition fees; increase in consumer movements and demand for quality education; the quality and credibility of some institutions offering higher education courses; and university accountability to meet the needs of stakeholders such as governments, employers, students and the community.

In 2001, AUQA began external quality auditing using a fitness-for-purpose approach. The fitness-for-purpose approach is based on the notion that the institution has the systems, processes, relevant resources and infrastructure to achieve its mission and objectives. The cycle 1 audits of universities commenced in 2001; this was a whole-of-university audit. The cycle 2 audits started in 2008, again using a fitness-for-purpose approach to quality. However, the cycle 2 audits focused on the selection of two risk-based themes, with internationalisation as a mandatory theme due to the alarming quality assurance issues found in cycle 1 audits.

The year 2010 marked a decade of external quality audit in Australia. While external quality audits have been in place in Australia for ten years, there has been no research using systematic data collection on the effectiveness of government policy on external quality audits of universities. This research is timely and relevant, as governments in many countries, including Australia, are renewing their current approaches to quality with a new focus on academic rigour, increasing access and participation for disadvantaged students, and achievement of high quality outcomes. The Australian Government has established a new national regulator – the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) for higher education – which is responsible for registration, accreditation, external quality audits, performance monitoring, and performance-based funding. It will also undertake other functions, such as establishing the *My University* website to provide institutional performance information for public access.

2 The Need for Such Research

External quality audits have been in place for more than a decade in many countries. However, there is a lack of research on the effectiveness or ‘value-add’ of these quality audits at the national, institutional and faculty levels. It is important, and also ethical, to find out if government policy on external quality audits of universities can be credited for change and improvement in quality assurance in core and support areas of universities. There is no research worldwide on the effectiveness of external quality audits of universities. The current studies and literature on the topic (by Askling, 1997; Dano & Stensaker, 2007; Dill, 2000; Harvey, 2002; Harvey & Newton, 2004; Kristensen, 1997; Massy, 1999; Newton, 2000; Wahlen, 2004; and Weusthof, 1995) are based on opinions and predictions of the likely impact of audits but without systematic research using qualitative and quantitative data.

At a national level, governments aspire to improve the access and participation of students with continued decreased public funding. At the same time, governments are holding universities accountable for quality assurance and a high quality and standard of education to meet current and future demands. At a university level, institutions have spent a lot of time and money preparing for the external quality audits. Universities have also invested considerable effort in responding to the quality and compliance requirements imposed by governments, such as annual reporting on student data, reporting on teaching and research performance, and compliance with external reference points such as legislation, protocols and guidelines.

At a faculty level, a significant amount of work is carried out to prepare for an external quality audit including: ongoing review of courses; course accreditation; assessment moderation; assessment of learning outcomes; collecting student feedback; peer review of teaching; and quality assurance of course development, approval and review processes. The increased internationalisation of higher education means some faculties have the added responsibility of ensuring the quality assurance of offshore courses and partnerships.

In the Australian context, the Review of Australian Higher Education in 2008 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008) highlighted the need to renew quality assurance in higher education with a focus on academic standards and outcomes, rather than the current fitness-for-purpose approach. In response to the review, the Australian Government is setting up a new national regulator, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), which will have overall responsibility for the registration and accreditation of universities and non-university higher education providers. TEQSA’s functions will include: performance monitoring; quality audits and monitoring of standards and outcomes;

assessing performance and linking rewards; monitoring compliance to external reference points such as the Higher Education Provider Registration Standards and the Australian Qualifications Framework; and publishing information on the performance of universities on a new website, *My University* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009).

This research, undertaken as part of a higher degree by research, is timely, particularly for the following reasons.

- There is a significant gap in the current literature on systematically assessing the effectiveness of external quality audits of Australian universities.
- There is a lack of similar studies undertaken in countries where external quality audits have been in place for more than a decade.
- There is a lack of monitoring of the extent to which government policy on external quality audits can be credited for change and improvement.
- Governments are reviewing quality assurance processes in various countries, including Australia and the UK, with a focus on quality assurance and academic standards.
- Governments, stakeholders and communities have an increased focus on quality assurance and external quality audits in both developed and developing countries, with a recognition of external quality agencies in improving quality assurance and the credibility of higher education.

This study is pertinent to the current debate in the Australian higher education sector about academic standards and outcomes. The lack of agreed definitions of ‘academic quality’ and ‘academic standards’ across the university sector in Australia raises the questions of how universities will engage academics and researchers in assuring quality and what constitutes a ‘quality’ university or faculty. AUQA’s own definition of standards states that ‘although standards are necessary, they are also difficult to determine’ (AUQA glossary, 2010). The new government policies aim to widen the participation of disadvantaged students and reward institutions for their results in this area through performance-based funding. They will also increase the prominence of rankings and league tables. These new policies raise debate about whether student diversity is an ingredient of quality or whether it is considered a reputational risk to universities in the emergence of ranking. Currently, diversity measures are not used in rankings and league tables.

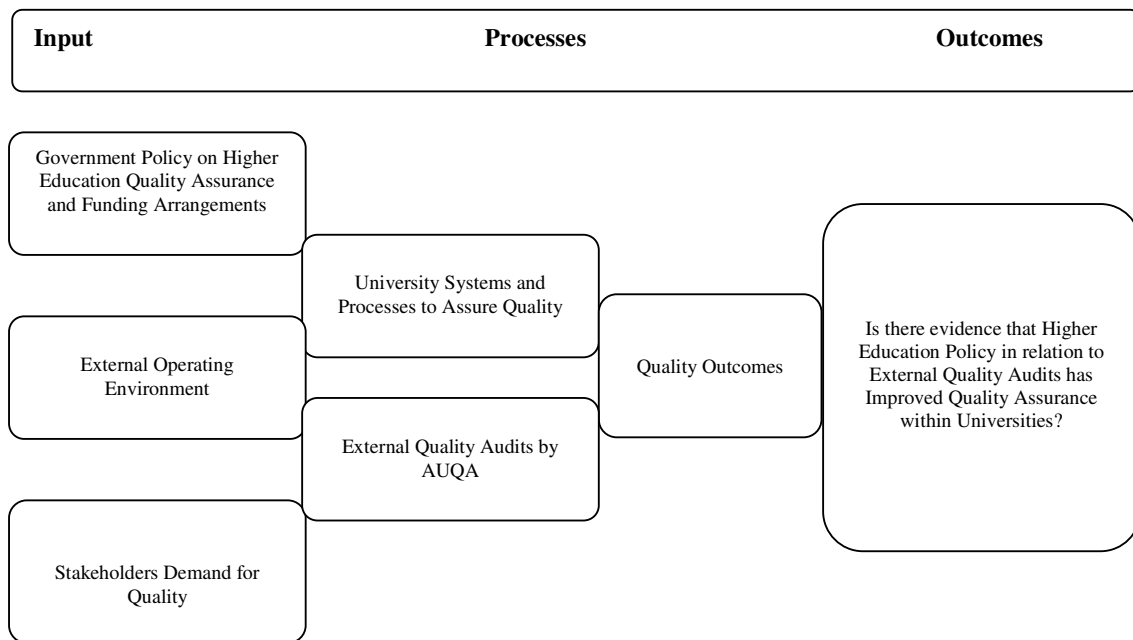
This research will also be useful for those countries without external quality auditing of higher education institutions to determine their future planning.

The need for this type of study, which assesses the effectiveness of external quality audit, was supported by Professor Denise Bradley AC, Chair of the Review of Australian Higher Education, in her keynote address at the 2005 International Network of Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (INQAAHE) conference in New Zealand. Professor Bradley questioned who was researching the impact of external audits, and supported measuring the effectiveness of external quality audit as an area of needed enquiry (Bradley, 2005). Academics and researchers who have undertaken research on higher education quality assurance (for example, Brennan & Shah, 2000; Dill, 2000; Dano & Stensaker, 2007; Harvey, 2002; Meade & Woodhouse, 2000; Newton, 2000; and Stensaker, 2003), confirm the need for empirical research on the impact of external audit on universities. Lemaitre (2004) suggests that there is no formal study on the impact of external quality audit and that such a study is overdue.

3 Theoretical Framework of Research

The study attempts to determine the extent to which government policy on external quality audits has been effective in improving quality assurance in universities. Figure 1 below outlines the framework of research using the common quality cycle with input, process and outcomes. The **input factors** include: government policy on quality assurance, particularly external quality audits; the external operating environment (including international trends, the growth of higher education in domestic and international arenas, and the growth of ICT in learning); and stakeholder demand for quality (including university accountability for public funding, value for money; and universities fulfilling the moral purpose of higher education institutions) (Keohane, 2006). The **process factors** include: university systems and processes to assure quality including strategic planning, governance, resourcing and infrastructure, academic and administrative reviews; and alignment of administrative support service with the core business of the university. The process factors cover external quality audits by AUQA on a cycle of five years. The audits include self assessment, production of the self assessment performance portfolio, trial audit, actual AUQA audit, and post-audit progress reports. The final factor for this research is **outcomes**, i.e. the extent to which input and processes have resulted in value-adding or positive outcomes. In other words, is there evidence that the input and processes deployed in Figure 1 result in the effectiveness of university quality assurance?

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework of Research



4 Evolution of Quality in Australian Higher Education

The Australian higher education system comprises, for the most part, autonomous universities established under State, Territory, or Commonwealth Government legislation with the power to accredit their own courses. State and Territory Governments retain the power to accredit individual higher education courses developed and delivered by other providers. However, accreditation arrangements and approaches vary across the States and Territories.

In the 1980s, with the absence of a national quality management framework, individual universities were responsible for the development, implementation and enhancement of systems and processes for quality assurance. Major discipline reviews were funded to determine standards and to improve quality and efficiency. While these reviews served to highlight the importance of quality assurance within institutions and across the sector, there was no mechanism to ensure that the recommendations of the reviews were acted upon at the institutional level.

Since then, major changes have been implemented. These include: the Higher Education: Quality and Diversity policy statement in the 1990s, which addressed the weaknesses of the discipline review approach to quality assurance; a committee for quality assurance in higher education between 1993 and 1995 to review the quality assurance practices and outcomes of public universities, with annual recommendations to the government for allocating the quality assurance and enhancement element of universities' operating grants; the implementation of the Australian Qualifications Framework in 1995 to provide national articulation of the awards offered in Australian vocational education and training, and higher education; and the integration of a quality improvement plan into the annual educational profiles submission, now called the Institutional Performance Portfolio (IPP), which is used by the government to evaluate university performance and negotiate funding for the triennium.

In 2000, the Australian Government implemented the following:

- the first quality assurance framework for higher education, along with the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes
- the *Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act* to ensure quality education services and the interests of overseas students by setting minimum standards and providing tuition and financial assurance
- an external agency named the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA).

The quality assurance framework consists of five key elements.

1. *State and Territory* responsibility for the registration, re-registration and accreditation of higher education providers other than universities.
2. The *role of AUQA* in undertaking five yearly cyclical audits.
3. *Commonwealth monitoring* of universities' performance via IPP and other data submissions.
4. The *onus on universities* to ensure the development and enhancement of quality and standards.
5. *Compliance* with relevant laws, regulations and guidelines such as national protocols and the National Code.

Since the implementation of the quality assurance framework in 2000, the higher education sector has witnessed significant changes. Notable changes include: the growth of the student population from 695,485 in 2000 to more than 1 million students in 2009; an increase in international students from 95,607 in 2000 to 320,970 in 2009; the growth of private for-profit higher education from a few providers in 2000 to more than 160 providers in 2009, with a consistent increase in student enrolments at the rate of 20% (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009); increased diversity of the student population; and the increased use of technology in learning. While the sector has grown significantly, government funding shrank from 77% of university revenue in 1989 to just 44% in 2008 (Trounson, 2008). Public funding of universities has consistently declined despite the recommendations of the review of higher education in 2008. According to the most recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) statistics, Australia is ranked 15 out of 34 (below the OECD average) on higher education expenditure. The OECD statistics show that the average expenditure per student in Australia is \$15,000 compared to \$25,109 in the US (OECD, 2006).

These developments in the external operating environment, together with a leadership change in the Australian Government and education as a key policy platform, have resulted in a renewed interest in quality assurance in Australian higher education.

An analysis of the current Australian higher education quality assurance framework (Shah, Wilson & Nair, 2010) suggests a number of deficiencies including: the lack of comparison using quantifiable data across all higher education institutions; limited improvement in the student experience despite ten years of external quality audits; inequity in rewarding institutions using student satisfaction (happiness) as a measure of educational quality; university complacency; the lack of monitoring across institutions on comparable academic standards; the role of AUQA and its powers; an inconsistent approach by State and Territory governments to registration and accreditation of non-university

providers; the promotion of quality of higher education institutions to wider stakeholders; and student engagement in quality and improvement.

The 2008 Review of Australian Higher Education recommended a standards-based quality assurance framework. The review concluded that Australia must enhance its capacity to demonstrate quality outcomes and appropriate standards in higher education if it is to remain internationally competitive (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, p. 128). The review also recommended: the formation of a new national regulator with the responsibility to centralise State and Territory government registration and accreditation of courses for non-university providers, registration and accreditation of all higher education providers; quality audits using a standards-based approach rather than fitness-for-purpose; performance evaluation of all providers; and monitoring of institutional compliance with external reference points. In response to the review, the Australian Government agreed to establish a new national regulator with overarching responsibility for quality assurance of all tertiary education providers, including higher and vocational education, with the powers to impose sanctions on universities and other higher education providers.

The proposed quality and regulatory framework for Australian higher education includes four elements.

1. The establishment of an independent national regulator (TEQSA) with powers to register university and non-university higher education providers and monitor quality and ensure standards.
2. A national register of all higher education providers.
3. A higher education standards framework which includes provider standards, qualification standards, information standards, teaching and learning standards, and research standards.
4. The establishment of a new website, *My University* (similar to *My School*), to publish institutional performance on agreed measures. These initiatives will be complemented through government plans to invest \$5.4 billion in public higher education between 2010 and 2014. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009)

The government also introduced policies related to the funding of universities based on a demand-driven model, including performance-based funding on measures such as access and participation of disadvantaged students, and ratings on the national Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) in student satisfaction or experience on generic skills, good teaching and overall course satisfaction. New performance measures will include: the implementation of a new University Experience Survey (UES) to assess the student experience of enrolled students; and a new Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), such as that used in the USA, to assess generic skills and improve higher order competencies (Benjamin & Chun, 2009).

These proposals aim to impact on the changing environment of higher education, both in Australia and internationally. The demand for higher education is growing in both the domestic and international arenas, leading to developments across the world to ensure international comparability and student mobility, such as the Bologna process in Europe (The Bologna Declaration, 1999). The Australian higher education sector is seeing an increase in private for-profit higher education and rise in student tuition fees. According to the Review of Australian Higher Education (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, pp. 3-4), the sector as a whole has grown in terms of student population, diversity and in private providers, but the student experience or satisfaction remains relatively low in areas such as good teaching and student support, compared to the experience of students in the UK on similar survey items. At the community level, stakeholders are demanding higher standards of education to address national issues, such as public confidence in government funding of universities and preventing future skills shortages.

5 Review of Literature

5.1 *Defining Quality in Higher Education*

Harvey and Green (1993, pp. 4-9) provide four definitions of quality. First, 'quality as exceptional', which is linked to the idea of excellence with high standards of academic achievement. Second, 'quality as perfection or consistency' achieved by setting specifications and ensuring zero defects. Third, 'quality as fit-for-purpose', where the product or service meets the stated purpose. Fourth, 'quality as value-for-money', which is viewed as a return on investment or expenditure. This notion of quality is also linked to accountability of public funding. Harvey and Green's final definition is 'quality as transformation', which means that quality is seen as a process of change that adds value to students through their learning experience. Astin (1980, pp. 6-7) provides five conceptions of quality: 'mystical, reputational, resources, outcomes and value-added'. She argues that the characteristics of high quality outcomes result in improved institutional reputation and improved attraction of resources. McWilliam (2004) uses a different approach to defining quality in higher education. She suggests that contemporary organisations, including universities, are risk organisations and quality means guarding against the danger of waste (of resources), or failure (of students), or of declining standards (intellectual, ethical and moral). She outlines the linkage between risk and quality where areas of vulnerability in quality are seen as risks to the university.

As can be seen from this brief overview, a key problem in achieving and monitoring quality assurance in higher education is the lack of a universal definition of quality and standards. In the Australian context, the development of new quality assurance arrangements by the government does not include any definitions of quality and standards. None of the Australian Government discussion papers on quality assurance in higher education have so far provided these definitions. For example, the discussion paper on the new provider standards, new performance indicators framework and new mission-based compacts funding do not put forward any definitions of quality and standards (Commonwealth of Australia 2009; Commonwealth of Australia, 2010).

AUQA defines quality as fitness for purpose, where 'purpose' is to be interpreted broadly, to include mission, goals, objectives, specifications, and so on (AUQA glossary, 2010). This is an inclusive definition, as every organisation or activity has a purpose, even if it is not always precisely stated. 'Fitness for purpose' means both that an organisation has procedures in place that are appropriate for the specified purposes, and that there is evidence to show that these procedures are, in fact, achieving the specified purposes. AUQA's definition of 'standard' is an agreed specification or other criterion used as a rule, guideline, or definition of a level of performance or achievement. One function of

standards is to measure the criteria by which quality may be judged. Although standards are necessary, they are difficult to determine (AUQA glossary, 2010).

In the UK, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) provides clarity on the definition of academic quality and academic standards. QAA defines academic standards as the description of the threshold level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an academic award (for example, a degree). Academic quality is defined as the way of describing how well the learning opportunities made available to students are managed in order to help them achieve their award (QAA, 2010).

Across the higher education sector, there is a lack of a universal definition of quality in higher education and academic standards. This lack of definition raises concerns as to how institutions can engage academic staff in quality and how quality can be embedded into the day-to-day lives of academics and researchers. With no agreed definition of quality, there is no agreed standard on what constitutes a 'high quality' university, faculty or research centre. An additional issue in the current landscape, where governments are aspiring to improve the access of disadvantaged students, is whether diversity can be a factor within quality or if it will lower institutional quality and reputation.

5.2 Brief History of Quality Assurance

The quality movement can be traced back to medieval Europe, where craftsmen began organising into unions called 'guilds' in the late 13th century. Until the early 19th century, manufacturing in the industrialised world tended to follow the craftsmanship model. The factory system, with its emphasis on product inspection, started in Great Britain in the mid-1750s and grew into the industrial revolution in the early 1800s. In the early 20th century, manufacturers began to include quality processes in quality practices. After the United States entered World War II, quality became a critical component. The birth of quality in the United States came as a direct response to the quality revolution in Japan following World War II. The Japanese welcomed the input of Americans, Joseph Juran and Edwards Deming, specialists in total quality management. Rather than concentrating on inspection, they focused on improving all organisational processes through the people who used them. By the 1970s, US industrial sectors, such as automobiles and electronics, had been broadsided by Japan's high-quality competition. The US response, emphasising not only statistics but approaches that embraced the entire organisation, became known as total quality management (TQM). By the last decade of the 20th century, TQM was considered a fad by many business leaders. But while the use of the term TQM has faded somewhat, particularly in the United States, its practices continue (Juran, 1992).

In the decade since the beginning of the 21st century, the quality movement seems to have matured beyond TQM. New quality systems have evolved from the foundations of Deming, Juran and the early Japanese practitioners of quality, and quality has moved beyond manufacturing into the service, healthcare, education and government sectors.

5.3 The Rise of External Quality Audits

The last two decades have seen the rise of a quality agenda in higher education. External quality audit agencies have been set up to monitor quality assurance in many countries such as the UK, New Zealand, Australia, Denmark, Sweden, Hong Kong, India, the Middle East and South Africa. The quality agenda in higher education has become a phenomenon worldwide. For example, the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), which started in 1991 with eight members, now has more than 200 members (INQAAHE, 2010). Not only has quality assurance become widespread, but its impact has been significant. For example, in Australia, more than a quarter of a billion dollars was awarded to public universities between 2005 and 2009 as part of performance-based funding to reward learning and teaching. The performance-based funding, called the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF), was mostly enjoyed by the elite Group of Eight (Go8) universities, which have high student retention and student satisfaction. Similarly, the Research Assessment Exercise in the UK in the 1990s resulted in the highest-rated department receiving four times the funding of the lowest-rated departments (Morley, 2003).

According to Westerheijden, Hulpiau and Waeytens (2007), the discourse of higher education after World War II has been dominated by the wish to increase the number of higher education graduates. They suggest that evaluations in the past only focused on assessing individual lecturers as a voluntary instrument for improvement of their own teaching. The emergence of mass higher education, together with the diversity of education providers, diversity of students and different modes of learning, has demanded different schemes of quality assurance and educational evaluation. The ongoing decline in public funding of universities and changes in external operating environments have witnessed changing government policies with the implementation of external agencies to monitor quality assurance and academic standards. Jeliazkova and Westerheijden (2002) argue that some of the contributing factors to the emergence of external quality audit include: serious doubts about educational standards; doubts about the efficiency of the higher education system and institutions; doubts about the innovation capacity and quality assurance capacity of institutions; and the need to stimulate a quality culture in institutions. Stensaker (2003) suggests that external quality audits serve a range of purposes including: accountability for the use of public funds; improving the quality of higher education provision; informing students and employers; stimulating competitiveness; quality checking of non-university institutions; enabling mobility of students; and making international comparisons.

Vught Van and Westerheijden (1994) suggest that the factors contributing to the recent focus on quality in higher education include: the rapid growth of the student body and accompanying increase in the number of fields of study; public expenditure for higher education; and the increased costs of higher education systems. They suggest the general model of quality assurance based on USA, Canada and Western European countries include external agencies monitoring quality, self evaluations within the institution with the view that academics need to trust their own process, a peer review process with the use of external experts, the use of assessment outcomes, and linking performance funding with specific measures.

In the last ten years, governments and other stakeholders have had a huge interest in the quality of higher education institutions. For example in Australia, the government requires public universities to report on data and performance related to learning and teaching, research, student satisfaction, graduate outcomes and staffing on an annual basis. The Australian Government is also moving toward the establishment of the *My University* website to provide publicly available information on the performance of the institution on certain measures. Such a strategy has already been put in place in the school sector with the *My School* website. Skolnik (2010) argues that quality assurance in higher education is a political process for increased government interest and influence on quality assurance, performance monitoring and resourcing of universities.

5.4 Review of Literature on the Effectiveness of External Quality Audits Worldwide

The aim of the external quality audit is to assure society that higher education standards are adequate and internationally comparable. According to Rozsnyai (2010), quality assurance has become a fact of life – a concept instilled in the public mind and an awareness of its importance as a wish for better education. Concerns are emerging about the relative merits of different institutions and their standards in light of the massification of higher education. The exposure of a larger proportion of society to higher education has created a core of sophisticated consumers interested in how well universities are doing their job (Massaro, 2010).

The majority of the literature on the effectiveness of external quality audits on universities is anecdotal and reflects two opposing viewpoints. The first view is that audits have not transformed higher education and do not contribute to institutional improvement and the enhancement of student learning. Instead, change takes place in institutions through internal reviews, and internal and external operating environments. The opposing view is that audits, if managed effectively and aligned well with internal systems and processes, motivate universities to self-assess and improve their core business and services. Most literature has also critiqued the processes used by the auditing agencies. External audits with an improvement-led culture have had positive results in terms of self assessment, external peer

review, improvements and follow-up, while audits with a compliance-driven regime failed to engage academics in quality and improvement (Barrows, 1999; Jackson, 1997; Laughton, 2003; Kogan et al., 2000; Newton, 2000). Williams (2009) argues that the tendency of individuals to reject is higher when something is forced or imposed on them than when choosing to do it themselves. This suggests compliance or inspectorate regimes will be ineffective.

5.4.1 The UK Experience

In the UK, external quality audits have been criticised by the university sector. It is believed by some that the cost involved in the preparation of the audit in UK outweighs the benefits. The cost of the first cycle of quality audits in the UK was approximately £250 million a year for the sector and between £80,000 to £100,000 for an individual audit (HEFCE, 2005). However, there is little doubt that external quality audit has had an impact upon institutions in the UK. It has provided an impetus for institutions to give more attention to the quality of their teaching. A recent report by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) on the evaluation of the quality assurance framework (academic infrastructure) in the UK gives evidence from many higher education providers that the academic infrastructure provides an adequate basis for the comparison of threshold standards and a useful baseline for the management on the quality of learning opportunities (QAA, 2010). On the downside, it has taken up a lot of time and resources and caused some stress.

According to Harvey and Williams (2010), academics see quality assurance as burdensome, and it has failed to become a part of their everyday activities because they see no real link between quality and their academic work. Harvey (2005) and Cheng (2011) argue that quality monitoring in the UK has been beset by overlapping and burdensome processes (see also Laughton, 2003; Kogan et al., 2000), as well as competing notions of quality, a failure to engage learning and transformation, and a focus on accountability and compliance. The UK experience suggests that academics perceive external reviews as a distrust of their own work, and a costly and bureaucratic exercise (Cheng, 2009). In general, quality assurance activities have prompted a culture of compliance (Jackson, 1997; Barrows, 1999; Newton, 2000) and have discouraged the engagement of ideas around quality improvements. A study in the UK with 64 academics from one university suggests that academics see quality audit as a compliance requirement and find the process burdensome with a focus on documentation and no real benefit for lecturers and students (Cheng, 2011).

The first cycle of audits in the UK resulted in more than 100 items of negative media coverage about the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and outcomes of the audit reports. Several prestigious universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, challenged the QAA and its audit process. However, despite this opposition, studies with 12 universities in the UK indicated that two-thirds of external review panel recommendations had been acted upon (Brennan et al., 1997). They found that actions involved formalised procedures and improved documentation, and that recommendations were more likely to be instigated at the faculty level.

Newton (2002) found that academic staff does not mutely accept change or the particular demands of the quality assurance policy or systems in the review process. His experience in Wales suggests that external audits which encourage team-based action planning and increased dissemination of good practice result in improvement in the student experience.

A study at Sheffield Hallam University sought academics' perceptions of the different external monitoring processes in England. They found that some processes, notably external examination, were perceived as providing a check on standards. However, there was little support for the view that external quality evaluation improved the student learning experience (Harvey & Newton, 2004).

Student experience and engagement in learning has been highlighted as an area where limited improvements have been made in the UK, despite the growth of quality audits (Harvey, 2002; Newton, 2000). In Australia, quality assurance systems have failed to take account of student engagement, according to Coates (2005).

5.4.2 The Scandinavian Experience

In Sweden, Wahlen (2004) found that, although external audits together with other elements impacted at the management and faculty levels, it took a long time to build accepted systematic quality assurance and development measures in universities. He found that the audits improved: the development of policy and structure of institutional quality work; the development of student influence in quality assurance; cooperation with stakeholders; internal evaluations, reviews and follow-up processes; and quality assurance in the internationalisation area. Askling (1997) concluded that external evaluation is only one of several factors influencing institutional quality enhancement.

Other demands may come from such areas as an increase in student numbers, growing diversity in terms of previous knowledge, and the need for external funding. External audits in Sweden have resulted in substantial change, including stimulating quality enhancement and strategic management. Askling (1997, p. 17) attributes the change to the 'improvement orientation' approach to quality monitoring. Research by Stensaker (1997) with 24 heads of department in a Swedish university

suggests that quality audits have led to enhanced management of quality processes and staff development. However, Massy (1999) implies that it is a mistake to say that audits have *transformed* higher education in Sweden and Denmark. Universities are too complex, their governance systems too convoluted, and their faculties too traditional for real transformation to take place in only a few years. But his findings indicate that external reviews in Sweden and Denmark have been constructive and can be credited for the advancement of quality work to a significant extent. The experience in Denmark suggests that external quality assessment using methodology such as self assessment, peer-review, audit reporting and follow-up has resulted in useful information, and that the effectiveness of the process is dependent on well-developed internal quality systems and improvement-led cultures (Kristensen, 2010). Research in a Norwegian university suggests that external quality audits have played a key role in strengthening the use of student evaluation data to improve the student learning experience (Gynnild, 2007).

In European higher education, the Bologna process, with its focus on international comparability and student mobility, appears to have been an important driver for increased quality in steering mechanisms and governance over a decade of change (Schwartz and Westerheijden, 2004). Studies by Sursock and Smidt (2010) suggest that there is an agreement across European universities that enhanced internal quality processes have been the most important change in institutions.

The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education conducted a review in 2005, which involved an analysis of the progress made in the fifth year of external quality audits based on the external quality audit reports published. The review report concluded that, firstly, the external quality audit process was useful and provided opportunities for institutions to conduct self reviews and identify areas of good practice and areas where improvement was needed. And secondly, the outcome of the external quality audit played a key role in internal change and improvement. The Swedish experience shows external quality audits have also demonstrated value in enabling comparison across higher education institutions, which had been difficult in the past (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, 2005).

5.4.3 The New Zealand Experience

In New Zealand, quality reviews have led universities to examine and monitor processes in ways they have not done previously. Under such examination, defects were identified and addressed rather than lingering to face public exposure (Meade & Woodhouse, 2000). Another study in New Zealand suggests that audit processes have been effective in encouraging a cultural shift in the universities with respect to quality matters, although penetration has been uneven across the sector. However, there is broad acknowledgement within the universities that positive benefits have resulted, which have been worth the cost (New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit - NZUAAU, 1997). Another report suggests that external quality audit has acted as a stimulus and catalyst for universities to build robust quality systems (NZUAAU, 2001).

Research on external quality audits in the UK, New Zealand, Sweden and Hong Kong shows their effectiveness in: increased responsibility for improving teaching and student learning; facilitating active discussion and cooperation within academic units on the means to improve teaching and student learning; clarification of responsibility for improving teaching and student learning in faculties; and providing information on best practice both within the institution and across the systems (Dill, 2000).

5.4.4 The South African Experience

A recent study by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in South Africa with three South African universities measured staff perception of external quality audit. Face-to-face interviews with staff in three universities revealed that not all ideas for improvement were implemented before audits, however, public external quality audit reports played a key role or were used as leverage in bringing about change and improvements. Some of the improvements in the three South African universities included: changes in policies and procedures, centralised administrative and record keeping practices; new program development and assessment procedures; and sharing good practice within the institutions (Wickham et al., 2007).

Fourie and Alt (2000) found that quality audits in South Africa foster an improvement-led culture but there is a lack of integration of quality in core activities such as program planning and professional development.

5.4.5 Effectiveness Studies in Other Countries

Studies in a range of other countries have found positive effects of quality audits, including:

- in Chile, indications of a change in institutional culture (Silva, Reich and Gallegos, 1997; Lemaitre, 2004)
- in the West Indies, the implementation of review recommendations and enhanced learning and teaching (Gift and Hutchinson, 2007)
- in New Zealand, the enhancement of learning and teaching, documentation structures, sequences of learning and the approach to student assessments (Horsburgh, 1997; Gerbic & Kranenburg, 2003); and an improvement in teaching and research outcomes (Carr et al., 2005).

Twenty years of quality accreditation in the US have resulted in significant change in quality assurance, from shifting the focus on resources and processes to assessing student learning outcomes. It is also beginning to move beyond the inspection of assessment as a process to examining actual levels of student performance (Ewell, 2010). According to Ewell, quality reviews in the US have also improved: institutional attention to documenting internal quality processes; conscious planning and establishing and assessing academic goals; and providing publicly assessable information about institutional effectiveness to inform taxpayers.

Studies undertaken by Sitkin et al. (1994) suggest that quality management fails to address the specific circumstances of the organisation, and success in one organisation is all too easily seen as a universal remedy for quality problems in other organisations. Ramsden (2003) argues that quality assurance encourages compliance and not commitment, reinforces unsophisticated theories of learning, and engenders a culture of lack of trust in academics by external agencies.

Overall, there is broad agreement that external quality audits, together with internal university processes, have been a driver in improving quality assurance processes in universities. Studies by Saarinen (1995), Thune (1996), Smeby and Stensaker (1999) and Brennan and Shah (2000) confirm that a self assessment process, as part of an external audit, is very successful in improving quality assurance processes. The experience from a Dutch university suggests that internal self reviews serve to increase faculty autonomy, as well as helping to improve educational quality (Weusthof, 1995). Internationally, there is agreement that the quality audit process has raised awareness of quality and systems, and that it has increased communication and transparency of accountability (Caroll, 1997; Anderson et al., 2000; Dill, 2000).

Scott and Hawke (2003) argue that, for universities, a unique benefit of the external quality audit is the extrinsic motivation to document, critique and enhance their internal capabilities for continuous quality assurance, improvement and innovation. Similar conclusions were reached in a number of studies around the world, for example, in South Africa (Wickham, Coetzee, Jones, and Metcalfe, 2007), Denmark (Kristensen, 1997), the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Sweden and Hong Kong (Dill, 2000).

5.5 Review of the Australian Experience

The external review report of AUQA suggests that the higher education sector believes AUQA has had a positive impact in raising awareness of quality matters, in developing a commitment to quality and quality enhancement across the sector, and also in showcasing good practice within the sector (AUQA, 2006).

Shah and Grebennikov's study (2008) of a large public university in Australia found that the external quality audit was used as a driver for change and improvement in the university. They suggest that, while changes and improvements would happen as part of internal review processes, the effective use of the external driver led to improvement as a direct result of the review outcomes. Some of the notable areas of improvement included: the development of a range of tracking, reporting and improvement systems, which may have been developed regardless, but the speed of development and their uptake were definitely enhanced; development of a more evidence-based culture of decision-making; implementing improvement projects as a direct result of reviews and stakeholder feedback; fostering active engagement in benchmarking with similar institutions; and a more coordinated, systematic and consistent approach to planning and review across the faculties and divisions. Other key improvements in learning and teaching were: a university-wide student retention project from 2004 to 2006 which resulted in a 4.2% improvement in overall retention and a 3.9% increase in first-year undergraduate retention; university-wide implementation of quality management of assessments; improved engagement with student associations and university entities; the formation of network groups (e.g. Program Heads) to provide peer support for those staff who put improvement projects into daily practice; centralised and effective management of offshore programs and partnerships; improved synergy between various support services, such as the library, IT and student support; and strengthening the role of the planning and quality office in facilitating planning, reviews and improvement.

A follow-up study of the same university by Shah and Nair (2010) showed that the first-year retention rate had improved by 7.2% in a six-year period, compared to 1.2% improvement across the entire university sector in the same period (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008). The university recorded the second highest trend improvement in first-year retention compared to 38 other universities.

The improvement on retention rate is attributed to the student retention project initiated in 2004 (Shah & Nair, 2010). This improvement in first-year retention of 7.2% is significant based on the student profile of the university, with 54% of students being first in their immediate families to attend tertiary education, and with almost 22% of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds. The first year progression rate improved by 2.6% in a six-year period compared to 0.85% across the university sector. Results from the Course Experience Questionnaire (a national survey targeted to graduating students across all Australian universities similar to the National Student Survey in the UK) also reported a trend improvement in all three scales. Explicit satisfaction (% responding to 4 and 5 on a 5-point Likert scale) on the overall satisfaction scale improved by 13.8% from 2004 to 2009. On the generic skills scale, the university improved 11.3% in the same period. The university recorded one of the highest improvements compared to the other 38 Australian universities on both the overall satisfaction and the generic skills scales. On the good teaching scale, the university improved by 3.8% from 2004 to 2009. The improvement in student satisfaction measured through the CEQ is inconsistent across all universities with little progress made in the higher education sector during this period. The trend improvement in this particular university was due to initiatives between 2004 and 2008 implemented as a direct result of student feedback (Shah & Nair, 2010).

According to Baldwin (1997), external reviews in Australia have been instrumental in ensuring rigorous course approval procedures; increasing awareness of the student perspective in learning and teaching; and a perceptible shift in the climate, with renewed attention to teaching issues.

Harvey (2006, p. 287) acknowledges that the various impacts of external quality reviews on universities are not easy to measure. He summarises such impacts as: “changes evident from one review to the next; improvements in performance indicators; the adoption of formal internal quality processes by institutions; student feedback indicating positive changes; and employer perceptions about improvement in graduate abilities”. Using Harvey’s concept of assessment of the effectiveness of external quality audits through a range of measures, Shah and Grebennikov (2008) and Shah and Nair (2011) analysed performance data on specific measures two years before an external audit in an Australian university and two years post-audit. The analysis showed trend improvement across all measures including: first-year student retention rates; the overall student satisfaction scales measured on the internal student satisfaction survey and on the CEQ; the average explicit satisfaction on the CEQ good teaching scale and the generic skills scale; and the overall satisfaction ratings on the end-of-semester unit evaluations, the research students’ survey, and the employers’ survey. Their experience in a large Australian university suggests that an external quality audit, when aligned with effective internal processes, can enhance the quality outcome.

According to Shah, Roth and Nair (2010), external quality audits have been particularly effective in improving the quality assurance of Australian offshore international education programs. Some of the reasons for this include the following factors: the focus of cycle 1 audits on offshore programs and partnerships, with audit panel visits to offshore countries; audit panel interviews with students, staff, employers, alumni, senior managers from partner institutions and government officials; public audit reports highlighting significant deficiencies in the management of offshore programs; negative media stories related to offshore activities; the requirements placed on universities to close the loop and report progress on the affirmations and recommendations 18 months after the release of the public report; the Australian Government's decision to include internationalisation as a mandatory theme in cycle 2 audits; and finally, the audit panel follow-up on selected affirmations and recommendations in the cycle 2 audit. An analysis of the success and deficiencies of the Australian higher education quality assurance framework by Shah et al. (2010) shows that some of the successes include: improvement in internal quality management systems and processes in universities in both onshore and offshore education; the emergence of the quality cycle and its use in core areas of the university including offshore education (for example, plan, implement, review and improve cycle); and the effective use of the student voice to improve teaching quality at all locations and modes of learning.

A detailed study by Shah (2011), based on discussions with 40 participants in a national forum and an analysis of 60 AUQA audit reports in his recent paper, *Ten Years of External Quality Audit in Australia: Have Audits Improved Quality Assurance in Universities?*, suggests that government policy on external quality audits has been effective in improving systems and processes related to quality assurance in core and support areas. However, Shah's study and a review of critics in the Australian media imply that external audits have failed to assess outcomes and standards. Ten years of external audit have focused more strongly on input and quality assurance processes, rather than reviewing educational outcomes in terms of standards. The danger of an excessive focus on systems and processes for quality assurance is the lack of systematic monitoring of student achievement or monitoring the extent to which students have attained the learning outcomes and employability or generic skills that are seen as important for graduates to achieve by employers and the community. Arguably, one of the limitations of a lack of focus on standards and outcomes is the lack of debate in the Australian higher education sector on standards and outcomes until recent times. By comparison, the UK has used external examiners for more than two decades to safeguard standards and outcomes (Hannan & Silver, 2006), however, external moderation has had an impact on timely feedback on student assessment and further learning.

The cycle 1 audits also failed to ensure university compliance with key national policies, such as the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes and the Australian Qualifications Framework. Moodie (2008) argues that a number of Australian universities significantly breach key national policies. He argues that using ‘university’ as a title seems to be seen as a default with regards to compliance with government policies. Some critics (Massaro, 2010; Blackmur, 2008) suggest that AUQA has failed to achieve its objectives as stated in its constitution.

The literature discussed above is based on a review of external quality audit reports in various countries, comparative analysis of audit reports, opinions on the likely impact of external audit and predictions based on experience, most of which is anecdotal. The literature clearly shows a gap in empirical research that uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse the effectiveness of external quality audits. This thesis on the effectiveness of external quality audit with universities addresses the current gap by using qualitative, quantitative and case study methods to determine the extent to which external quality audits have improved quality assurance in universities.

5.6 Addressing the Current Gap in Literature: What is known already? Where are the gaps? What is yet to be discovered?

It is clear from the literature review that most of the research undertaken worldwide on the effectiveness of external quality audits is based on individual opinions, predictions and anecdotal evidence on the likely impact on universities. What is already known from the literature is that there are two different viewpoints.

The first viewpoint is that audits have been effective and have contributed to improvement in systems and processes for quality assurance and they have also played a role in monitoring standards and outcomes. This positive view indicates certain attributes are needed to make external audit effective. These attributes include: an improvement-led external quality audit process rather than a compliance-based audit; the alignment of internal university processes with external quality audit process (for example, cyclical reviews of faculties or courses); leadership within the university on quality monitoring and ongoing enhancement; a range of national initiatives or government policies to promote, reward and enhance quality improvements; improvement in the documentation of policies and procedures; and a focus of the external review on *inputs, processes and outcomes*, rather than outcomes only. In Australia, the external drivers, such as changes in government policy and the increased powers of external quality agencies, together with new policies such as performance-based funding using specific measures (for example, the learning and teaching performance fund), have also encouraged universities and faculties to continue ongoing performance monitoring and improvement.

The second viewpoint is that external quality audit has not been effective in the enhancement of quality. This view is shared in various contexts, particularly in the UK where external quality audits have been described as: a burden to universities; increased bureaucracy; damaging and intrusive to university and academic autonomy; creating distrust between academics and external quality agencies; and not engaging academic staff with quality. Some of the contributing factors to this notion include: the process used by the external quality agency which is driven by an inspectorate or compliance regime; an increased focus on systems and processes for quality rather than outcomes; bureaucratic processes where auditing agencies work against universities, rather than using a collaborative approach; the lack of initiatives to engage academic staff in quality; and a lack of evidence that external quality monitoring has had an impact on the student experience.

This thesis is addressing the current gap in the literature by measuring the effectiveness of external quality audits in Australia after a decade of external monitoring. The study is timely in Australia as the government is renewing its approach to quality assurance, along with other new policy initiatives. These initiatives include: a shift from funding projected students numbers in universities to a demand-driven model which will fund actual student numbers in an attempt to increase diversity and competition; mission-based compacts funding with individual negotiations with each university to meet government access and equity targets; performance-based funding using specific teaching, research and equity measures; publicising the performance of individual universities and possibly ranking them on the new *My University* website; and setting up a new national regulator called TEQSA with increased powers to place sanctions on institutions. This study is also timely in its examination of whether the government policy initiatives of the late 1990s, related to setting up an external agency (i.e. AUQA), and ten years of external quality audits have been effective and provided value-add to the university sector.

This study uses mixed research methods (qualitative, quantitative and case studies) to analyse the extent to which external quality audit has been effective in improving quality assurance in Australian universities, the extent to which such audits have improved the student experience, and the level of university satisfaction with the AUQA audit process. The thesis is based on six years of work, including ongoing research, the publication of more than 40 peer-reviewed papers in conference proceedings and journals on topics related to quality in higher education, and presentations at conferences and other fora. Part of the research involved using several universities as case studies and undertaking a survey of 120 relevant university staff from 30 Australian universities. The three research methods are used to explore three research questions to test the hypothesis. Based on the analysis of the current literature on the effectiveness of quality audits on universities, it is the first time a single research higher degree thesis has used all three research methods to evaluate three separate issues of significant relevance to this topic.

5.6.1 Research Questions

- 1. Has government policy on quality assurance and external quality audit been effective in improving the core business of higher education institutions?**
 - a. Can government policy on quality assurance and external quality audit be credited for change and improvement in core areas of institutions?

- 2. Is there any evidence that quality assurance and an external quality audit improve student satisfaction and retention in institutions?**

- 3. Are higher education institutions satisfied with the process used by the external auditing agency (AUQA) in Australia?**

Some of the findings of the study are unique and not covered in any previous research or literature. For example, the impact of external quality audit on offshore programs and partnerships, with more than 50% of Australian universities closing their offshore programs as a direct result of external monitoring, has not been discussed in any previous research. While the impact of external quality audits on the student experience has been examined in the UK context, this thesis uses eight years of trend performance data from the CEQ and the views of study participants on whether audits have been effective in improving the student experience in Australia. Finally, there was a significant gap in the literature on the extent to which universities are satisfied with the audit process used by various agencies, such as AUQA in Australia. This thesis has collected the views of 120 staff from 30 universities on their experience and satisfaction with the AUQA audit process.

This thesis has also found that there are two specific areas requiring further research. These two areas ‘yet to be discovered’ were not within the scope of this research and would be areas of great interest for future research. The first is the issue of access and equity and its implications on quality outcomes. The Australian Government’s aspiration to increase the participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, combined with the expectation that universities will need to grow and that growth must not compromise quality outcomes, is challenging in an environment of decreased public funding of universities. Recently, the Australian Minister of Tertiary Education, Chris Evans, warned universities to keep growth ‘sustainable’ and ensure ‘quality isn’t sacrificed’. Senator Evans mentioned that the budget environment is tight and that the new student demand-driven system will punish universities that let quality slip (Trounson & Hare, 2011).

The government's access and equity agenda raises questions over the extent to which social inclusion policies could impact on academic standards and outcomes. This issue is discussed by Shah, Lewis and Fitzgerald (2011) in a forthcoming paper where the authors outline key challenges in access, equity and quality outcomes facing the sector. The government's access targets also lead to debate on whether diversity is an ingredient of quality. From a moral perspective the answer is 'yes', however, universities operate in an environment where institutional reputation is judged through rankings and league tables; the absence of equity measures in rankings could create reputational risk for institutions. According to Brink's (2008) experience in South Africa, where a range of initiatives were used to admit low-scoring students into the University of Cape Town, the fact that the university implemented programs to help low-scoring students and had low entry standards did not necessarily mean low exit standards. Brink suggested that the range of programs at the University of Cape Town ensured weak starters were turned into strong finishers comparable to the traditional students.

Brink's experience at the University of Newcastle in the UK suggested that students with lesser entry standards attained perfectly acceptable exit standards. At the University of Newcastle, low-scoring students are admitted into medical school after completing a summer school Partners Program. Brink found that 92% of the students admitted into the medical program in the 2002 and 2004 cohort graduated with first and second class degrees; this compared well with the overall average of 95%. However, Brink's research in the UK also indicated that access, equity and diversity initiatives impact on rankings and league tables. He found that entry scores were used as one of the parameters in calculating a ranking in UK universities and they impacted on the ranking of the university. In 2007, the University of Newcastle's entry score for medicine was ranked 17th. Brink proposed that removing the Partners Program students from the equation would increase the ranking to 7th. This program, to which the university is firmly committed, comes at a cost in terms of the league table position, according to Brink.

The second area yet to be explored is the impact of rankings and league tables on academic work, and the extent to which rankings using teaching and research measures interferes with the academic profession and academic autonomy. In Australia, the use of performance-based funding, such as the previous learning and teaching performance fund, and the new performance-based funding post 2012, will mean an increase in the use of student satisfaction results and research output to assess the performance of academic staff, and linking the outcomes with reward and recognition. This focus on outcomes measures, such as satisfaction and research outputs, along with increased enrolments in universities and higher student-to-staff ratios, may impact on teacher performance and the student experience. More importantly, the increased reliance on such measures could lead to a decreased focus on ensuring academic quality and standards in core areas, such as: investment in resources and infrastructure in faculties to produce positive outcomes; recruitment, recognition, succession planning

and retention of academics; the development of early career academic and researchers; academic staff workload (teaching workload, research output, research student supervision, industry engagement, managing various modes of learning such as online and involvement in offshore activities as part of a normal workload); academic quality and standards in course development, approval and ongoing review; moderation of student assessments; and other day-to-day processes.

The dominance of rankings, performance-based funding and new performance development and review processes in universities raise the accountability of academic and senior staff on quality outcomes and increase transparency on the funding and performance of institutions. According to Williams (2009), quality assurance is an integral part of all academics' personal and professional armoury. Learning and teaching are viewed as joint enterprises between teachers and students that need careful planning and professional management.

5.7 *The Complexities of Measuring Effectiveness*

A number of authors believe there are difficulties in measuring the effectiveness of external quality audits. These difficulties are due to the following: the complexity of mapping causal relationships between systems and processes for quality assurance and measuring outcomes (Harvey & Newton, 2004; Stensaker, 2003; Weusthof, 1995; Askling, 1997; Brennan, 1997); the correlation between certain external initiatives and their impact on internal processes (Hackman & Wageman, 1995); and issues related to methodological pathways and epistemological assumptions that are likely to yield credible insights into quality assurance and its effects (Singh, 2010). An evaluation of impact is difficult because of the complexity and the pace of change in most institutions (Brennan, Fredericks & Shah, 1997). Harvey (1999) suggests that impact studies can fall into three broad types. The first type includes 'opinionated' or 'theoretical' analysis which tends to 'predict' the likely impact (Wilson, 1996, p. 152). The second is based on limited evidence; much of this is anecdotal (Harvey, 1998). The third type is based on an analysis of systematic data collection (Harvey, 2006). The need for further study on the effectiveness of quality audits has been strongly recommended; for example, Bradley (2005) suggested the need for such research with systematic analysis during the keynote address at the 2005 International Network for Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education.

6 Research Methodology

This study uses mixed research methods (qualitative, quantitative and case studies) to analyse the extent to which external quality audit has been effective in improving quality assurance in Australian universities, the extent to which such audits have improved the student experience, and the level of university satisfaction with the AUQA audit process. It includes 14 peer-reviewed papers published in conference proceedings and journals. Qualitative, quantitative and case study research methods are used as the basis for the research papers.

The use of mixed methods and its effectiveness to test the hypothesis is supported by various writers, such as Creswell (2003, 2009). The literature on the effectiveness of external quality audit suggests the need to use mixed methods (Harvey, 2006; Mertens, 2005). Nine papers use the quantitative method of research, which includes systematic data collection and analysis using survey research. Five papers have used a mixed methods approach, including qualitative research method and case study method (interviews and discussions with respondents and the use of a university as a case study). A number of the papers provide policy analysis of the impact of government policy on external quality audits.

Three of the research papers are directly related to the topic of determining the effectiveness of external quality audits. *The Effectiveness of External Quality Audits: A Study with Australian Institutions* used a quantitative method with survey tools, data collection and analysis. All Australian universities were targeted to provide a sample of the different types of institutions in terms of size, age, elite research, technology focus, regional and metropolitan, and single and multi-campus universities. A database was created to determine the survey's target population, which included Deputy Vice Chancellors, Pro Vice Chancellors, Directors, Managers and Quality Officers responsible for quality assurance in all universities. The target population was extended to some former AUQA auditors, critics of external quality audits, and academics and researchers who have published on topics related to quality assurance in Australia. Each individual was telephoned and invited to participate in the survey; this was followed by an email invitation with the web-link of the online survey. In total, 150 people were invited to participate and a reminder email was sent three weeks later. The survey received 120 valid responses from staff at all levels across the institutions, ranging from Deputy Vice Chancellors to Quality Officers and academics. In total, representatives from 30 of the total 39 Australian universities participated in the survey.

The survey tool was developed based on a literature review and the recurring commendations, affirmations and recommendations from AUQA audits of all universities in Australia. Before its use, the survey tool was reviewed by eight leading academics and researchers from Australia and overseas who have undertaken research and published in quality assurance in higher education including Harvey, Woodhouse, Hawke, Nair, Brennan, Dill and Scott.

The second paper directly related to the topic used a qualitative research method. *Ten Years of External Quality Audit in Australia: Evaluating its Effectiveness and Success* includes a review of 60 AUQA audit reports from cycle 1 and cycle 2 audits. It also analyses the responses of 40 participants from 25 universities in a workshop on the topic: *Measuring the Impact of External Quality Audit on Universities* (Shah, Skaines & Miller, 2007). The workshop aimed to elicit discussion on the effectiveness of external quality audits based on the experience of the 40 participants. The workshop was part of the Australian Universities Quality Forum 2007, a premier conference for quality practitioners in universities, private for-profit institutions, governments and other organisations.

The third paper is based on Harvey's (2006) concept of assessing the effectiveness of external quality audits through a range of measures. The paper analysed performance data on a range of measures before and after external quality audit in an Australian university. The analysis showed trend improvement across all measures, including: first-year student retention rates; the overall student satisfaction scales on the internal student satisfaction survey and on the CEQ; the average explicit satisfaction on the CEQ good teaching scale and the generic skills scale; and the overall satisfaction ratings on end-of-semester unit evaluations, the research student survey, and the employer survey.

7 Discussion and Published Work

This section will provide a cohesive, thematic overview which integrates the individual published research output(s).

The analysis of literature shows limited research in Australia and overseas on the effectiveness of external quality audit on universities. The limited studies undertaken so far are based on opinions, predictions and anecdotal evidence on the likely effect of the external quality audits of universities. None of the research to date involved sampling across universities by using systematic data collection, either qualitative or quantitative, on the extent to which quality audits actually improved quality assurance in universities. None of the previous studies has shown if quality audits have improved student experience in universities. Well-known researchers in the area, such as Professor Lee Harvey, have also suggested the need for such research to assess if government policy related to quality assurance and audits in higher education are adding value to the higher education sector at the national level and individual universities at the institutional level.

External quality audits have been in place in Australia since 2001. The year 2010 marked a decade of quality audit in universities. This research has been timely for a number of reasons.

- It is important to determine if government policy related to external quality audits of universities has added value to higher education.
- An assessment of the effectiveness of the audit can be measured as all Australian universities completed cycle 1 audits in 2007, and the majority of universities have also completed cycle 2 audits. Universities are in a better position to assess if audits have played a key role in improving quality assurance.
- The Review of Australian Higher Education in 2008 outlined the need to improve the quality and standard of higher education with future directions yet to be announced.
- Universities have spent a significant amount of money and resources in preparing for audits.

All of the outputs from this current research are related to quality assurance in higher education and are based on a comprehensive analysis of literature, an analysis of quality assurance policies in higher education, an analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data, the use of case study research, and opinions and predictions by the author(s) on the effectiveness of external quality audits in higher education.

The following research questions were used to guide the research.

- 1. Has government policy on quality assurance and external quality audit been effective in improving the core business of higher education institutions?**
 - a. Can government policy on quality assurance and external quality audit be credited for change and improvement in core areas of institutions?

- 2. Is there any evidence that quality assurance and an external quality audit improve student satisfaction and retention in institutions?**

- 3. Are higher education institutions satisfied with the process used by the external auditing agency (AUQA) in Australia?**

Five outputs have directly provided answers to almost all of the research questions through the use of qualitative and quantitative research methods, as well as case studies. Some of the indicators of quality in higher education that are used in many developed countries, including Australia, the UK, New Zealand and others, are based on such measures as student retention, student satisfaction, graduate outcomes and other indicators. These measures are assessed in the research papers in relation to the core business of the university, comprising learning and teaching, research, internationalisation and engagement. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods are used to test the hypothesis concerning the key research questions.

All 14 publications are peer-reviewed papers in conference proceedings and journals. The discussion on each paper is structured around three key areas to provide a logical sequence, and implications for policy and practice have been developed and discussed.

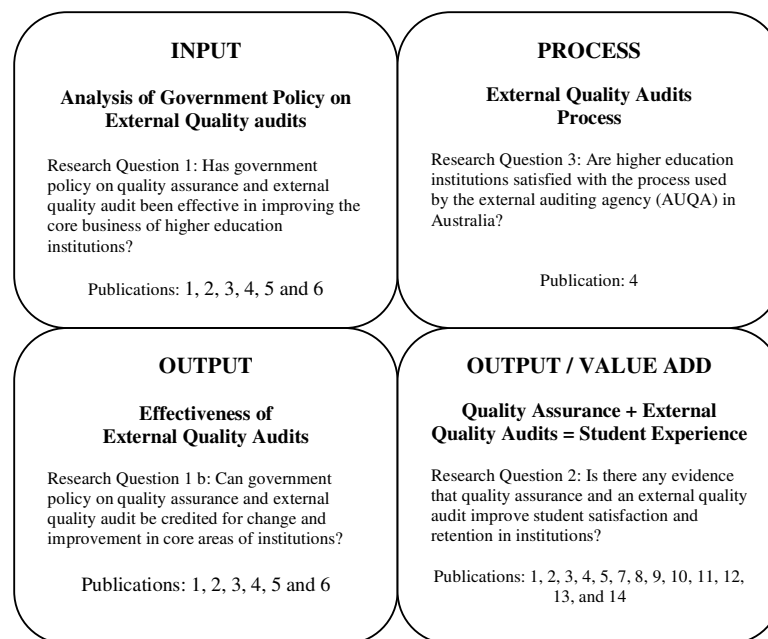
1. Analysis of government policy on quality assurance and external quality audits.

2. The effectiveness of external quality audits.

3. Tracking and improving quality assurance, student experience and student retention related to the learning and teaching experience, research student experience, employer experience and international offshore student experience.

Figure 2 below shows how the 14 papers are related to each other and the nature of their contribution to the research topic. The papers all relate to the research topic and are topical in the current debate about Australian higher education on quality assurance and academic standards. Nearly all of the papers relate to contemporary trends in Australian higher education, for example, they analyse areas such as quality assurance and external quality audits, private for-profit higher education, the student experience, student attrition and retention, offshore international education, and the use of performance data in teaching and research to improve quality outcomes. The papers are aligned with the research questions and the input, process and output cycle used in the theoretical framework.

Figure 2: Thematic Overview of Published Outputs



1) **Analysis of Government Policy on Quality Assurance and External Quality Audits**

Publication 1: The Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework: Its Success, Deficiencies and Way Forward

The current Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework was implemented in 2000. While the current framework has served us well with evidence of success, it is clear that the new policy on quality assurance will be more rigorous. The new policy will be implemented in 2011–2013 as a result of the review of higher education in Australia in 2007–08. The aims of the paper were to provide a brief history of quality assurance and its evolution in higher education in Australia, and to analyse the success and deficiencies of the current quality assurance framework used by the Australian Government. The analysis of the framework was based on the views of 40 participants from 25 Australian universities, as well as the views of the three authors who have worked in quality assurance roles in various institutions.

The paper outlined the main drivers of change in Australian higher education that have contributed to changes in government policies on quality assurance, external quality audits and, now, the performance-based funding of universities. The paper uses a qualitative method and was published in the 2010 *Australian Association for Institutional Research Forum*.

Publication 2: Private Higher Education in Australia: Growth, Quality and Standards

This paper provides an overview of the growth of private higher education in Australia and internationally with an analysis of factors contributing to the growth in Australia. It outlines issues around quality assurance and standards, based on the experience of the authors in working closely with five Australian private providers in self-reviews, quality assurance and external quality audits, and course development. An analysis of recurring themes as a result of the external quality audits of 19 private higher education institutions in Australia is also discussed. The paper concludes by providing recommendations that could be used by government and private providers to improve quality assurance and academic standards.

The paper was based on a topic that is a current trend in Australian higher education. The growth of private for-profit provision is one of the contributing factors towards the changing government policy on quality assurance and the formation of the new national regulator, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency. The paper was based on a qualitative study and was published in the *Journal of Institutional Research (South East Asia)* in 2010.

2) ***The Effectiveness of External Quality Audits***

Publication 3: The Effectiveness of External Quality Audits: A Study with Australian Universities

This paper is based on research with all Australian universities to assess the extent to which audits by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) have improved quality assurance in the core and support areas of the universities. The paper analyses the views of 120 respondents including senior members of the universities and AUQA auditors, and evaluates university satisfaction with the external quality audit process. Through analysis of the national Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) data from 2002 to 2008, the paper also examines if audits in Australia have contributed to the enhancement of the student experience. The study found that the audit process used by AUQA in Australia is satisfactory due to its approach of an improvement-led culture. The findings indicate that external quality audits alone cannot be credited for improving quality assurance in universities. A combination of external quality audits, together with the internal and external operating environments, have significantly contributed to improving quality assurance in universities.

A quantitative research method was used to collect data. The paper will be published in the *Quality in Higher Education* (QHE) in 2012. (QHE is a ranked international journal which only publishes one paper from an author on annual basis. The author has already published another paper, which is not part of this PhD (Publication) in QHE in 2011.) A total of 120 people from 30 Australian universities participated in the study. The research involved a diverse range of universities including the elite Group of Eight (Go8), Australian Technology Network (ATN), multi-campus, regional and post-1987 universities. The respondents were senior staff members with responsibilities related to quality, directors and managers of quality, critics of external quality audit in Australia, researchers who have published in quality assurance topics in Australia, and a number of former AUQA auditors.

Publication 4: Ten Years of External Quality Audit in Australia: Evaluating its Effectiveness and Success

This paper analysed the extent to which external audits in Australia have improved quality assurance in universities over the past 10 years. The analysis was based on discussions with 40 participants in a workshop on the effectiveness of audits and the review of 60 external quality audit reports between 2001 and September 2010. The research found that, while external audits have led to an improvement in systems and processes in Australian universities, they have not necessarily improved the student experience. This lack of impact on the student experience in Australia is similar to other countries, according to the literature review. This study is timely in its analysis on the effectiveness of the current

improvement-led audits, as the government in Australia is in the process of renewing quality assurance arrangements of higher education institutions with a focus on outcomes and standards.

A qualitative research method was used to assess the effectiveness of external quality audits through discussion with 40 participants from 25 Australian universities. The discussion was part of a workshop conducted in a national quality forum. The paper has been accepted for publication and will be published in November 2011 in the *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education Journal*.

Publication 5: External Quality Audit as an Opportunity for Institutional Change and Improvement

This paper outlines the steps taken by the University of Western Sydney to effectively prepare for an external quality audit by the Australian Universities Quality Agency in 2006, with the view to using the audit as a lever for internal change and improvement. The areas where improvement was needed were identified in the process of the audit preparation through the university-wide self assessment, internal reviews, tracking performance data and the outcomes of the trial audit. Based on the comparison of the university performance data from sources before and after the audit, the paper concludes that audits can be used as a lever for institutional change and can contribute to measurable improvement.

The study involved a quantitative method with the use of trend performance data pre and post external quality audit between 2006 and 2007. The study suggested that the use of an external lever to drive change and improvement in a large multi-campus university has shown improved performance in various educational measures. The university's approach to quality, through effective tracking and improvement systems such as internal reviews, surveys and improved data and information reporting and subsequent improvements, has proven to be successful. Shah and Nair (2011) conducted a similar study in the same university and found trend improvement on all measures between 2004 and 2009; these included student retention, progression and student experience at the overall university, course and subject level, and with various cohorts of students such as Indigenous and offshore international students. The paper was published in the *Australian Universities Quality Forum 2008*, a premier forum in Australia on quality in higher education.

**Publication 6: Measuring the Impact of External Quality Audit on Universities:
Can External Quality Audit be Credited for Improvements and
Enhancement in Student Learning? How can we Measure?**

This paper presents a brief review of literature on the impact of external quality audit on universities. It presents the thoughts of many higher education professionals who have responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement. The paper offers both national and international perspectives. It provides several possible strategies to carry out an impact study and aims to elicit discussion on the effectiveness of external quality audits in various universities. Participants are invited to critique the proposed strategies and engage in discussion about how to measure the impact of external quality audit on universities and to discuss the effectiveness of external quality audit in a range of institutions.

The main aim of the paper was to facilitate discussion on the effectiveness of external quality audits based on the experience of participants from a number of Australian universities. The paper enabled participants in the workshop to engage in discussions about the effectiveness of external quality audits and its value-add to their institutions. A qualitative method was used to collect participants' views on the effectiveness of external quality audits. The paper was published in the *Australian Universities Quality Forum 2007*, a premier forum in Australia on quality in higher education.

**3) *Tracking and Improving Quality Assurance, Student Experience
and Student Retention related to the Learning and Teaching
Experience, Research Student Experience, Employer Experience
and International Offshore Student Experience***

**Publication 7: Trends in the Quality of the Student Experience:
An International Perspective based on Studies
in Three Universities**

This paper reviews the trend in student experience in three universities that have been using student satisfaction surveys for more than a decade. These two Australian universities and one UK university have diverse student groups. The paper reports that student experience and high satisfaction was based on five interrelated factors: adequate and reliable learning infrastructure and resources; the quality of teaching staff; course design which enables student attainment of generic skills; quality management of student assessments; and issues around administrative matters such as timetabling, admissions and enrolments. The findings of this study demonstrate that predictors of student satisfaction, if effectively managed and improved by universities, could result in improved student engagement, retention and student satisfaction.

The paper is topical as government policy on performance-based funding is focused on using measures such as student satisfaction and student experience in the assessment of educational quality with billions of dollars in rewards linked to university performance. The study is important in regards to current trends in higher education with some universities also using student satisfaction to assess and reward academic staff performance. The paper used quantitative analysis. It has been published in the *International Engineering and Technology Education Conference Proceedings 2011*.

Publication 8: Monitoring Student Attrition to Enhance Quality

This paper outlines the findings of a survey conducted in a large public university in Australia with first-year undergraduate students who enrolled then later withdrew from the university. The survey was conducted as a result of consistently high student attrition rates in the university compared to other Australian universities. The university took the initiative to discover the reasons for student withdrawal and implemented a university-wide retention project to improve first-year student retention.

Student retention is one of the key performance indicators used in universities to track learning and teaching performance. Research indicates that student retention and success in higher education improves the life chances of an individual in terms of employment opportunity, achievement of career goals and contribution to the society, and the economic development of the nation. Retention can be considered as a moral purpose of a university to improve student success, particularly for the most disadvantaged student groups.

The paper is based on a quantitative study with the use of survey research to determine the reasons for student withdrawal in the first year of study. The study was conducted in 2004, and again in 2008, in a large multi-campus university in Australia. The paper was published in the *International Journal of Quality and Participation* in 2010.

Publication 9: Using Student Voice to Improve Student Satisfaction: Two Australian Universities, the Same Agenda

The paper outlines the practices used at the University of Western Sydney and Monash University with regards to survey management and improvement. As part of ongoing quality assurance, both universities conduct surveys targeted at stakeholders, including students, staff, employers and the general community. Feedback from students can inform decision-making in universities and be part of the students' role in contributing to university management. The challenge for universities is not to gather feedback from stakeholders, but rather to implement improvement projects as a result of stakeholder feedback and to communicate the actions and improvement to all stakeholders. Stakeholders should see that their feedback is not only value-adding to the university but also that the

university is taking appropriate and timely action to enhance the student experience in academic and support services areas. The paper addresses an area where universities across Australia and many other countries are vulnerable. Higher education institutions are active in conducting student surveys with various groups of students and other stakeholders. But the challenge is in using the results of the survey to implement improvements that will enhance student satisfaction and experience. The paper is based on the success of two Australian universities in using student survey results to implement improvement. The universities are in the AUQA Good Practice database as exemplars of good practice. The paper is based on a qualitative study. It was published in the *Journal of Institutional Research (South East Asia)* in 2009.

Publication 10: Does Retention Matter? Improving Student Retention: A University of Western Sydney Case Study

This paper provides a consolidated picture of patterns and trends in student retention in Australia's universities. Common reasons for student withdrawal and strategies to improve student retention are also explored, using both empirical research and a review of the literature. Further, the paper presents approaches used by the University of Western Sydney to effectively improve student retention. These approaches include: identifying and prioritising the main reasons for student withdrawal and corresponding retention solutions; using a range of tactics to ensure that these solutions are consistently implemented; and monitoring the improvement actions for two years to measure their efficiency based on student feedback, and to identify areas warranting further improvement attention.

The paper is based on one of the most important indicators of student engagement in learning which is used by the government to reward universities. This quantitative study examined the views of students withdrawing from university and the strategies to improve student retention. The paper was published in the *Australian Association for Institutional Research Forum* in 2007.

Publication 11: Enrolling in Higher Education: The Perceptions of Stakeholders

This paper is based on a study conducted in a large Australian university. The findings related to: the key factors influencing student choice to study with a university; and student perception of the first-preferred institution compared with their perception of four other Australian metropolitan universities.

Though there is a substantial body of research on student satisfaction, retention and student engagement in higher education, there is limited research on students' image or perception of a university, and the factors contributing towards choosing a particular university. In the current highly competitive environment, universities are seeking to identify what exactly differentiates them from other institutions. In particular, it is important to understand what attracts prospective

students to one university rather than another, and to ensure that these expectations are met once they enrol. Failure to meet student expectations may result in student withdrawal, which limits the chances of students to participate in higher education. Fierce competition between universities and private higher education provides opportunity for students to enrol in institutions that are better able to listen to student voices and can cater to the needs of their students.

The paper is based on a quantitative study. It was published in the *Journal of Institutional Research* in September 2010.

Publication 12: Enhancing the Research Student Experience in a University

This paper presents approaches effectively used by the University of Western Sydney (UWS) to improve the research student experience as a direct result of their feedback. These approaches include: (a) identifying trends in the research student experience and areas needing improvement through the UWS Research Student Satisfaction Survey conducted in 2005 and 2007, and through relevant themes that emerged from the 2006 AUQA audit; (b) prioritising and implementing improvement solutions; and (c) monitoring the improvement actions to measure their efficiency based on student feedback, and to identify areas warranting further improvement and attention.

The paper assesses the higher degree research student experience in a large university and is based on quantitative analysis. It was published in the *Australian Association for Institutional Research Forum* 2008.

**Publication 13: Employer Satisfaction of University Graduates:
Key Capabilities in Early Career Graduates**

This paper outlines the findings of a survey undertaken in 2004 and 2008 by a large Australian university with 400 graduate employers and professional associations on their satisfaction with university graduates with respect to the key capabilities of early career graduates. The paper also looks at the employer's views about the key skills and attributes needed in early career graduates to meet changing industry trends in a number of professions. While employers are one of the most important stakeholders of universities, there is limited research in Australia on employer satisfaction with the quality of university graduates and on the key capabilities of early career graduates for employers in various professions. Such research is critical as governments in many countries are enhancing quality assurance of higher education with a focus on academic standards and the extent to which students have achieved learning outcomes.

The paper outlines the generic skills rated as most important in early career graduates. The current debate in Australian higher education on the assessment of learning outcomes and generic skills is related to the study in this paper. The quantitative approach was used in this study. The paper has been published in the 2011 *Teaching and Learning Forum Proceedings*.

**Publication 14: Improving the Quality of Offshore Student Experience:
 Findings of a Decade in Three Australian Universities**

This paper outlines the findings of offshore student experience and satisfaction in three Australian universities. The findings from the three studies suggest that student experience, satisfaction and the issues raised by offshore students are common across all three universities. The paper also draws on an analysis of recurring themes related to offshore education based on AUQA cycle 1 and 2 audits of Australian universities.

The number of international students enrolled in Australian universities, both onshore and offshore, has expanded over the past decade. The number of offshore programs and partnerships have also increased, with some universities opening offshore campuses. The offshore component of all Australian universities has been under scrutiny by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) since 2002. A large number of universities closed some of their offshore programs and partnerships after AUQA cycle 1 audits due to poor management and quality assurance of offshore operations. The many recommendations in public audit reports and negative media stories related to offshore operations have been noted in almost all university audit reports. The vulnerability of quality assurance and the risk associated with the quality and standard of offshore education have been such that in 2006, the Australian Government included internationalisation as a default theme in cycle 2 audits of almost all universities. Such a decision was made to protect the image and branding of Australian higher education and to improve the quality assurance of international education.

While the findings of various audit reports related to offshore education are known, there is limited research on the student experience and the satisfaction of offshore students.

The paper is based on a topic of great interest in higher education. Universities in Australia have focused on external sources of income due to the continuous decline in public funding. The offshore component of all universities has been subject to external scrutiny by AUQA. The last five years have seen the closure of many offshore programs and partnerships due to alarming concerns raised in AUQA audit reports. The paper is based on quantitative analysis. It was published in the 2010 *Australian International Education Conference Proceedings*.

8 Thesis Requirements

8.1 Demonstrate the Contemporary Relevance of each Publication

The outputs that form part of this PhD (Publication) focus on emerging issues that are significant in the current higher education environment. The Review of Australian Higher Education in 2008 highlighted the need to improve student outcomes such as retention, student satisfaction, attainment of generic skills and the domestic and international student experience (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, pp. 69-77). The review recommended that the Australian Government consider a standards-based quality framework rather than the fitness-for-purpose approach currently used, as well as establishing a national regulator with extended responsibility for assuring quality of Australian higher education.

The outputs are related to contemporary issues in quality assurance in Australian higher education, including improving the quality and standard of Australian higher education, the student experience and performance-based funding proposed by the government from 2011 to 2012. The outputs relate to the three research questions which aim to provide evidence on the extent to which quality audits have improved quality assurance and improvement in core and support areas of the universities.

All 14 outputs focus on the assessment of the effectiveness of external quality audit in improving the core business of the university including: governance, learning and teaching, research, internationalisation, engagement and the student experience. The research attempts to answer the three research questions which are part of this study.

- 1. Has government policy on quality assurance and external quality audit been effective in improving the core business of higher education institutions?**
 - a. Can government policy on quality assurance and external quality audit be credited for change and improvement in core areas of institutions?

- 2. Is there any evidence that quality assurance and an external quality audit improve student satisfaction and retention in institutions?**

- 3. Are higher education institutions satisfied with the process used by the external auditing agency (AUQA) in Australia?**

Five of the papers directly relate to the effectiveness of external quality audit at national and institutional levels. These publications are based on systematic data collection with 120 participants from 30 Australian universities. Initially, the research was targeted to 10 universities, however, the survey attracted much interest within the university sector and so it was extended to all 39 Australian universities, of which 30 participated. The universities are diverse in terms of size, age and location.

Another paper (Publication 2) focuses on the quality and standard of private higher education in Australia. This is an emerging area, with limited research. Private higher education has grown significantly in Australia, and there are issues around quality and standards.

In many parts of the world, contemporary measures of quality in higher education are used in university rankings and league tables with quantitative indicators. Almost all of the papers discuss quality measures, including the areas of retention and attrition, student satisfaction (total student experience, course specific experience, unit or subject level experience), research student experience, offshore student experience and employer satisfaction.

As outlined earlier, there has been no previous research in Australia on the extent to which external quality audits have been effective in the enhancement in core and support areas of the university using mixed methods research. There is limited research in Australia and worldwide on whether quality assurance and external quality audits have improved the student experience in universities. This current study brings new knowledge based on systematic data collection with 120 participants from 30 Australian universities. The research is timely as Australia is renewing its approach to quality assurance and plans to use institutional performance to reward universities. The government plans to implement a suite of reforms, including setting up the *My University* website to make institutional performance public, increasing the access and participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and ensuring high academic standards.

Most of the papers relate to contemporary issues in higher education quality assurance. Some of the topics covered in the 14 publications include:

- the effectiveness of external quality audits using both qualitative and quantitative analysis
- an analysis of government policy on the current quality assurance framework
- quality and standards in the burgeoning private for-profit higher education
- a case study of a university that has used audit as a lever for change and assessing its performance before and after external quality audit through a range of performance data
- measuring the student experience with cohorts of students, such as undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students, in two Australian universities, and benchmarking with one UK university
- measuring the student experience with higher degree research students and offshore international students in a large multi-campus university
- the systematic monitoring of student attrition for a decade in a large multi-campus university
- strategies for improving student retention
- the factors influencing student choice to study in universities
- employer satisfaction with university graduates.

Table 1 lists the 14 publications in chronological order. It shows the title of the publication, percentage of contribution, the current status of the published work and methodology used.

Table 1: Full Details of the Publications

Title, Authors and Publication	% Authorship	Conference or Journal	Methodology
Analysis of government policy on quality assurance and external quality audits			
1. Shah, M., Wilson, M., & Nair, S. (2010). The Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework: Its Success, Deficiencies and Way Forward, <i>Proceedings of the Australian Association for Institutional Research (AAIR) forum</i> Geelong, Melbourne.	80%	Published in conference proceedings	Qualitative method
2. Shah, M., & Lewis, I. (2010). Private Higher Education in Australia: Growth, Quality and Standards, <i>Journal of Institutional Research (South East Asia)</i> , 8(2), pp. 80-95.	60%	Paper published in the journal	Qualitative method
The effectiveness of external quality audits			
3. Shah, M. (2011). Ten Years of External Quality Audit in Australia: Evaluating its Effectiveness and Success, <i>Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education</i> , forthcoming	100%	Paper accepted for publication in the journal 2011	Qualitative and case study methods
4. Shah, M. (2012). The Effectiveness of External Quality Audits: A Study with Australian Universities, <i>Quality in Higher Education</i> , forthcoming.	100%	Paper submitted in Nov 2010 for review	Quantitative and qualitative methods
5. Shah, M., & Grebennikov, L. (2008). External Quality Audit as an Opportunity for Institutional Change and Improvement: <i>Proceedings of the Australian Universities Quality Forum</i> , pp. 98-103. Melbourne, Australian Universities Quality Agency.	70%	Published in conference proceedings	Quantitative and case study methods
6. Shah, M., Skaines, I., & Miller, J. (2007). Measuring the Impact of External Quality Audit on Universities: Can External Quality Audit be Credited for Improvements and Enhancement in Student Learning? How Can We Measure? <i>Proceedings of the Australian Universities Quality Forum</i> , pp. 136-142. Melbourne: Australian Universities Quality Agency.	60%	Published in conference proceedings	Qualitative method
Tracking and improving quality assurance, student experience and student retention related to learning and teaching experience, research student experience, employer experience and international offshore student experience.			
7. Shah, M., & Nair, S. (2011). <i>Trends in the Quality of Student Experience: An International Perspective based on Studies in Three Universities</i> , International Engineering and Technology Education Conference. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.	60%	Published in conference proceedings	Quantitative method
8. Shah, M., & Nair, C. S. (2010). Monitoring Student Attrition to Enhance Quality. <i>International Journal of Quality and Participation</i> , 1(2), pp. 24-30.	70%	Paper published in the journal	Quantitative method
9. Shah, M., & Nair C. S. (2009). Using Student Voice to Improve Student Satisfaction: Two Australian Universities the same Agenda. <i>Journal of Institutional Research (South East Asia)</i> , 7 (2), pp. 43-55.	60%	Paper published in the journal	Case study method
10. Shah, M., Grebennikov, L., & Singh, H. (2007). <i>Does Retention Matter? Improving Student Retention: A UWS Case Study</i> . Paper presented at the Australasian Association for Institutional Research Forum, Sydney, 28-30 November.	50%	Published in conference proceedings	Quantitative and case study method
11. Shah, M., & Nair, C. S. (2010). Enrolling in Higher Education: The Perceptions of Stakeholders. <i>Journal of Institutional Research</i> , 15(1), pp. 9-15.	60%	Paper published in the journal	Quantitative method
12. Grebennikov, L., & Shah, M., (2008) Enhancing the Research Student Experience in a University. <i>Proceedings of the Australasian Association for Institutional Research 2008 Forum</i> , Canberra, 19-21 November.	50%	Published in conference proceedings	Quantitative and case study method
13. Shah, M., & Nair, C. S. (2010). <i>Employer Satisfaction of University Graduates: Key Capabilities in Early Career Graduates</i> , Teaching and Learning Conference. Perth, Australia.	80%	Published in conference proceedings	Quantitative method
14. Shah, M., Roth, K., & Nair, S. (2010). Improving the Quality of Offshore Student Experience: Findings of a Decade in Three Australian Universities, <i>Proceedings of the Australian International Education (AIEC) Conference</i> . Sydney, Australia.	50%	Published in conference proceedings	Quantitative method

8.2 How the Published Research Output(s) make an Original, Scholarly Contribution to Knowledge at a Doctoral Level

The review of literature shows there is limited research with systematic data collection on the effectiveness of external quality audits in Australia and internationally. The studies on which this thesis is based were undertaken in Australia by the researcher and included: the analysis of external quality audit reports; data collected from 120 participants at 30 Australian universities; case studies from three Australian universities; and analysis of higher education performance data produced by the government and critics of external quality audit reported by media. Most of the work undertaken by other researchers is based on institutional studies with a lack of systematic qualitative and quantitative data collection. There is no research in Australia and limited research internationally that has attempted to analyse the effectiveness of external quality audits at the national level with the engagement of universities. Three of the output publications within this thesis directly relate to studies undertaken in Australia using both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse government policy on quality assurance and external quality audits, and the effectiveness of such audits in core and support areas of the university.

The research brings new knowledge and addresses the current gap in the literature on the effectiveness of external quality audits using qualitative and quantitative methods. The study on the effectiveness of external quality audits is timely in the Australian context for two keys reasons.

1. After a decade of external quality audit in Australia, this thesis analyses its effectiveness based on the experience of 30 universities.
2. Australia is in the process of revising its quality assurance policy on higher education, with a focus on quality, standards, equity and performance-based funding.

The 14 research publications/outputs which form the Ph.D. (Publication) submission are based on original scholarly contribution. All publications have been peer reviewed by local and international reviewers. Two of the publications, which address all three research questions, are being published in the international journals, *Quality in Higher Education* (QHE) and *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. These two journals were ranked at 'A' level on the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) journal rankings. Two papers were published in the Australian Universities Quality Forum (AUQF) conference proceedings. AUQF papers are peer reviewed and the forum is a premier conference for quality practitioners in higher education.

The publications are based on qualitative, quantitative and case study methods. They focus on emerging areas in quality assurance in higher education that are topical worldwide, such as the effectiveness of external quality audits, quality and standards in private for-profit higher education, student attrition and retention, and the student experience.

The majority of publications are co-authored with senior academics and practitioners in higher education quality assurance from a range of universities. Their involvement has provided oversight and ensured that the papers are rigorous and based on scholarly work.

Nearly all of the research outputs include:

- new knowledge on the higher education sector in Australia and the potential for future national research involving all higher education institutions
- a comprehensive review of the literature
- systematic data collection
- use of qualitative and quantitative research methods
- use of the case study method
- alignment with the three research questions.

One publication proposes a theoretical framework which uses the elements of the current Australian higher education quality assurance framework

The publications have been peer-reviewed and published in conferences and reputable journals related to the topic. Five outputs are being published in journals listed on the ERA journal rankings (2010). Two papers were published in the proceedings of the Australian Universities Quality Forum, the premier conference for quality practitioners in higher education.

Some of the research outputs are aligned with priority areas based on the recent review of higher education in Australia. The areas of national focus, which have been analysed in the outputs, include: retention, attrition, student satisfaction, employer surveys, research student experience and government policy on quality assurance. Some outputs are also directly related to the measures being used by the Australian Government to assess university performance as part of a performance-based funding framework.

8.3 Provide a Critical Analysis of Appropriate Literature in the Discipline

A comprehensive and critical review of literature has been provided above in Section 5, Review of Literature. This section of the thesis will outline the significance of the research findings in the Australian context. The study aimed to assess the effectiveness of the Australian Government policy of an external quality agency undertaking audits of universities and other higher education providers. This study is a first in Australian higher education as it systematically analyses the effectiveness of external quality audits on universities, using qualitative, quantitative and case study methods. Although external quality audits were first introduced in 2001, neither the policy-makers nor government-funded institutions, such as the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) or AUQA itself, have commissioned studies to assess the impact of a decade of audits. This research is significant as the government is now renewing its approach to quality assurance with a focus on academic standards and outcomes and a range of policy initiatives that are supported by a \$50 billion-plus investment.

This research and the topic of quality assurance in universities has attracted media interest, particularly *The Australian* newspaper. In 2007, an article titled *Public Audits See Unis Tighten Act* (Rout, 2007) was published as a result of a paper presented by the researcher at the Australian Universities Quality Forum (now called the Australian Quality Forum). This news article was an indication of the level of interest in the topic, particularly debate on the value-add of external quality audit and its effectiveness in improving the student experience.

Most of the current higher education policy directions and initiatives are related to quality assurance and to improving the reputation of Australian higher education – for example, Excellence in Research for Australia (now being replaced with an amended scheme for assessing the value of research outputs by Australian academics), performance-based funding, the social inclusion and equity agenda, mission-based compacts funding, the performance indicator framework to assess and reward universities, and the plan to introduce the *My University* website. The quality agenda in Australian higher education is driven by a number of factors including: the Review of Australian Higher Education in 2008; the Australian Labor Party's election promise to revolutionise education; the growth of the student population; the rise of private for-profit higher education institutions; international competition and international developments in higher education (for example, the Bologna process in Europe which aims to foster comparability and student mobility, and enhance the reputation of the higher education sector in relation to quality processes and outcomes (The Bologna Declaration, 1999); student and stakeholder interest in the quality of education; the use of diverse modes of learning such as online learning and developments in pedagogy for ICT and the impact of

these developments on graduate quality; and the needs of employers and industry for quality, work-ready graduates.

The increased prominence of the quality agenda in higher education requires ongoing research and the development of new knowledge, which may be beneficial to governments, higher education institutions, quality practitioners and researchers. This study is significant as the Australian Government is renewing its approach to quality with a promise to invest more than \$50 billion in higher education without any cost-benefit analysis of the possible outcomes. In addition, the government has not assessed the effectiveness of its educational policies introduced in the late 1990s.

The findings of this research clearly inform stakeholders in the higher education sector about the benefits of governments providing oversight of the performance of institutions. It also shows that external monitoring is effective when combined with a collegial peer-review process aimed to help institutions enhance their quality management processes. The finding on the effectiveness of external quality audits on the offshore component of universities is just one example of how universities have failed to provide leadership and accountability on certain key aspects of their operations. Similarly, the findings of this study on the ineffectiveness of external quality audits in improving the student experience is significant, as they suggest that audits have had no impact on improving student levels of satisfaction across the sector. Arguably, it is not the role of external quality agencies to improve the student experience, as funding and performance monitoring is undertaken by the government. However, the predictors of student satisfaction (such as student-staff ratios, learning and teaching practices, the use of ICT in learning, action on the results of student feedback surveys, campus infrastructure and facilities for students, course design and assessment practices) are part of the external quality audit.

The study clearly suggests the need for universities to be responsive to student feedback. The opportunity for students to play a significant role in university management by providing their views is important in the monitoring of quality. The challenge for universities is to effectively use student feedback data and identify areas needing improvement in a timely manner. The need for targeted professional development of academic and general staff is also important, based on the recurring themes found in the student feedback.

The findings of this research indicate the need for policy-makers to re-think the current policy directions on quality assurance. They also inform the need for universities and higher education institutions to re-examine their quality assurance systems and to recognise the importance of innovation, creativity, and ongoing change at a time when the sector is already in turbulence. Government policies such as performance-based funding may not drive real change as funding could be skewed to well-resourced and mature institutions. The use of performance-based funding to reward universities may result in the increased dominance of quantitative measures, such as student satisfaction to assess faculty, course and individual teacher performance as a measure of educational quality, with a lack of focus on the inputs and processes required to achieve better outcomes. Similarly, the penalty for not meeting the minimum thresholds set by the government will impact on individual universities, faculties, courses and lecturers; this may disengage academics from quality and improvement.

The government is establishing TEQSA and setting it up with immense responsibilities related to quality assurance, without first assessing the infrastructure, resources and skills needed in the organisation. This could lead to heavy criticism of TEQSA from within the higher education sector. It is possible that a divide could develop between higher education institutions and the agency, leading to the disengagement of academics from the quality agenda. The experience in the UK shows a divide between the elite universities and the external auditing agency.

On an international level, the dominance of rankings to judge quality and reputation will have an impact on Australian higher education with its focus on growing student enrolments, particularly students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Achieving a balance between academic rigor, equity and high quality outcomes is challenging. An alternative to the potential reputational damage is discussed by Shah, Lewis and Fitzgerald (2011), who argue the need for the government to consider the establishment of new kinds of publicly-funded institutions, such as community colleges or polytechnics, with the purpose of providing tertiary education and pathways to universities for those students unable to access direct entry.

The findings of this thesis may be used to enhance scholarly debate through the impact of its publications, contributions to policy forums, and conference participation. These contributions to the quality debate could, in turn, influence current government policy directions. The researcher will continue to promote awareness of the findings within institutions and the need to use an evidence-based approach in future policy initiatives.

9 Key Findings

External quality audits in Australia and other developments due to higher education reforms have played a significant role in improving quality assurance processes in universities. Policies such as performance-based funding, introduced in 2005 as the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF), although controversial, have resulted in an institutional focus on improving teaching quality and a greater use of student feedback. The improvement-led audit conducted by AUQA has significantly contributed to improving quality assurance in core and support areas of the university. The opportunity for institutions to self assess before the external quality audit has enabled them to identify areas of good practice and areas needing improvement. For example, in one Australian university, the Vice Chancellor described the self review and external quality audit as an opportunity to identify areas of good practice which may not have been known across the university, and for the university to describe its quality assurance mechanisms in a single self review portfolio for peer review and evaluation (unpublished).

The key findings of the research are outlined below under each of the research questions.

9.1 **Research Question 1: Impact on the Core Business**

Has government policy on quality assurance and external quality audit been effective in improving the core business of higher education institutions?

- a) *Can government policy on quality assurance and external quality audit be credited for change and improvement in core areas of institutions?*

9.1.1 **Quality Audit as a Driver for Change**

The study strongly suggests that external quality audits have played a key role in improving quality assurance in universities. However, the study found that external quality audits alone cannot be credited for improvement. Changes in government policies and the impact of the internal and external operating environments, together with external quality audits, have been drivers of change and improvement. A study undertaken by Shah (forthcoming), with 120 participants in Australia, found the following:

- respondents were asked if AUQA audits had improved quality assurance in their university - the mean score on a five-point Likert scale was 3.91 or 86.7% explicit agreement (% marking 4 and 5)

-
- respondents were then asked if AUQA audits, together with the internal and external operating environments, had played a key role in improving quality assurance in the university - the mean score was 4.09 or 88.9% explicit agreement
 - the third question assessed the extent to which AUQA audits improved student satisfaction/experience - the mean was 2.78 or 28.9% explicit agreement. This lack of impact of external quality audits on the student experience is supported by Coates (2005), based on the Australian experience, and Harvey (2002) and Newton (2000), based on the UK experience of external quality audits.

The qualitative and quantitative data collected for the purposes of the thesis strongly suggest that external quality audit is one of many factors contributing to the improvement of quality assurance in universities. Other important factors include: the funding of universities; changes in government policies related to higher education; and the internal and external operating environments, such as growth of student population, competition and ongoing restructures in universities.

The study suggests that a decade of external quality audits has been effective in improving systems and processes for quality assurance in the following areas:

- offshore international education
- a university-wide quality assurance framework
- review of university performance
- ongoing cyclical reviews across the university
- quality assurance in course development, approvals and review processes.

Another study by Shah (2011), using qualitative methods, suggests that ten years of external quality audits have been effective in the following:

- self review and identification of areas needing improvement before the actual audit
- the appointment of senior staff to manage and lead quality in institutions
- improved governance of universities with a greater role by their Academic Boards and Councils in monitoring quality
- improved data and information management systems
- an increased focus on using the student voice
- the use of quality frameworks in university strategic planning frameworks such as the plan, implement, review and improve cycle.

9.1.2 Improvement in Quality Assurance of Offshore Programs

According to Shah, Roth and Nair (2010), external quality audits in Australia have played a key role in improving the quality assurance of offshore international programs. They found that external scrutiny by AUQA resulted in the closure of many offshore programs and partnerships due to quality assurance issues identified in cycle 1 audits between 2001 and 2007. A study by Shah (forthcoming) showed that 53.3% of Australian universities have closed, or were planning to close, offshore programs and partnerships as a direct result of external scrutiny. Shah and Nair (2011) suggest that the recurring themes related to internationalisation in cycle 1 audit reports from 2002 to 2007 are alarming and, in some cases, unethical. The outcome of cycle 1 audits resulted in the decision by the Australian Government to introduce internationalisation as a mandatory theme in almost all cycle 2 audits. The quality assurance arrangements in some offshore campuses raise significant questions about the extent to which universities and academia are fulfilling the moral responsibility of higher education in providing high quality and value-for-money education. The offshore international education of some institutions could be described as ‘cottage industries’ with a large number of offshore programs initiated by individual academics with a lack of overall university strategy, leadership and governance.

Shah and Nair suggest that external quality audits have had a direct impact on Australia’s offshore international education. The absence of this audit process would have led to the growth of poor quality offshore education, partnerships and many unethical practices. The continued poor practices would also have damaged the relationship between Australian universities and overseas universities, overseas governments and the wider stakeholders. External quality audits have forced institutions to seriously revisit offshore arrangements with the fear of scrutiny, reputational damage and negative public audit reports. In this particular area, having to confront external quality audits resulted in rapid changes that may not have occurred without an external driver.

9.1.3 Private For-profit Higher Education Institutions

The analysis by Shah and Lewis (2010) of AUQA cycle 1 audits of 28 private for-profit higher education institutions indicates the need for quality management and capacity building in that area. Their study suggests that external quality audits have played a key role in identifying recurring issues that need improvement within the burgeoning private providers. Some of the sector-wide issues for improvement include:

- institutional governance (particularly academic governance and its independence from corporate ownership)
- strategic planning and resourcing
- a culture of compliance rather than improvement

-
- academic leadership
 - the use of sessional lecturers
 - admission criteria, equity and access to disadvantaged students
 - professional development of staff
 - a huge reliance on international student income.

9.1.4 Identifying Areas Needing Improvement

Studies by Shah, Wilson and Nair (2010) analysed the Australian Government's higher education quality assurance framework. They suggest that some of the success of the current framework includes:

- the improved reputation of Australian higher education based on the growth of international students until 2009 and university rankings
- improved internal quality assurance systems and processes in universities
- the emergence of a quality cycle and frameworks
- ongoing government monitoring and annual performance assessments
- performance-based funding (although controversial, it has focused attention on quality reviews and rewards)
- compliance monitoring by government and, to some extent, by AUQA
- the improvement-led external quality audit process
- external course accreditation with professional bodies
- the research assessment exercise and use of external peers
- recognition of Australian university qualifications in Australia and overseas
- the use of student surveys to monitor student experience and satisfaction.

Internationally, it is agreed that the self review process as part of external quality audit preparation is advantageous for identifying best practices within a university and areas needing improvement. The areas needing improvement are prioritised and addressed before the external quality audit. Both the literature and this researcher's experience suggest that the alignment between an internal review of faculties, courses and administrative units and the external review process results in significant benefits. Consistent internal and external processes create synergy and foster a culture of review, reflection and improvement. Together, they encourage universities to own and act on self review recommendations and to support the professional development of internal staff involved in internal reviews. Institutions with policies that require internal cyclical reviews of courses, faculties, administrative units and special purpose reviews (for example – offshore international reviews), with alignment between internal and external review processes have proven successful. The internal review culture places the onus on the university to undertake reviews, build the momentum for good practice,

and take action on areas needing improvement. The cyclical nature of internal review also compels universities to close the loop on review recommendations, thus fostering an improvement culture.

Longitudinal studies by Shah and Grebennikov (2008) and Shah and Nair (2011) in a large multi-campus university suggest that using an external quality audit as a lever for change and improvement has proven successful. They compared a number of quantitative measures from two years before an audit to three years after the audit and found significant improvement. The measures included ratings on: retention, progression, the student experience (at overall university, course and subject level with different cohorts of students), and staff and employer surveys. The authors suggest that the self review process enabled the university to identify areas needing improvement; and that these were prioritised and actioned in a systematic and timely manner.

The case study of one university shows that the first-year retention rate improved by 7.2% in a six-year period; this was attributed to a retention project initiated by the university as a result of the self review (Shah and Nair, 2010). The internal student experience survey, which is conducted on a biennial basis, showed a trend improvement with overall satisfaction rising from 3.34 mean in 2004 to 3.71 in 2007 to 3.98 in 2009. The national CEQ result also reported a trend improvement in all three scales. Explicit satisfaction (% responding to 4 and 5 on a 5-point Likert scale) on Overall Satisfaction (OS) improved by 13.8% between 2004 and 2009. On the Generic Skills Scale (GSS), the university improved 11.3% in the same period. Compared to the 38 other Australian universities, it had one of the highest improvements on the OS and GSS measures. On the Good Teaching Scale (GTS), the university improved student satisfaction by 3.8% between 2004 and 2009. The university's end-of-semester unit evaluation surveys showed a trend improvement on the Overall Satisfaction item from 3.80 mean in 2004 to 3.90 in 2009. The Overall Satisfaction with offshore students also increased from 3.67 mean in 2005 to 4.01 in 2009. Indigenous student experience on the Overall Satisfaction item improved from 3.35 mean to 3.96. The trend improvement in the national CEQ, first-year retention rates and end-of-semester unit evaluation were statistically significant with 7.2% improvement in retention rates; 13.8% improvement on OSS; and 11.3% on GSS in the national CEQ.

9.1.5 A Decade of External Quality Audit

The effectiveness of external quality audits was reflected upon at the recent 10th anniversary of AUQA. In the keynote address, Emeritus Professor Adrian Lee (former Pro Vice Chancellor Quality and Education Enhancement at the University of New South Wales and former AUQA auditor) suggested that in having to confront AUQA, universities were forced to look at themselves in ways that had not happened before. The requirement for self review encouraged them to genuinely address strategies for improvements. The universities that embraced this opportunity were clearly better off than before, with benefits to both students and staff. Emeritus Professor Lee stated that, without

AUQA, quality and standards across the sector would be less evident and international confidence in Australian higher education would be less certain. He commented that, without AUQA, there would be doubt about the quality and quantity of staff development in learning and teaching; the student voice would not have been heard as strongly as at the present time; there would not have been as much attention to support performance review as there is now in a number of universities; there would not have been the increase in the profile of learning and teaching that has occurred over the past 10 years (the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund has also contributed to this increase but there is still a long way to go); there would not have been the rationalisation and increased oversight of courses delivered offshore by Australian universities; and the sector would be less accountable for the billions of taxpayer dollars given each year to universities (Lee, 2010). The views of Emeritus Professor Adrian Lee regarding the Australian experience are similar to the views expressed by the former Chief Executive Officer of the Quality Assurance Agency in the UK, Peter Williams. In his lecture at the Institute of Education at the University of London, Williams concluded that two decades of quality assurance and external monitoring in the UK higher education sector have shown the results of an intelligent effort and provided a mirror for future developments in quality assurance (Williams, 2009).

Fullan and Scott (2009) argue that external quality audit can be used to drive change-capable universities. They suggest that such audits seek to confirm if the institution is consistently achieving its mission and objectives to a satisfactory standard; whether it is taking an evidence-based approach to decision-making; and that it is not only tracking the quality of what is being delivered but it is also promptly, wisely, and consistently addressing the key areas for improvement which emerge from this process (p. 78).

A recent study undertaken by Stensaker, Langfeldt, Harvey, Huisman and Westerheijden (2010) in Norway suggests that national quality monitoring of higher education institutions by the external agency had a positive impact, with 77% of participants agreeing that national evaluations of quality had high or moderate positive impact. Their study indicates that the areas of significant positive impact from external monitoring include: new routines and procedures (45.7%); scholarly discussion on learning and teaching (43.5%); quality of learning and teaching (39.1%); and staff engagement in learning and teaching (34.8%). Skolnik (2010) argues that the impact of quality assurance can have significant implications in funding. As an example, he used the Research Assessment Exercise in the UK in the 1990s where the highest-rated departments received four times the funding of the lowest-rated departments for the same value of research (Morley, 2003).

9.1.6 Limitations of External Quality Assurance

Australia's ten years of quality assurance and external quality audits have also had limitations. The first limitation is the lack of focus on academic standards and student attainment of learning outcomes. According to Shah (2011), external quality audits in Australia have failed to assess education outcomes and standards. He suggests that ten years of external audit have focused on input and quality assurance processes. The consequence is that, wherever poor outcomes exist, they have been hidden by the excessive concentration on processes, and by a complacency that arises because good processes are easier to achieve than good outcomes. The Australian experience is similar to the UK, where audits by the Quality Assurance Agency are more focused on quality processes than monitoring standards (Alderman, 2009). Shah and Nair (2011) argue that there is a lack of sector-wide definitions of academic quality and academic standards in Australia, despite recent policy announcements and discussion papers by the Australian government since the 2008 review.

Shah, Wilson and Nair (2010) analysed the success and deficiencies of the current Australian higher education quality assurance framework and they outlined the following limitations:

- a lack of quantifiable results on university performance across the sector
- limited progress on improving the student experience despite initiatives such as external audits and performance-based funding using student experience measures
- inequity in performance-based funding and rewarding of universities
- university complacency with various processes and performance
- inconsistency in comparable academic standards
- AUQA's role and its powers
- the lack of mechanisms to promote the quality and reputation of universities based on AUQA audit outcomes
- the lack of strategies to engage students in quality assurance initiatives.

A severe limitation within the current model is the lack of compliance-checking against external reference points by AUQA and the State and Territory governments. Some critics (Moodie, 2008) argue that AUQA has failed to monitor university compliance to such external reference points as the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007) and the Australian Qualification Framework (MCEETYA, 2007). Moodie also argues that using the title 'university' assumes institutional compliance to external reference points is guaranteed, despite concerns that some universities substantially breach the Australian Qualifications Framework (Moodie, 2010). The cycle 1 audit also failed to ensure university compliance with a key national policy, the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes. Some critics (Massaro, 2010;

Blackmur, 2008) argue that AUQA has failed to achieve its objectives (1 and 3) as stated in its constitution.

9.1.7 Summary of Findings in Relation to Research Question 1

In summary, the study clearly provides answer to the first research question. The findings of the study suggest that:

- external quality audits in Australia have played a key role in improving systems and processes for quality assurance in core and support areas
- external quality audits in Australia, together with changes in government policy and the internal and external operating environments, have been effective in the improvement of quality assurance
- external quality audits alone cannot be credited for change and improvement in quality assurance in universities
- quality assurance in universities is more effective if the internal university processes are aligned with the external review process (for example, a review of offshore programs and partnerships that includes the development of a self review portfolio and the engagement of external review panel to review systems, processes, standards and outcomes, and interviews with all relevant stakeholders, followed by the university's ability to close the loop on review recommendations)
- the effectiveness or 'value add' of the external review process is highly dependent on the audit process used by the external audit agency; an improvement-led audit culture is seen as acceptable and beneficial in fostering and engaging stakeholders, compared to a compliance or inspectorate regime
- the top five areas where audits have been effective are: (1) quality assurance of offshore international education/partnerships; (2) university-wide quality assurance frameworks and their implementation; (3) review of offshore programs/partnerships; (4) tracking of university performance using specific measures; and (5) the development of review processes in academic and administrative areas

-
- external quality audits have played a significant role in the closure of many offshore programs and partnerships due to external scrutiny and public reporting on the findings
 - external quality audits in Australia, together with performance-based funding and the future *My University* website, have started dialogue within the academic community about quality assurance and standards
 - external quality audits in Australia have mostly focused on improving systems and processes for quality assurance in core and support areas, rather than monitoring academic standards and student outcomes
 - external quality audits in Australia have, therefore, failed to monitor academic standards across the higher education sector
 - external quality audits in Australia have also failed to monitor compliance to various external reference points such as the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes and the Australian Qualifications Framework.

9.2 Research Question 2: Impact on Student Satisfaction

Is there any evidence that quality assurance and an external quality audit improve student satisfaction and retention in institutions?

The rationale of quality assurance is based on meeting customer needs and ensuring that standards are maintained and continuously improved. The International Organisation Standardisation (ISO 9000) and the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program are used widely across the world in many industries to focus on customer satisfaction. The ISO 9000–2000 standard for quality management systems includes customer satisfaction based on requirements and meeting their satisfaction (Standards Australia, 2000). The Baldrige Performance Excellence Program also includes customer focus as an important element of the framework (Baldrige, 2010). Based on these two models of quality assurance, one would assume that external quality audits would play an important role in improving the student experience and retention. Various studies (James, Krause & Jennings, 2010; Long, Ferrier & Heagney, 2006; Scott, 2006; and Shah, Grebennikov & Singh, 2007) suggest a close relationship between student satisfaction, student engagement in learning and student retention. These studies indicate that high student satisfaction and engagement in learning contribute to high student retention and progression.

Studies in the UK (Harvey, 2002; Newton, 2000) found that quality audits have had limited impact on improving the student experience in learning. According to Coates (2005), quality assurance systems have failed to take account of student engagement in Australian higher education. The most recent review of the New Zealand Academic Audit Unit in 2009 implies that almost two decades of external quality audits in New Zealand have not improved the student experience (NZUAAU, 2009, p. 19)

9.2.1 Predictors of High Student Satisfaction

Shah and Nair's study of three universities (2011) suggests that the predictors of high student satisfaction include five interrelated factors.

1. Learning infrastructure (an adequate and well-resourced library, user-friendly online learning platform, accessibility of information technology infrastructure, quality of classrooms and learning environments)
2. Quality of teachers
3. Course design that engages students in learning (e.g. use of work-based learning)
4. Quality management of student assessment (e.g. student assessment which enables student attainment of generic skills and learning outcomes, clarity on assessment tasks, the use of a range of assessment methods, and timely and constructive feedback on student assessments)

-
5. Well-resourced support services, including the administration of enrolments and admissions, fees and student complaints management

Similar findings on the predictors of student satisfaction and retention in higher education were shown in studies by: Shah and Widin (2010) with Indigenous students; Shah, Roth and Nair (2010) with offshore students; and Grebennikov and Shah (2008) with higher degree research students. The analysis of 108,000 qualitative comments from a range of surveys on the best aspects and areas needing improvement in one Australian university by Scott, Grebennikov and Shah (2008) indicate that the recurring themes for improvement relate to: assessment (standards, marking, expectations management and feedback); student administration; and course structure.

These studies indicate the need for well-resourced teaching and academic support services to achieve high student satisfaction. Shah and Nair (2009) argue that student engagement and participation in surveys are highly dependent on the extent to which universities are genuinely listening to the student voice and taking actions to improve the student experience. Their study in two Australian universities suggests that student satisfaction will improve in those universities that are actively listening to the student voice and taking actions to enhance the student experience across all areas. A case study of one university presented by Shah and Nair (2011) suggests trend improvement in student satisfaction at three levels (overall university, course and subject level), as a result of the university's efforts to listen to the student voice and implement improvement projects, as well as communicate the planned actions to the student body via posters and other communication campaigns.

Shah and Nair's (2010) student attrition study undertaken in 2004 and 2008 in a large multi-campus university found that the top six reasons for student withdrawal in the first year include factors related to both university issues and the students' own personal lives. The top six reasons from highest to lowest were:

1. employment commitments
2. the course wasn't what the students expected
3. students felt isolated
4. family pressures
5. staff did not give enough feedback or individual help.
6. the timetable made it difficult to attend classes.

As a result of the attrition survey, the university implemented a retention project in 2004, along with other improvement projects as a direct result of the student voice. This resulted in 7.2% improvement in first-year student retention over a five-year period, and significant improvement in student satisfaction surveys at the overall university level, course level and student satisfaction at unit level.

9.2.2 Limited Impact on Student Satisfaction

A qualitative study undertaken by Shah (2011) with 40 participants suggests that external quality audits have made limited improvement in student experience and satisfaction in universities. Participants in the study noted that one of the key stakeholders of the university is the student body, and yet quality audits have not had a huge impact on the student experience. A quantitative study by Shah (forthcoming) analysed the views of 120 participants about the extent to which external quality audits had improved student experience and satisfaction. The mean result on the question: *I believe that AUQA audits have improved student satisfaction/experience in my university* was 2.78 or 28.9% explicit agreement. Ten years of external quality audit show limited evidence of improvement in student satisfaction and experience across the university sector in Australia.

An analysis by Shah (forthcoming) on the national dataset of the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) from 2000 to 2008 found little improvement in three core scales. The CEQ is a national, annual survey of university graduates that gathers student experience of the course. The explicit satisfaction (percentage marking 4 and 5) result on the CEQ shows that over the seven-year period, 5.7% improvement was made on the good teaching scale, 1.0% on the generic skills scale and 1.4% improvement in overall satisfaction. Five out of 39 Australian universities have consistently improved their satisfaction levels by over 10% on all three scales. The student retention data from 2001 to 2008 also shows limited improvement with 1.26% improvement in seven years. Some may argue that it is not the role of an external agency to improve the student experience as funding and reward is not linked to the outcome of audit reports, however, external scrutiny of quality assurance and an enhancement-led audit should play a role in improving the student experience.

A study in a large Australian university by Shah and Nair (2010) found that students use a wide range of information before making decisions on where to study. They suggest that most students are well-informed about the characteristics of individual universities. The top three factors influencing student choice are: (1) quality of teaching staff; (2) academic facilities; and (3) employment prospects. The study also shows that student perception of the elite Group of Eight (Go8) is of those universities being academically rigorous, prestigious, elite and traditional. The proposed *My University* website will affect student choice and the decision on where to study by providing information to create league tables and home-grown rankings.

The use of student satisfaction and experience measures to assess institutional teaching quality will continue with this information being available in the public domain and with a link to such measures for performance-based funding. Shah, Lewis and Fitzgerald (2011) argue that the renewal of quality assurance in Australian higher education faces a number of challenges, including the use of valid and

reliable student experience measures to assess and reward institutional performance. They suggest that student satisfaction (happiness) may not be the right measure to assess educational quality, as it may be subject to controversy and result in inequity in rewarding institutions.

9.2.3 Summary of Findings in Relation to Research Question 2

In summary, the study clearly answers the second research question. The findings of the study suggest that:

- ten years of external quality audit have had limited impact in the enhancement of student satisfaction/ and experience across the sector: a qualitative study with 40 participants from 25 Australian universities suggested that external audit had limited impact on student experience; a quantitative study of 120 participants showed only 28.9% agreement that such audits have contributed to improved student satisfaction and student experience; and the analysis of CEQ data between 2000 and 2008 indicated limited improvement
- ten years of external quality audit have had limited impact on student retention rates with only 1.26% improvement in seven years
- the Australian Government's policy of rewarding funding based on teaching quality measures, such as the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund, have been subject to controversy, with inequitable funding based on student satisfaction and experience measures benefiting the elite and well-resourced institutions
- the universities that have used external quality audit as a lever for change and improvement have seen trend improvement in student satisfaction and retention due to improvement projects initiated as part of the self review process; for example, in one Australian university, retention rates improved by 7.2% due to the implementation of a university-wide retention project as a direct result of a self review outcome (Shah et al., 2007)
- the review of literature shows that external quality audits have not contributed to any significant improvement in student satisfaction and experience in the UK, New Zealand or Australia. It can be argued that improved student satisfaction and student experience are dependent on the student-teacher ratio (with low satisfaction where there are high student-teacher ratios), and the funding of institutions to be able to accommodate well-resourced teaching and learning and support services infrastructure; for example, Massy, Graham and Short (2007) argue that quality improvement is difficult when institutions are starved for funding, and that quality depends on spending and using the resources effectively.

9.3 Research Question 3: University View of External Audit Process

Are higher education institutions satisfied with the process used by the external auditing agency (AUQA) in Australia?

There is a lack of study worldwide on the level of satisfaction with the external quality audit process from the perspective of universities and other higher education institutions. There is literature (discussed earlier in Section 5) that suggests institutions welcome an improvement-led external quality audit process, which includes self review and external quality audit. A compliance or inspectorate regime has proven to be bureaucratic and has also disengaged universities and academics from the quality and improvement process. A study undertaken as part of this thesis assessed the extent to which universities are satisfied with the process used by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) in its audits. The AUQA audit process comprises:

- institutional self review and submission of the self review portfolio
- an AUQA audit visit with the use of four to five external panel members
- panel interviews with staff, students, alumni, graduate employers and research partners
- visits to offshore programs by the audit panel
- a public report on the findings
- the selection of institutional good practices for inclusion in the publicly available ‘good practice database’
- an 18-month progress report from the university on the actions taken as a direct result of audit findings and on a random selection of cycle 1 audit affirmations and recommendations to assess progress as part of cycle 2 audits.

9.3.1 Level of Satisfaction with AUQA by Universities and Private Providers

A recent study by Shah and Nair (2011) on a private for-profit college in Australia assessed academic staff views on external quality audit. Their study is reported in Table 2 and outlines a high level of satisfaction with the external quality audit and the approach used by the college to prepare for the audit. Respondents were asked to select their level of satisfaction on a five-point Likert scale. All items attracted a mean score of greater than 4.00 out of 5.00, which suggests a high level of satisfaction. Respondents viewed the self review process as beneficial to the college; this is similar to the findings in the literature review.

Table 2: Academic Staff Views about External Quality Audit in a Private for-profit College

Items	Mean Score	*Rank
1. The self assessment undertaken in late 2008 enabled the college to identify areas needing improvement	4.21	10
2. The AUQA audit preparations from 2008 to date has been a key driver for improvements	4.00	11
3. The information sessions and forums were useful for communication and raising staff awareness	4.27	8
4. The AUQA audit preparation at the college was effective	4.40	5
5. The Performance Portfolio prepared for AUQA audit accurately represented the college	4.29	7
6. The communication about my participation in the audit was received in a timely manner	4.23	9
7. The information sessions with all staff in faculties was useful	4.41	4
8. The briefing session before the audit was useful	4.38	6
9. The atmosphere during the AUQA interview could be described as friendly/pleasant/comfortable	4.51	2
10. The logistics of the overall AUQA audit is well managed	4.46	3
11. The staff directly involved in AUQA audit preparation were helpful	4.61	1

* Ranking based on mean ratings

A recent study by Shah (forthcoming) assessed the extent to which universities are satisfied with the external audit process used by AUQA. Respondents were asked to rate 10 items on a five-point Likert scale (1 – low satisfaction, 3 – moderate and 5 – high satisfaction). All items attracted a mean score greater than 3.00. Participants expressed high satisfaction about the processes used by AUQA in its audit. Areas for improvement included the composition of the audit panel based on the history and characteristics of the institution, and the volume of supporting materials required by AUQA before the audit. Table 3 outlines the results on satisfaction with the external audit process.

Table 3: Satisfaction of Universities on the External Audit Process

Overall Satisfaction on the External Quality Audit Process	Mean	% Explicit Satisfaction	Ranking
1. The external quality audit process conducted by AUQA	3.43	60.0%	6
2. Panel composition based on the history and characteristic of your institution	3.09	46.7%	9
3. Advice and guidance by the Audit Director of the external quality agency	3.68	71.1%	2
4. External quality agency website and resources available	3.57	60.0%	5
5. Communication with the external quality agency before, during and after the audit	3.64	71.1%	3
6. Preparatory visit by the Panel Chair and Audit Director	3.75	75.6%	1
7. Request for additional material	3.11	44.4%	8
8. Offshore visits	3.25	46.7%	7
9. Main audit visit	3.61	71.1%	4
10. Final audit report	3.68	68.9%	2

Shah's study asked respondents to identify the best aspect of the audit, as well as areas for improvement. Respondents wrote extensive comments, listing some of the best aspects as:

- external influence being a significant prompt for improvements in monitoring and responding to student feedback
- the opportunity for self review prior to the audit
- the triangulation of evidence based on interviews and the analysis of information presented
- the transparent processes and opportunity for anyone to talk to the auditors
- the professionalism of the panel members; and the engagement of staff, students, student unions, alumni, employers and research partners in the audit.

Respondents also noted that the process enabled the university to act on areas needing improvement, motivated by the fear that a poor outcome in the audit may result in negative media stories. Respondents valued the follow-up by the external agency on the progress made on relevant affirmations and recommendations, and the risk-based selection of themes in cycle 2 audits with internationalisation as one of the mandatory themes in almost all cycle 2 audits.

9.3.2 Areas Needing Improvement in the Audit Process

The areas identified as needing improvement aligned with the quantitative findings of the survey. These included:

- the large volume of supporting materials required
- the selection of an audit panel with proven experience in the area and their awareness of the university
- a lack of training and preparedness of some auditors
- some recommendations related to things that might happen rather than what had happened
- a lack of focus on compliance checking with national policies and external reference points
- a lack of focus on assessing academic standards and outcomes
- a careful selection of risk-based themes by AUQA is needed, rather than relying on the institutions to nominate themes on areas they are doing well to avoid potential exposure
- the need to commission improvement projects based on areas where the sector is vulnerable (for example, benchmarking).

Several respondents noted that mock audits should not be encouraged as, in some cases, they are used to train people on how to answer questions, jeopardising independent judgment of the institution.

A survey conducted in a large dual sector university in Australia in 2007 assessed staff views about external quality audit in the university. It showed that 74% of staff found the self review process useful as part of the AUQA audit preparations, and 82.4% of staff agreed that the atmosphere during

the AUQA interview could be described as ‘friendly/pleasant/comfortable’. The study also found that 79% of staff felt the audit process was beneficial for their university (unpublished).

9.3.3 Summary of Findings in Relation to Research Question 3

In summary, the study clearly provides answers to the third research question. The findings of the study suggest that:

- a representative sample of Australian universities are satisfied with the process used in Australia by the AUQA - this is based on quantitative and qualitative studies undertaken in a range of universities in Australia
- the two key areas where further improvement in the quality audit process are needed are: a panel composition based on the history and characteristics of the relevant institution; and a decrease in the large volume of additional material requested with the self review portfolio
- the improvement-led audit culture has encouraged institutions to self review and identify areas needing improvement before the external quality audit
- the engagement of university stakeholders in the audit process is seen as a transparent process with all interested parties invited to meet the panel and submit brief written submissions (including governing committees, senior staff, academics, general staff, casual teaching staff, local and international (onshore and offshore) students, alumni, graduate employers, research partners, offshore partners and agents, and other staff and students)
- the requirement for a progress report 18 months after the audit and the follow-up on selected affirmations and recommendations in cycle 2 audits places the onus on universities to action areas needing improvement
- the triangulation of information from various sources is effective, including: the performance portfolio; interviews with stakeholders ranging from 150 to 400 people; the request for additional information; and university performance, based on the annual Institutional Performance Portfolio submitted to DEEWR, to identify commendations, affirmations and recommendations.

10 The Future of Quality Assurance in Australian Higher Education

Quality in higher education is not a new phenomenon. Many countries have implemented policies related to higher education quality assurance aiming to improve the quality and standard of their higher education and the expansion of higher education to all groups of people. The last decade has seen increased government and stakeholder interest in the quality of higher education. The growth of the student population in Australia and governments aspiration to increase access and the participation of disadvantaged students with high quality outcomes will witness increased attention on quality assurance. The linking of funding or reward based on institutional performance will significantly change the landscape of higher education in Australia, and lead to increased competition, consumer choice and university accountability for quality outcomes.

Higher education is now a marketable commodity that is offered by a range of ‘businesses’ including: public and private universities, private for-profit providers (for example, Navitas and the Kaplan Group), not for-profit providers (for example, theology colleges), consortiums (for example, Open Universities Australia), and professional accreditation bodies, such as the Australian Society of Certified Practising Accountants (CPA Australia). The ongoing decline in public funding of universities has resulted in increased competition between public and private institutions in both the domestic and international student market. Public and private institutions are now benefiting from the expansion and development of higher education, and competing for students. Competition and market demand have also prompted new forms of marketing to reach potential students (for example, the website, seek.com, uses a job search website to advertise courses based on search words) and further investment in flexible learning modes such as online, distance and fast-track courses.

The profitability of higher education has led to a rise in private for-profit institutions in the last few years, with large providers offering courses in different modes across Australia. With the growth in private for-profit higher education, the sector is witnessing mergers and acquisitions of small colleges by large providers to fiercely compete with universities and maximise profit. The rapid growth of private providers in vocational and higher education has raised questions around the credibility of some institutions and the extent to which their academic programs and process are rigorous and comparable with universities.

With the recognition by the Australian Government that higher education contributes to future economic development, there is an increased focus on quality assurance and institutional accountability. Based on the past and current developments in higher education quality assurance across the world, the section below outlines the future of quality assurance in Australian higher education.

10.1 Academic Rigour

Academic rigour will be a key focus in future quality assurance to ensure that institutions have rigorous academic processes and standards to achieve high quality outcomes. Higher education institutions have to demonstrate that they have effective systems and processes for quality assurance that are comparable with, and benchmarked against, other kinds of providers. Processes such as course design and development, course approvals, course reviews and assessment practices will need to ensure that learning outcomes are achieved and measured.

Shah et al. (2011) argue that academic rigour should benefit all groups of students in higher education with resources and academic support for disadvantaged students. Academic rigour and standards-based quality assurance must ensure that traditional and non-traditional students are not disadvantaged in areas such as engagement in learning, access to academic support services and, more importantly, the attainment of generic skills, which is perceived as important by early career graduates and their employers (Crebert et al., 2004).

10.2 Performance-based Funding

Performance-based funding will be an important element of the new quality assurance framework. Institutions will be rewarded based on measures such as access and participation, student attainment of generic skills and student satisfaction/experience. Performance-based funding will further drive competition between higher education providers, as the government will reward universities on their success in recruiting students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Performance-based funding may result in inequitable funding, with regional and post-1987 universities benefiting on access and equity measures, and elite universities benefiting from student satisfaction and experience measures. It may also divert university resources to achieve better outcomes. Similar observations have been made in the UK by Brown (2010) with the danger of resources being used to attain better scores on league tables, rather than for rigorous academic processes. The Learning and Teaching Performance Fund in 2006 resulted in 14 out of 38 universities receiving rewards; with mostly the elite and well-resourced institutions benefiting.

An intrusion into academic autonomy may result under the new performance-based funding. As governments reward universities using student satisfaction/experience measures, institutions may use similar measures to reward individual academics as part of annual performance development and review processes. Internal ranking and league tables will use educational and research measures to rank faculties, and student satisfaction and research output to rank individual academics. Greater focus will be on outcomes rather than input or the means needed to achieve better outcomes.

The new directions for quality assurance could be driven by a compliance regime that may be rejected by academics due to a lack of engagement and a lack of trust. According to Morgan and Zeffane (2003), mutual trust is consistently presented as an essential feature of change, and is best achieved through consultation, participation and empowerment. The experience of Brown (2004) suggests that external assessments and quality audits have had an impact on academic freedom.

10.3 Political Interest in Quality

The political interest in quality will continue as governments aim to ensure that higher education institutions are meeting the current and future needs of society, and that institutions are accountable for their public funding. Politics will also play a dominant role in funding and resource allocation, and in setting new directions for higher education. A typical example is the Australian Labor Party's political campaign of 2007, which used 'education revolution' as a key platform for the election. According to Danziger, politics is the 'exercise of power', 'the public allocation of things that are valued', 'the resolution of conflict', and 'the competition among individuals and groups pursuing their interests' (Danziger, 1994, p.5).

10.4 Social Inclusion and an Equity Agenda

Social inclusion and an equity agenda will form part of the new quality assurance framework to ensure that higher education institutions are providing access and participation to disadvantaged students. The equity and access agenda will drive change, with a quest to balance equity, academic rigour and high quality outcomes. Governments will play an important role in setting targets to increase the access and participation of disadvantaged students, and providing funding and reward to those universities who are able to meet or exceed the government target.

The key challenge for universities is to ensure that the equity and access agenda does not compromise quality outcomes and graduate standards, and that the focus is on quality outcomes rather than the quantity of graduates. Another key challenge for institutions will be to provide adequate academic support and transition for disadvantaged students, some of whom will be unprepared for tertiary education. The emergence of different kinds of institutions and the social inclusion agenda requires

external agencies such as AUQA and now TEQSA to ensure that inclusive student entry standards do not compromise graduate exit standards.

10.5 Ranking and League Tables

Ranking and league tables will be used by governments to assess and communicate the performance of universities. The use of various quantitative measures in learning, teaching and research will enable the Australian Government to rank universities and, possibly, disciplines. This approach will provide information for students on where to study, for employers on where to seek graduates, and for research partners on where to invest money in research.

The proposal for the *My University* website is a first step in a ranking system, which could also lead to internal university rankings between faculties, courses and individual academics. Ranking may damage the trust of academic staff in regards to quality, and disengage them from quality and improvement processes, as universities at the bottom of the league table could be seen as low-performing institutions with low quality academics, a lack of research, teaching and learning infrastructure. This could impact on the recruitment and attraction of both domestic and international students for whom prestige, elite education and academic rigour are key factors influencing student choice.

Various studies undertaken in the UK, USA and Germany (Federkeil, 2002; Heine et al., 2007; Heine & Willich, 2006; McDonough et al., 1998) indicate that rankings are used by two-thirds of students to make their choice when entering university. These studies also show that high-achieving students are more inclined to use rankings. In a demand-driven environment with funding of actual student places, ranking may begin to affect the make-up of student enrolments, in particular, universities as many of the highest-achieving and most motivated students will use it to influence their choice.

10.6 Market Forces

Market forces will present a fundamental challenge to quality assurance with the growth from elite to mass higher education. These challenges come not only from outside the university but also from within, as faculties compete for resources to ensure improved performance. Market competition (price, quality and availability) will be seen as the key safeguards of quality, as governments will continue to use performance metrics to judge quality and reward institutions. Brown (2009) argues that there is wide agreement that increased competition has made universities more responsive, more flexible, and more 'customer aware', as well as more efficient in their use of resources. Whether this has raised quality, in terms of enhancing students' educational experiences and achievements, is a separate question.

The growth of private for-profit higher education, the growth in the international student market, and student demand for flexible learning are just some of the many examples of how market forces are driving change in quality assurance. According to Rolfe (2003), market forces in the UK have resulted in the diversion of resources to the marketing and branding of the university, as well as the use of rankings and league tables in promoting universities, and a focus on research outcomes as a means to improve research and teaching performance. According to Hoxby (1997), market competition has also resulted in a number of unexpected impacts including: increased stratification between colleges and universities in student admissions scores; increases in tuition fees; and an increased variance between colleges in quality, as well as in ‘average’ college quality across the sector. Her study provides evidence that the lifetime income benefits to graduates of the more expensive, selective colleges and universities continue to increase over time and far outweigh the students’ expenditures for tuition (Hoxby, 2001).

10.7 The Engagement of Academics in Quality

The engagement of academics in quality and improvement will be key to the success of quality outcomes and academic standards. So far, quality assurance in universities has focused on achieving high quality outcomes, such as high student satisfaction, high research outputs and financial return. There is limited focus on what is really needed in faculties in terms of inputs to achieve improved outcomes, such as resources, infrastructure, rewards, professional development and managing staff workloads. The use of ranking, performance-based funding and setting threshold standards in teacher and unit evaluations surveys may not drive improvements, and they may have significant negative impact on academic staff.

According to Massy (2003), colleges and universities employ many of the brightest and most talented people but usually they are not trained to think about teaching and many feel frustrated by the issues they confront each year. He also argues that academics receive little support from their institutions or even their faculty colleagues. Mintzberg (1994) has noted that many institutional efforts, such as strategic planning and quality efforts, have been failures precisely because they relied on centralised strategic planning efforts and not on the knowledge of the people in the organisation who are closest to the core business activities – an observation echoed by other management scholars and practitioners.

10.8 Commitment to Quality and Improvement

Commitment to quality and improvement is dependent on institutional culture and senior management priorities. Institutions where senior management is genuinely committed to quality and improvement will witness the improved performance and engagement of staff across all levels. Institutions that view quality as bureaucratic and damaging to university autonomy will reject external monitoring and foster

a culture of complacency, with a lack of recognition of areas of risk for the university. Institutional leaders, such as the senior management group, deans, associate deans, heads of programs, course coordinators and administrative unit heads, need to engage with quality and improvement initiatives. Leaders and academics need to take ownership of quality to ensure that the faculty, administrative unit and course performance is linked to accountability and reward. Williams (2009) argues that quality assurance should be, first and foremost, an integral part of all academics' personal professional armoury, the part that allows them a good night's sleep because their courses and teaching are well organised and properly ordered.

Developing the skills of future leaders of quality and improvement is a challenge facing the university sector. The renewal of quality in higher education requires leaders who have a mix of skills in the areas of strategic planning, reviews, institutional research, student surveys and the student experience, corporate sustainability, quality and standards, and higher education policy analysis, as well as good knowledge across the education sector. This researcher's experience suggests that academic leaders manage quality at the institutional level better than administrative staff. In many cases, administrative staff lack experience and understanding of academic quality, what happens in classrooms, and faculty processes such as course design, approval, reviews, assessment moderation, and research and scholarship. The renewal of quality will result in universities and private providers competing to appoint quality practitioners.

Research undertaken by Scott et al. (2008) with higher education leaders on leadership challenges in Australian universities found that the top five criteria used to judge the performance of leaders are: achieving high quality graduate outcomes; successfully implementing new initiatives; producing significant improvements in learning and teaching quality; establishing a collegial working environment; and achieving a high profile for the area of responsibility. The imminent retirement of the baby boomers' generation will have a dramatic impact in the search for quality practitioners. According to Hugo (2005, p. 20), universities will lose between one-fifth and one-third of their academic staff members by 2015. In some universities, half of their leadership and a significant proportion of frontline staff may retire in the next five years.

10.9 The Cost of Achieving High Quality

The cost of achieving high quality is an area of limited research. For example, what evidence is there to suggest that recruiting more academic staff and researchers will improve teaching and research quality outcomes? According to Massy et al. (2007), it is widely believed that the only way to improve quality is through additional spending. He argues that the ideology of spending more to improve quality is deeply rooted, and he suggests that this perspective ignores the possibility of using current resources more effectively and efficiently.

The changing landscape of higher education requires universities to be innovative in their approach to learning and teaching and research to achieve quality outcomes. Additional money allows the university to hire more professors who will contribute towards the teaching discipline and research outcomes. It also enables the university to upgrade resources, facilities and teaching infrastructure, which may enhance the student experience.

10.10 Innovation and Creativity

Innovation and creativity will be required to meet stakeholder needs in this new era, which is dominated by information and communication technology, global competition, student mobility and cheap air fares, decreased public funding, growth in the student population and student diversity, changing patterns of student participation, and an equity and access agenda. Universities will need to be innovative, creative and plan carefully to ensure that they achieve their aspirations with effective use of their resources.

With increased stakeholder and market interest, the presence of quality assurance in higher education will remain. Institutions need to embrace change rather than resist the growth of quality in higher education. They need to develop strategies to operate effectively in the changing landscape, including using technology in their core business, engaging with stakeholders, collaborating with other universities and education providers, and ensuring effective workforce development and succession strategies. Fullan and Scott (2009) outline a number of strategies to encourage a change-capable university. They believe change-capable universities have attributes similar to a learning organisation. These attributes are:

1. not defending poor performance
2. creating change based on evidence
3. setting priorities
4. making hard decisions
5. ensuring responsibility and accountability
6. acknowledging and rewarding staff
7. a focus on tracking outcomes
8. ensuring that complex, hierarchical approval systems are justified to manage risk effectively
9. making sure that meetings are justified and cost-effective
10. operating in a responsive, collaborative and team-based way
11. undertaking strategic networking.

10.11 Student Experience

Student experience will continue to dominate discussions and debate on measuring educational quality and linking student satisfaction and student experience with performance-based funding. The next five to ten years will see an increased focus on using student feedback or the student voice to better understand the predictors of high student satisfaction and student engagement in learning. Student feedback will also play a greater role in improvement in universities.

Deming's teachings of the 1980s emphasised meeting the needs of customers; he stated that 'consumers are the most important part of the production line and quality is aimed at the needs of the consumer, present and future' (Deming, 1986, p. 5). He advocated for studying customers to determine their needs, thoughts, preferences, and expectations. Meeting or exceeding customer expectations is a critical and essential component to the achievement of a comprehensive approach to quality improvement. The current practice in universities is to measure student satisfaction and the student experience at the overall course, unit and teacher level, with the results produced at the university and faculty levels and, in some cases, the course, unit and teacher level. To better understand the student experience, in terms of the equity and access agenda, the focus will need to be on comparing the student experience across all key cohorts of students: domestic, international onshore, international offshore, low socio-economic status backgrounds, Indigenous students, students with a disability, postgraduate coursework students, research students, and students studying in flexible modes (online and distance).

Various international researchers across Australia, New Zealand and UK (such as Harvey and Coates) have found that external quality audits have not contributed to enhancing the student experience. It is envisaged that TEQSA will play a greater role in ensuring an improved understanding of the student experience in universities.

10.12 Strategy and Quality Initiatives

Strategy and quality initiatives in universities have to align to optimise the benefits. The former is focused on setting future directions and the latter on doing things right to achieve positive outcomes which should be continuously improved. A university's strategic planning framework needs to embed quality and improvement, risk and budget process to ensure that the resources are aligned with the future directions, and that the university is able to manage the risks effectively. According to Shah and Skaines (2008), the development of university strategic plans should include the consideration of three core pillars: university sustainability; economic benefits for the university; and being socially responsible for education, research and the creation of civil society. The strategic and quality agenda could be used in institutions to drive change and improvement at the university, faculty and individual

level, using faculty, course and individual staff performance, which is linked to the strategic priorities of the university.

10.13 Identifying the Value of Defining Quality

It is important to *identify the value of defining quality* in order to engage staff. For example, quality is linked to corporate sustainability, corporate ethics and quality as a learning organisation. Corporate sustainability is linked to the effective and efficient use of resources, while corporate ethics is the higher education institution's ethical or moral responsibility for education and research with its stakeholders. Meade (1995) used a learning organisation approach to engage staff in quality and improvement initiatives in an Australian university; this was proven to be successful. Dodgson (1993) believes the need for improved efficiencies in times of change requires organisations to learn. In management and innovation literature, learning is seen as a purposive search to hold on to and improve competitiveness, productivity and innovation in uncertain technological and market circumstances (Garratt, 1987). The renewal of quality requires institutions to use various management concepts to engage staff in quality and improvement processes.

11 Future Research in the Area

Research in quality assurance in Australian higher education has been limited. Most of the research undertaken so far has been based on experiences in the UK, Europe, North America, New Zealand and the USA. The rise of quality assurance, combined with government interest in the area, requires ongoing research at the national, institutional and faculty level. Further research in quality assurance is important as governments in many countries are holding universities accountable for public funding, and promoting increased access and equity in higher education. Governments are using performance-based funding to reward universities and providing public information on the performance of universities. Based on the Australian context, the rise of private for-profit higher education providers and new regulatory arrangements for quality assurance with \$5.4 billion funding necessitates ongoing research as to the effectiveness of the system and its value-add to the higher education sector.

The author is undertaking further work in some emerging areas through the following research.

1. Contributing to AUQA's occasional publication in 2011/2012 with a paper on *Enhancing the Student Feedback and Improvement System in Higher Education: What Works Well and What is Yet to be Done?* This will be a joint project between the University of Queensland, Curtin University of Technology, RMIT University, University of Western Sydney, University of Western Australia and a private college.
2. Research on whether *social inclusion policies could lower academic standards*, jointly with University of Western Australia and Macquarie University in 2011/2012.
3. Research on the *student experience* with all cohorts of students - local, international onshore, international offshore, part-time, full-time, undergraduate, postgraduate, low socio-economic background (LSES) and Indigenous students. The aim of the study is to determine the *extent to which the student experience* of all cohorts of students is comparable.
4. Research on *Quality Assurance of International Offshore Education*.
5. Completion of a book by end of 2011 on the *Effectiveness of External Quality Audits*. This book provides an international perspective with contributions from 15 countries. It will be published by Woodhead Publishing, Cambridge, UK.

12 Recommendations from the Findings

The results of the research and key findings from this thesis have led to the following recommendations for Australia's higher education sector. The recommendations outlined in this section take into account three levels of quality assurance: government policy and directions; internal university systems and processes; and individual academic staff responsibility. The area of study that has not been explored in detail in this research is the role of academic and individual staff in universities in quality assurance and improvement. The heart of any discussion on academic quality lies in the extent to which academics and other staff are engaged in quality, i.e. how to ensure a university culture that encourages and promotes quality and improvement with equitable recognition and reward, and that provides the resources and infrastructure to achieve high quality outcomes.

12.1 Recommendations related to the Effectiveness of Quality Audits in the Core Business of the University

Research Question 1: Has government policy on quality assurance and external quality audit been effective in improving the core business of higher education institutions?

1. There is an identified need to develop acceptable definitions of 'academic quality' and 'academic standards' in Australian higher education that are easily understood by various stakeholders such as policy-makers, universities, employers, academics and students.
2. There is an identified need to ensure that future directions for higher education quality assurance audits are based on an improvement-led audit approach rather than a compliance approach.
3. The Australian Government should encourage and foster national debate on academic standards and the measures used to monitor standards. Without clear policy directions, the current initiatives may not be effective.
4. TEQSA, once established, needs to ensure that higher education institutions undertake rigorous compliance checks against external reference points, such as the new provider standards, the National Code 2007 and the Australian Qualifications Framework.
5. There is an identified need for government and institutions to implement initiatives to engage academic staff in quality and improvement (e.g. quality and improvement grants and funds).

-
6. There is an identified need for additional funding of academic support structures to meet the demands of access, equity and transition of disadvantaged students in higher education, without compromising quality outcomes and standards.
 7. There is a need for the Australian Government to identify themes for audits around areas seen as high risk to academic standards and the Australian higher education sector (for example, quality management of student assessments).

12.2 Recommendations Related to the Effectiveness of Quality Audits on Student Experience and Satisfaction

Research Question 2: Is there any evidence that quality assurance and an external quality audit improve student satisfaction and retention in institutions?

1. There is an identified need for institutions to develop effective systems and frameworks for student feedback that enable universities to listen to the student voice and to implement improvements that meet the needs of various student groups.
2. TEQSA, once established, should ensure that the student experience is monitored as part of institutional quality audits and the factors contributing to low student experience (e.g. high student-staff ratios) are followed up.
3. The Australian Government should initiate a national student forum aimed at involving representatives from all student groups to discuss issues related to the student experience and outcomes and how to improve the student experience in higher education.
4. There is an identified need for universities and academia to embrace change in the new performance-based funding environment with increased accountability of academics to produce high quality outcomes in teaching (using student satisfaction measures) and research outputs.

12.3 Recommendations Related to University Satisfaction with the Audit Process

Research Question 3: Are higher education institutions satisfied with the process used by the external auditing agency (AUQA) in Australia?

1. There is a need for TEQSA to ensure that the auditors selected and trained for external quality audit panels have proven expertise in the core business of higher education institutions, such as learning and teaching, research and engagement, and that they are leaders in their areas of expertise.

12.4 Other Recommendations

1. The Australian Government should ensure that universities are appropriately funded to meet their access and equity agenda through adequate resourcing of academic support structures.
2. The Australian Government should re-examine performance funding arrangements for the higher education sector to ensure that the measures used are valid and reliable, and that performance funding is fair across the sector and recognises institutional commitment to mission, the size and age of the institution, and diversity and the history of individual institutions.

13 List of Published Outputs

Analysis of government policy on quality assurance and external quality audits

1. Shah, M., Wilson, M., & Nair, S. (2010). The Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework: Its Success, Deficiencies and Way Forward, *Proceedings of the Australian Association for Institutional Research (AAIR) Forum*, Geelong, Melbourne.
2. Shah, M., & Lewis, I. (2010). Private Higher Education in Australia: Growth, Quality and Standards, *Journal of Institutional Research (South East Asia)*, 8(2), pp. 80-95.

The effectiveness of external quality audits

3. Shah, M. (2011). Ten Years of External Quality Audit in Australia: Evaluating its Effectiveness and Success, *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, forthcoming.
4. Shah, M. (2012). The Effectiveness of External Quality Audits: A Study with Australian Universities, *Quality in Higher Education*, forthcoming.
5. Shah, M., & Grebennikov, L. (2008). External Quality Audit as an Opportunity for Institutional Change and Improvement: *Proceedings of the Australian Universities Quality Forum*, pp. 98-103. Melbourne, Australian Universities Quality Agency.
6. Shah, M., Skaines, I., & Miller, J. (2007). Measuring the Impact of External Quality Audit on Universities: Can External Quality Audit be Credited for Improvements and Enhancement in Student Learning? How Can We Measure? *Proceedings of the Australian Universities Quality Forum*, pp. 136-142. Melbourne: Australian Universities Quality Agency.

Tracking and improving quality assurance, student experience and student retention related to learning and teaching experience, research student experience, employer experience and international offshore student experience

7. Shah, M., & Nair, S. (2011). *Trends in the Quality of Student Experience: An International Perspective based on Studies in Three Universities*. International Engineering and Technology Education Conference. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

-
8. Shah, M., & Nair, C.S. (2010). Monitoring Student Attrition to Enhance Quality. *International Journal of Quality and Participation*. 1(2), pp. 24-30.
 9. Shah, M., & Nair C. S. (2009). Using Student Voice to Improve Student Satisfaction: Two Australian Universities the same Agenda. *Journal of Institutional Research (South East Asia)*. 7(2), pp. 43-55.
 10. Shah, M., Grebennikov, L., & Singh, H. (2007). *Does Retention Matter? Improving Student Retention: A UWS Case Study*. Paper presented at the Australasian Association for Institutional Research Forum, Sydney, 28-30 November.
 11. Shah, M., & Nair, C. S. (2010). Enrolling in Higher Education: The Perceptions of Stakeholders. *Journal of Institutional Research*, 15(1), pp. 9–15.
 12. Grebennikov, L., & Shah, M., (2008) Enhancing the Research Student Experience in a University. *Proceedings of the Australasian Association for Institutional Research 2008 Forum*, Canberra, 19-21 November.
 13. Shah, M., & Nair, C. S. (2010). *Employer Satisfaction of University Graduates: Key Capabilities in Early Career Graduates*. Teaching and Learning Conference. Perth, Australia.
 14. Shah, M., Roth, K., & Nair, S. (2010). Improving the Quality of Offshore Student Experience: Findings of a Decade in Three Australian Universities. *Proceedings of the Australian International Education (AIEC) Conference*. Sydney, Australia.

Publication 1

This publication has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

This publication is available as:

Shah, M., Wilson, M., & Nair, S. (2010). The Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework: Its Success, Deficiencies and Way Forward, Proceedings of the Australian Association for Institutional Research (AAIR) Forum, Geelong, Melbourne.

Links to this publication:

Print	http://webpac.canberra.edu.au/record=b1688052~S4
Online paper	http://www.aair.org.au/app/webroot/media/pdf/AAIR%20Fora/Forum%202010/HEQualityFrameworkMahsoodShah.pdf
Online presentation	http://www.aair.org.au/app/webroot/media/pdf/AAIR%20Fora/Forum%202010/2-2mahsood.pdf

Abstract

Higher education policies related to quality assurance are implemented in many countries. The purpose of such policies are to ensure the provision for high quality education, university accountability and transparency in the use of public funding, confidence of various university stakeholders, competitiveness of higher education in the global arena and meeting the needs of the diverse stakeholders. The current Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework was implemented in the year 2000. While the current framework has served us well with evidence of success, it is clear that the new policy on quality assurance will be more rigorous and it will be implemented in 2011-2013 as a result of the review of higher education in Australia in 2007/2008.

The aims of the paper are to provide a brief history of quality assurance and its evolution in higher education in Australia and to analyse the success and deficiencies of the current quality assurance framework used by the government. The analysis of the framework is based on the views of 40 participants from 25 Australian universities and also the views of the three authors who have been in the quality assurance role in various institutions.

Publication 2

This chapter has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

This chapter is available as:

Shah, M., & Lewis, I. (2010). Private Higher Education in Australia: Growth, Quality and Standards, *Journal of Institutional Research (South East Asia)*, 8(2), pp. 80-95.

Links to this chapter:

Print	http://webpac.canberra.edu.au/record=b1688052~S4
Online subscribed content (UC community)	
Online general public	http://www.seairweb.info/journal/JIRSEA_v8_n2_2010_2nd.pdf#page=80
DOI	

Abstract

In the last five years private higher education has grown significantly in Australia. The growth of private higher education is also experienced in many parts of the world. Government regulation and policies related to higher education, the inability of public universities to meet the needs of the growing population and decreased funding of public universities with subsequent low student satisfaction have been key contributors to the rise of student participation in private higher education and growth in private providers. In 2008, private higher education enrolments in Australia were 64,092 (6 percent of the total student population). The growth of private higher education in 2008 was 20.8 per cent compared to 2.6 per cent in public universities (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). The number of private higher education colleges has also grown from five in 2000 to approximately 150 in 2008. Based on this trend it is predicted that by 2020 private higher education in Australia will contribute approximately 30 per cent of total higher education enrolments in Australia.

While private higher education enrolments and the number of institutions has grown significantly with signs of strong continuing growth, there are critical issues around quality and standards that need to be addressed to ensure comparable academic standards to universities.

This paper provides an overview of the growth of private higher education in Australia and internationally with an analysis of factors contributing to the growth in Australia. It outlines issues around quality assurance and standards, based on the experience of the authors in working closely with five Australian private providers in self-reviews, quality assurance and external quality audits and course development. An analysis of recurring themes as a result of the external quality audits of 19 private higher education institutions in Australia is also discussed. The paper concludes by providing recommendations that could be used by government and private providers to improve quality assurance and academic standards.



Publication 3

This publication has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

This publication is available as:

Shah, M. (2012). Ten years of external quality audit in Australia: evaluating its effectiveness and success. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 37(6): 761-772.

Links to this publication:

Print	http://webpac.canberra.edu.au/record=b1688052~S4
Online subscribed content (UC community)	http://ezproxy.canberra.edu.au/login?url=http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02602938.2011.572154
Online general public	http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02602938.2011.572154
DOI	10.1080/02602938.2011.572154

Abstract

External quality audits are now being used in universities across the world to improve quality assurance, accountability for quality education and transparency of public funding of higher education. Some countries such as Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Sweden and Denmark have had external quality audits for more than a decade but there has been limited research as to their impact. This study analyses the extent to which external audits in Australia have improved quality assurance in universities over the past 10 years. The analysis is based on discussions with 40 participants in a workshop on the effectiveness of audits and the review of 60 external quality audit reports between 2001 and December 2010. The research found that while external audits have led to an improvement in systems and processes in Australian universities, they have not necessarily improved the student experience. This lack of impact on the student experience in Australia is similar to other countries, according to the literature review. This study is timely in its analysis on the effectiveness of the current improvement-led audits, as government in Australia is in the process of renewing quality assurance arrangements of higher education institutions with a focus on standards and outcomes.

Publication 4

The Effectiveness of External Quality Audits: A Study with Australian Universities

Mahsood Shah
University of Canberra, Canberra, Australia

Abstract

External quality audits have been introduced in many countries as part of higher education reforms, with governments setting up external agencies to monitor quality assurance arrangements in universities. In countries such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Sweden and Denmark, external quality audits have been in place for more than a decade. However, there has been limited empirical research with systematic data collection on the extent to which these audits have been effective in improving quality assurance in universities.

This paper is based on research undertaken as part of PhD study with all Australian universities to assess the extent to which audits by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) have improved quality assurance in the core and support areas of the universities. The paper analyses the views of 120 respondents including senior members of the universities and AUQA auditors, and evaluates university satisfaction with the external quality audit process. Through analysis of the national course experience questionnaire data from 2002 to 2008, the paper also examines if audits in Australia have contributed to the enhancement of the student experience.

The study finds that the audit process used by AUQA in Australia is satisfactory due to its approach of an improvement-led culture. The findings indicate that external quality audits alone cannot be credited for improving quality assurance in universities. A combination of external quality audits together with the internal and external operating environment has significantly contributed to improving quality assurance in universities.

While external audits have led to an improvement in systems and processes in Australian universities, this study finds that they have not improved education outcomes and the student experience.

Keyword: effectiveness of external quality audits

Introduction

Governments in many countries have set up quality assurance agencies to conduct external quality audits of tertiary institutions as part of higher education reforms. The main purpose of these agencies is to conduct and report on quality audits of universities and other higher education providers and to enhance quality assurance in core and support areas.

While external agencies have been formed with different objectives in different countries, overall, their aim is to assure quality assurance of higher education and stakeholder confidence in the public funding of universities. In Australia, the external agency - the Australian Universities Quality Agency - was set up in 1999. It began the first cycle of audit with all 39 universities in 2001, and the second cycle in 2008. The year 2010 marked a decade of external quality audits in Australia and it is worthwhile to study the effectiveness of AUQA audits on core and support areas of universities to determine if the audit process has contributed to the enhancement of the student experience.

Examining the effectiveness of external quality audits is timely with governments in countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom in the process of reforming higher education, with quality assurance as a key element. Analysis on whether a decade of audit has improved quality assurance in universities is central in setting new directions. Such studies are also important for other reasons including: government's proposal to use performance-based funding which would reward universities on agreed performance measures; the cost borne by universities to prepare for external quality audit; and ensuring that quality assurance arrangements are sustainable, economically beneficial and socially responsible in the long term.

Studies on the Effectiveness of External Quality Audits Worldwide

The aim of the external quality audit is to assure society that higher education standards are adequate and internationally comparable. According to Rozsnyai (2010), quality assurance has become a fact of life – a concept instilled even in the public mind and an awareness of its importance as a wish for better education. Concerns are emerging about the relative merits of different institutions and their standards in light of the massification of higher education. The exposure of a larger proportion of society to higher education has created a core of sophisticated consumers interested in how well it is doing its job (Massaro, 2010).

The majority of the literature on the effectiveness of external quality audit is anecdotal and reflects two opposing viewpoints. The first view is that audits have not transformed higher education and do not contribute to institutional improvement and the enhancement of student learning. Change takes place in institutions through internal reviews, and internal and external operating environments. The opposing view is that audits, if managed effectively and aligned well with internal systems and processes, motivate universities to self-assess and improve their core business and services. Most literature has also critiqued the processes used by the auditing agencies. External audits with an improvement-led culture have had positive results in terms of self assessment, external peer review, improvements and follow-up, while audits with a compliance-driven regime failed to engage academics in quality and improvement.

The UK Experience

Academics see quality assurance as burdensome, according to Harvey and William (2010), and it has failed to become a part of their everyday activities because they see no real link between quality and their academic work. Harvey (2005) argues that quality monitoring in the UK has been beset by overlapping and burdensome processes (also Laughton, 2003; Kogan et al, 2000), as well as competing notions of quality, a failure to engage learning and transformation, and a focus on accountability and compliance. The UK experience suggests that academics perceive external reviews as a distrust of their own work, and a costly and bureaucratic exercise (Cheng, 2009). The first cycle of audits in the UK resulted in more than 100 items of negative media coverage about the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and outcomes of the audit reports. Several prestigious universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, challenged QAA and its audit process. Studies with 12 universities in the UK indicated that two-thirds of external review panel recommendations had been acted upon

(Brennan et al, 1997). They found that actions involved formalized procedures and improved documentation, and that recommendations were more likely to be instigated at the faculty level.

Newton (2002) found that academic staff do not mutely accept change or the particular demands of the quality assurance policy or systems in the review process. His experience in Wales suggests that external audits which encourage team-based action planning and increased dissemination of good practice result in improvement in the student experience.

A study at Sheffield Hallam University sought academics' perceptions of the different external monitoring processes in England. They found that some processes, notably external examination, were perceived as providing a check on standards. However, there was little support for the view that external quality evaluation improved the student learning experience (Harvey & Newton, 2004). According to Baldwin (1997), external audits have been instrumental in: ensuring rigorous course approval procedures; increasing awareness of the student perspective in learning and teaching; and a perceptible shift in the climate, with renewed attention to teaching issues.

The Scandinavian Experience

In Sweden, Wahlen (2004) found that, although external audits together with other measures, impacted at the management and faculty levels, it took a long time to build accepted systematic quality assurance and development measures in universities. He found that the audits improved: the development of policy and structure of institutional quality work; the development of student influence in quality assurance; cooperation with stakeholders; internal evaluations, reviews and follow-up processes; and quality assurance in the internationalisation area. Askling (1997) concluded that external evaluation is only one of several factors influencing institutional quality enhancement. Other demands may come from such areas as an increase in student numbers, growing diversity in terms of previous knowledge, and the need for external funding. External audits in Sweden have resulted in substantial change, including stimulating quality enhancement and strategic management, which Askling attributes to the 'improvement orientation' approach to quality monitoring. Research by Stensaker (1997) with 24 heads of department in a Swedish university suggests that the effect of quality audits has been the enhanced management of quality processes and staff development.

However, Massy (1999) implies that it is a mistake to say that audits have *transformed* higher education in Sweden and Denmark. Universities are too complex, their governance systems too convoluted, and their faculties too traditional for real transformation to take place in only a few years. But his findings indicate that external reviews in Sweden and Denmark have been constructive and can be credited for the advancement of quality work to a significant extent. The experience in Denmark suggests that external quality assessment using methodology such as self assessment, peer-review, audit report and follow-up has resulted in useful information, and that the effectiveness of the process is dependent on well-developed internal quality systems or the culture (Kristensen, 2010). Research of a Norwegian university suggests that external quality audits have played a key role in strengthening the use of data to improve student learning (Gynnild, 2007).

Effectiveness Studies in Other Countries

Studies in a range of other countries have found positive effects, including: in Chile, indications of a change in institutional culture (Silva, Reich & Gallegos, 1997; Lemaitre, 2004); in the West Indies, the implementation of review recommendations and enhanced learning and teaching (Gift & Hutchinson, 2007); the enhancement of learning and teaching, documentation structures, sequences of learning and the approach to student assessments (Horsburgh, 1997; Gerbic & Kranenburg, 2003); and in New Zealand, an improvement in teaching and research outcomes (Carr et al, 2005).

Internationally, there is agreement that the quality audit process has raised awareness of quality and systems, and that it has increased communication and transparency of accountability (Caroll, 1997; Anderson et al, 2000; Dill, 2000). Research on external quality audits in the UK, New Zealand, Sweden and Hong Kong shows the effectiveness in: increased responsibility for improving teaching and student learning; facilitating active discussion and cooperation within academic units on the

means to improve teaching and student learning; clarification of responsibility for improving teaching and student learning in faculties; and providing information on best practice both within the institution and across the systems (Dill, 2000). In New Zealand, quality reviews have led universities to examine and monitor processes in ways they have not done before. Under such examination, defects were identified and addressed rather than lingering to face public exposure (Woodhouse & Meade, 2000).

Despite the use of audits for more than a decade, student assessment continues to be an area for improvement. Fourie and Alt (2000) found that quality audits foster an improvement-led culture but there is a lack of integration of quality in core activities such as program planning and professional development. Student experience and engagement in learning has been highlighted as an area where limited improvements have been made despite the growth of quality audits (Harvey, 2002; Newton, 2000). In Australia, quality assurance systems have failed to take account of student engagement, according to Coates (2005).

Overall, there is a broad agreement that external quality audits, together with internal university processes, have been a driver in improving quality assurance processes in universities. Studies by Saarinen (1995), Thune (1996), Smeby and Stensaker (1999), Brennan and Shah (2000) confirm that a self assessment process, as part of an external audit, is very successful in improving quality assurance processes. The experience from a Dutch university suggests that internal self reviews serve to increase faculty autonomy, as well as helping to improve educational quality (Weusthof, 1995).

Scott and Hawke (2003) argue that, for universities, a unique benefit of the external quality audit is the extrinsic motivation to document, critique and enhance their internal capabilities for continuous quality assurance, improvement and innovation. Similar conclusions were reached in a number of studies around the world, for example, in South Africa (Wickham, Coetzee, Jones, & Metcalfe, 2007), Denmark (Kristensen, 1997), the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Sweden and Hong Kong (Dill, 2000).

The Complexities of Measuring Effectiveness

Various literature suggests there are difficulties in measuring the effectiveness of external quality audits. These difficulties are due to the following: the factors involved and the mapping of causal relationships (Harvey & Newton, 2004; Stensaker, 2003; Weusthof, 1995; Askling, 1997; Brennan, 1997); the correlation between certain external initiatives and their impact on internal processes (Hackman & Wageman, 1995); and issues related to methodological pathways and epistemological assumptions that are likely to yield credible insights into quality assurance and its effects (Singh, 2010). An evaluation of impact is difficult because of the complexity and the pace of change in most institutions (Brennan, Fredericks & Shah, 1997). Harvey (1999) suggests that impact studies can fall under three broad types. The first type includes 'opinionated' or 'theoretical' analysis which tends to 'predict' the likely impact (Wilson, 1996). The second is based on limited evidence; much of this is anecdotal (Harvey, 1998). The third type is based on an analysis of systematic data collection (Harvey, 2006). The need for further study on the effectiveness of quality audits has been strongly recommended; for example, Bradley (2005) suggested the need for such research with systematic analysis during the keynote address at the 2005 International Network for Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education.

Review of the Australian Experience

Shah and Grebennikov's study (2008) of a large public university in Australia found that the external quality audit was used as a driver for change and improvement in the university. They suggest that, while changes and improvements would happen as part of internal review processes, the effective use of the external driver led to improvement as a direct result of the review outcomes. Some of the notable areas of improvement included: the development of a range of tracking, reporting and improvement systems, which may have been developed regardless, but the speed of development and their uptake were definitely enhanced; development of a more evidence-based culture of decision-making; implementing improvement projects as a direct result of reviews and stakeholder feedback; fostering active engagement in benchmarking with similar institutions; a more coordinated, systematic

and consistent approach to planning and review across the faculties and divisions; a university-wide student retention project from 2004 to 2006, which resulted in a 4.2% improvement in overall retention and a 3.9% increase in first-year undergraduate retention; university-wide implementation of quality management of assessments; improved engagement with student associations and university entities; the formation of network groups (eg, Program Heads) to provide peer-support for those staff who put each improvement project into daily practice; centralised and effective management of offshore programs and partnerships; improved synergy between various support services, such as the library, IT and student support; and strengthening the role of the planning and quality office to facilitate planning, reviews and improvement.

A follow-up study by Shah and Nair (2010) of the same university showed that the first-year retention rate had improved by 7.2% in a six-year period, compared to 1.2% improvement across the entire university sector in the same period (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). The university recorded the second highest trend improvement in first-year retention compared to 38 universities. The improvement on retention rate is attributed to the student retention project initiated in 2004 (Shah & Nair, 2010). This improvement in first-year retention of 7.2% is significant based on the student profile of the university, with 54% of students being first in the immediate family to attend tertiary education and almost 22% of students from a low socio-economic status. The first-year progression rate improved from 2.6% in a six-year period compared to 0.85% across the university sector. Results from the course experience questionnaire (CEQ: a national survey targeted to graduating students across all Australian universities similar to the National Student Survey in the UK) also reported a trend improvement in all three scales. Explicit satisfaction (% responding to 4 and 5 on a 5-point likert scale) on the overall satisfaction scale improved by 13.8% from 2004 to 2009. On the generic skills scale, the university improved 11.3% in the same period. The university recorded one of the highest improvements compared to the other 38 universities on both the overall satisfaction and the generic skills scales. On the good teaching scale, the university improved by 3.8% from 2004 to 2009. The improvement in student satisfaction measured through the CEQ is inconsistent across all universities with little progress made across the higher education sector during this period. The trend improvement in this particular university was due to initiatives between 2004 and 2008 implemented as a direct result of student feedback; this is discussed in detail by Shah and Nair (2010).

Harvey (2006) acknowledges that the varied impacts of external quality reviews on universities are not easy to measure. He summarises such impacts as: changes evident from one review to the next; improvements in performance indicators; the adoption of formal internal quality processes by institutions; student feedback indicating positive changes; and employer perceptions about improvement in graduate abilities' (p. 287). Using Harvey's concept of assessing the effectiveness of external quality audits through a range of measures, Shah and Grebennikov (2008) and Shah and Nair (2010) analysed performance data on specific measures two years before an external audit in an Australian university and two years post audit. The analysis showed trend improvement across all measures including: first-year student retention rates; the overall student satisfaction scales measured on the internal student satisfaction survey and on the CEQ; the average explicit satisfaction on the CEQ good teaching scale and the generic skills scale; and the overall satisfaction ratings on the end-of-semester unit evaluations, the research students' survey, and the employers' survey. Their experience in a large university suggests that an external quality audit, when aligned with effective internal processes, can enhance the quality outcome.

According to Shah, Roth and Nair (2010), external quality audits have been particularly effective in improving the quality assurance of Australian offshore international education programs. Some of the reasons for this include: the focus of the first cycle of audit on offshore programs and partnerships, with audit panel visits to offshore countries; audit panel interviews with students, staff, employers, alumni, senior managers from partner institutions and government officials; public audit reports highlighting significant deficiencies in the management of offshore programs; negative media stories related to offshore activities; the requirements placed on universities to close the loop and report progress on the affirmations and recommendations 18 months after the release of the public report; the Australian Government's decision to include internationalisation as a default theme in the second

cycle of audits; and finally, the audit panel follow-up on selected affirmations and recommendations in the cycle two audit. An analysis of the success and deficiencies of the Australian higher education quality assurance framework by Shah et al (2010) shows that some of the success includes: improvement in internal quality management systems and processes in universities; the emergence of the quality cycle and its use in core areas of the university (for example plan, implement, review and improve cycle); and the effective use of the student voice to improve teaching quality.

A detailed study by Shah (2010), based on discussions with 40 participants in a national forum and an analysis of 60 AUQA audit reports in his recent paper *Ten Years of External Quality Audit in Australia: Have Audits Improved Quality Assurance in Universities?*, suggests that government policy on external quality audits has been effective in improving systems and processes related to quality assurance in core and support areas. However, Shah's study and a review of critics in the Australian media imply that external audits have failed to assess outcomes and standards. Ten years of external audit have focussed more on input and quality assurance processes, rather than reviewing education outcomes in terms of standards. The first cycle of audit also failed to ensure university compliance with key national policy, such as the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes and the Australian Qualifications Framework. Some critics (Massaro, 2010; Blackmur, 2008) suggest that AUQA has failed to achieve its objectives as stated in its constitution.

Aims and Methodology of the Study

The aims of this study are to determine: (1) the extent to which external quality audits in Australia have improved quality assurance in core and support areas of universities; (2) university satisfaction with the external quality audit process; and (3) the extent to which external quality audits have improved student satisfaction/experience.

The research for this study formed part of a PhD in an Australian university. The study involved two parts – a survey of all universities, and an analysis of data from the national course experience questionnaire (CEQ) from 2002 and 2008.

All universities were targeted to provide a sample of different types of institutions in terms of size, age, elite research, technology focus, regional and metropolitan, and single and multi-campus universities. A database was created to determine the survey's target population, which included Deputy Vice Chancellors, Pro Vice Chancellors, Directors, Managers and Quality Officers responsible for quality assurance in all universities. The target population was extended to some former AUQA auditors, critics of external quality audits and academics and researchers who have published on topics related to quality assurance in Australia. Each individual was telephoned and invited to participate in the survey; this was followed by an email invitation with the web-link of the online survey. In total, 150 people were invited to participate and a reminder email was sent three weeks later. The survey received 120 valid responses from staff at all levels across the institutions ranging from Deputy Vice Chancellors to Quality Officers and academics. In total participants from 30 out of 39 institutions participated in the survey.

The Survey Questionnaire

The survey tool had both quantitative and qualitative items. The quantitative items enabled respondents to rate on a five-point likert scale (1 – low improvement, 3 – moderate improvement and 5 – high improvement) on each item in areas related to general views about external quality audit, and the effectiveness of an external quality audit on the following:

- governance, strategic planning and quality management;
- the core business of the university's learning and teaching, research, community engagement and internationalisation;
- the support services of the university;
- institutional surveys and management information systems.

The survey also sought participant satisfaction on the external quality audit process used by AUQA, and participant views on the key factors impacting on universities over the last five years. After each section, respondents could write open-ended comments on areas where improvements had been made

as a direct result of external quality audits. At the end of the survey, participants were invited to comment on the best aspects of the external quality audit process and areas where improvement was needed. The quantitative items in the survey were based on literature review and recurring affirmations and recommendations from the Cycle 1 audits with 39 Australian universities. Before its use, the survey tool was reviewed by eight individuals from Australia and overseas who have undertaken research and published in quality assurance in higher education.

Findings and Discussion

The findings reported in this paper are based on the overall analysis from 120 valid responses from 10 universities. The first section of the survey focused on the overall administration and effectiveness of external audit. When asked if their university appointed staff specifically to coordinate quality assurance, 82% of respondents said yes. When asked if the university formed a group to provide governance and oversight of quality assurance, 95.6% said yes. In terms of the cost of preparing the university for the external quality audit (including self reviews, mock audits, staff costs and the actual external audit), 57.8% of respondents estimated the cost to be between \$100,000 to \$500,000; 26.6% said it would be between \$500,000 to \$1 million; and 15.6% said that the cost would be above \$1 million.

At the beginning of the survey, four questions assessed the effectiveness of external quality audit. The first question asked respondents if AUQA audits had improved quality assurance in their university. The mean score on a five-point likert scale was 3.91 or 86.7% explicit satisfaction (% marking 4 and 5). The second question asked if AUQA audits, together with the internal and external operating environments, had played a key role in improving quality assurance in the university. The mean score was 4.09 or 88.9% explicit satisfaction. The third question assessed the extent to which AUQA audits improved student satisfaction/experience. The mean was 2.78 or 28.9% explicit satisfaction. The effectiveness of external quality audits on the student experience in Australia is similar to the views of Coates (2005) based on his experience in Australia and the experience in the UK by Harvey (2002) and Newton (2000). The fourth question asked respondents if their preparation for Cycle 2 audits had played a key role in improving systems and processes for quality assurance in their university. The mean was 3.56 or 68.9% explicit satisfaction.

A comparative analysis between elite and other universities on the four items using Cohen's effect size was deployed to identify standardised difference. The analysis suggests that respondents from the elite universities scored lower agreement on each item with a difference between -0.22 to -0.64. Table 1 outlines the overall results of the first section of the survey. The results clearly show that a combination of external quality audits with the internal and external operating environment has contributed significantly to improving quality assurance in universities, rather than the external quality audit factor alone. The results strongly suggest that external quality audits have failed to improve student satisfaction and experience in the majority of universities.

[Table 1 – see Appendix]

Overall Improvements Due to External Audit

Respondents were asked to identify some of the improvements in their universities as a direct result of external quality audits. Recurring improvements identified included: raised awareness of quality assurance in various areas of the university; improved governance of international activities including offshore programs and partnerships; strengthened policies and procedures related to offshore education; benchmarking on areas of strategic importance; improved integration of planning and budgeting; use of performance data in planning and decision-making; embedding a culture of continuous improvement; the self review process in identifying areas needing improvement; the use of student feedback in improving teaching; attention on academic standards and aligning learning and teaching with defined outcomes that can be taught and assessed transparently; incentives for faculties to engage in quality and improvements; a sense of urgency associated with an external review process and the consequent public exposure as the impetus for change; and improved leadership and accountability of quality assurance across the university. Based on the extensive comments written by

respondents, it is clear that external quality audits have played a key role in improving quality assurance in various areas in most universities. The area with the most apparent improvement was international offshore programs and partnerships.

Effectiveness on Governance, Planning and Quality Management

The second section of the survey collected feedback about the level of improvement as a direct result of external quality audit in areas such as governance, strategic planning and quality management; learning and teaching; research and research training; community engagement; internationalisation; administrative support; and institutional survey and management information systems. In governance, strategic planning and quality management, the areas attracting high improvement with a mean score greater than 3.20 on a five-point likert scale include (in order from high to low): quality assurance framework and implementation; reporting on key performance indicators; review processes and improvement; and consultation/communication with staff, students and other stakeholders. The area of least improvement based on respondent feedback, with a mean score less than 2.70, was financial management and the management of university entities (that is, the commercial arm of a university such as university college). Table 2 shows the results on governance, strategic planning and quality management.

[Table 2 - see Appendix]

Respondents were asked to identify three areas where external audit improved governance, strategic planning and quality assurance in their university. The recurring areas of improvement align with the quantitative findings presented in Table 2 - the implementation of a quality assurance framework and the accountability to deliver planned outcomes; improved governance of the university with the university council providing oversight on the performance of the university; improved planning and review processes; alignment between strategic and operational plans; self review of governing committees; better use of performance data in decision-making; and the development of comprehensive school/faculty reviews.

Effectiveness on Learning and Teaching

The third section of the survey asked respondents about improvement as a direct result of external quality audit in core and support areas of the university, such as learning and teaching, research and research training, community engagement, internationalisation, administrative support, and institutional survey and management information systems. Respondents noted three areas of clear improvement in learning and teaching: quality assurance process for course development and approval (mean 3.14); tracking performance in learning and teaching (mean 3.12) and academic program reviews (mean 3.07). The three areas of least improvement were: strengthening the role of learning and teaching committees; quality management of student assessments; and external advice on course development. The need for improvement in student assessment has been identified in other studies related to student satisfaction in Australia (Scott, 2005; Shah & Widin, 2010; Shah & Nair, 2011). Table 3 outlines respondent feedback on the effectiveness of external quality audit on learning and teaching.

[Table 3 - see Appendix]

The qualitative comments from respondents on areas where external quality audit led to improvements in learning and teaching suggest that two factors are critical. First, government policy to reward universities using performance-based funding on learning and teaching measures, and secondly, the external scrutiny by AUQA. The recurring areas of improvement included: tracking performance on learning and teaching measures; academic program reviews; use of student feedback to improve teaching quality; improved course development and review processes; monitoring student satisfaction on individual subjects and using outcomes in staff performance reviews; more consistent understanding of equivalence of learning outcomes; and better understanding of graduate attributes.

Respondents were asked to rate the level of improvement in the area of research and research training. The result suggests that external quality audit has little impact in research area. All items attracted a mean score of less than 3.00 on a five-point likert scale. The top three areas where audits have been effective to some extent are: improvement in research and research training outcomes (mean 2.90); tracking performance in research (mean 2.83); and support for early career researchers and ongoing professional development (mean 2.71). The three areas of least improvement are: review of research centres; supervision of research students; and resources and facilities for research students. Table 4 shows respondent feedback on the effectiveness of external quality audit on research and research training.

[Table 4 – see Appendix]

The qualitative feedback suggests that improvements in the research area are due to government policy on assessing research performance. While external audits had limited impact, respondents noted some related improvements included: a review of policies on research; and improved responsiveness to student feedback on the research experience.

In the area of community engagement and administrative support services, respondents were asked to rate the level of improvement as a direct result of external quality audit. The result found limited improvement in community engagement. Two areas showed some improvement - strategy and framework for community engagement (mean 2.45); and resourcing and support for community engagement (mean 2.45). In administrative support, improvements were in: performance development and review processes for staff (mean 2.82); and improved synergy between the library, information technology, flexible and online learning and other student support services (mean 2.66).

In the area of institutional surveys and management information systems, the three greatest improvements were in: the systematic management of surveys and feedback (mean 3.12); improvements as a result of student and staff feedback (mean 2.98); and data and information management capability (mean 2.91).

Effectiveness on Internationalisation

Internationalisation is one area where AUQA audits have resulted in significant improvement. With alarming internationalisation issues raised in the Cycle 1 audit, the Australian Government listed internationalisation as a default theme in almost all Cycle 2 audits. According to Shah, Roth and Nair (2010), external quality audits in Australia have resulted in the closure of offshore programs and partnerships in many universities due to alarming quality assurance problems identified in Cycle 1 audits between 2002 and 2007. Of the respondents in the survey, 53.3% said their university had closed offshore programs as a result of the external quality audit. The findings suggest that the top three areas where improvements have been made in internationalisation as a direct result of external audit are: the development of quality assurance processes for offshore courses/partnerships/contracts (mean 3.47); a process for the review of offshore programs/partners (mean 3.37); and a risk management process for offshore programs (mean 3.19). Two important areas requiring further improvement are resources and support for offshore students (for example, library, learning skills), and induction and cross-cultural training for teaching staff. Studies by Shah, Roth and Nair (2010) suggest that offshore students perceive the quality of teaching and assessments and support services with partner institution in overseas as one of the predictors of offshore student satisfaction. Table 5 shows the results related to internationalisation.

[Table 5 – see Appendix]

Qualitative comments by respondents on recurring areas where external audit has improved internationalisation include: the development of policies and processes to assure quality assurance; university-wide strategies for internationalisation; improved accountability for all offshore operations; improved review processes for offshore programs and partnerships; consistency and equivalence in teaching and assessing outcomes; improved processes of due diligence with offshore partners; internationalisation of the curriculum; measuring and comparing the onshore and offshore student experience and other performance measures; a focus on sustainable partnerships and financial viability scrutiny; and assessment moderation.

The ranking of all items related to core and support services in terms of high to low improvements is presented as Appendix 1. The areas attracting a mean score greater than 3.00 included: internationalisation (mostly offshore); governance, management and quality assurance; learning and teaching; and institutional survey management.

University Satisfaction with the Audit Process

The second aim of the study was to evaluate university satisfaction with the audit process used by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA). Respondents were asked to rate 10 items on a five-point likert scale (1 – low satisfaction, 3 – moderate and 5 – high satisfaction). All items attracted a mean score greater than 3.00. Participants expressed high satisfaction on the processes used by AUQA in its audit. Areas for improvement included: the composition of the audit panel based on the history and character of the institution; and the volume of supporting materials required by AUQA before the audit. Table 6 outlines the results on the satisfaction of the external audit process.

[Table 6 – see Appendix]

The survey asked respondents to identify the best aspect of the audit, as well as areas for improvement. Respondents wrote extensive comments, listing some of the recurring best aspects as: external influence being a significant prompt for improvements in monitoring and responding to student feedback; the opportunity for self review prior to the audit; the triangulation of evidence based on interviews and analysis of information presented; the transparent processes and opportunity for anyone to talk to the auditors; the professionalism of the panel members; and the engagement of staff, students, student unions, alumni, employers and research partners in the audit. Respondents also noted that the process enabled the university to act on areas needing improvement with the fear that a poor outcome in the audit may result in negative media stories. They valued the follow-up on the progress made on relevant affirmations and recommendations, and the risk-based selection of themes in Cycle 2 audits. Others said it was an opportunity for the university to outline its achievements in various areas; and that an external audit with public reporting was a motivation for change.

The recurring areas needing improvement aligned with the quantitative findings of the survey. These included: the volume of supporting materials required; selection of an audit panel with proven experience in the area and their awareness of the university; lack of training and preparedness of some auditors; some recommendations related to things that might happen rather than had happened; a lack of focus on compliance check with national policies and external reference points; a lack of focus on assessing academic standards and outcomes; careful selection of risk-based themes by AUQA is needed rather than relying on the institutions to nominate themes on areas they are doing well to avoid potential exposure; and commissioning improvement projects based on areas where the sector is vulnerable (for example, benchmarking). Several respondents' noted that mock audits should not be encouraged as they are in some cases used to train people on how to answer questions, jeopardising independent judgment of the institution

The Impact of Internal and External Pressures

The final section of the survey asked respondents to rate the extent to which internal and external pressures had impacted on the university. The survey found that universities had been severely affected by university funding, higher education policy changes since 2006, and changes as a result of the external operating environment. A recent study conducted with Vice Chancellors in British universities suggests funding cuts and competitive pressures will precipitate institutional failures and significant restructuring (PA Consulting, 2010). The findings imply that external quality audits had limited impact compared to other internal and external factors. Table 7 shows the result on the impact of various internal and external factors.

[Table 7 – see Appendix]

Analysis of the National Course Experience Questionnaire

The rationale for the foundation of quality management and quality assurance is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency in organisations and the provision of high quality service to customers or users of the service. Quality frameworks are widely used across the world, such as the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) and Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, and focus on output factors such as customer or client satisfaction. Based on the rationale of quality assurance and its evolution from manufacturing to other sectors such as higher education, one would assume that quality assurance and external monitoring would play a key role in improving student satisfaction and the student experience of teaching and course outcomes.

Ten years of external quality audit shows limited evidence of improvement in student satisfaction and experience across the university sector in Australia. Analysis by the author on the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) data from 2000 to 2008 suggests little improvement in three core scales. The CEQ is a national survey of university graduates annually and it gathers graduate experience of the course and graduate employment. The explicit satisfaction (percentage marking 4 and 5) result on the CEQ shows that over the seven-year period, 5.7% improvement was made on the good teaching scale, 1.0% on the generic skills scale and 1.4% improvement in overall satisfaction. Five out of 39 Australian universities have consistently improved satisfaction by over 10% in all three scales.

Conclusion

The findings from this research indicate that external quality audits alone cannot be credited for improving quality assurance in universities. A combination of external quality audit, together with the internal and external operating environment, has significantly contributed to improving quality assurance in universities. Factors such as university funding, changes in government policy in higher education, external operating environments, university restructures and external quality audits have resulted in ongoing improvements in quality assurance.

Ten years of external quality audits and higher education reforms have led to improvements in systems and processes for quality assurance. The main areas of improvements are: internationalisation including offshore programs; university governance; learning and teaching; and the institutional approach to student survey and feedback. Areas with limited improvement are: community engagement; administrative areas; and research and research training.

The findings from this study align with research undertaken in Denmark, Sweden, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Norway and the UK, which show external quality audits have improved systems and processes for quality assurance. This study found that the process used by AUQA in Australia is satisfactory due to its approach of an improvement-led culture. The review of literature also suggests that improvement-led external quality audit has contributed to the enhancement of quality assurance in institutions. In the area of student satisfaction/experience, the study found that external quality audits have had very limited impact. Some universities have experienced trend improvement due to strategies implemented as a direct result of the student voice.

Ongoing studies by the author and the qualitative feedback from this study suggest that external audits have failed to assess education outcomes and standards in Australia. A decade of external audit has mostly focussed on quality assurance systems and processes. The consequence is that where poor outcomes existed in universities, they have been hidden by the excessive concentration on processes, and by a complacency that arises because good processes are easier to achieve than good outcomes. External quality audits in Australia have also failed to ensure university compliance with key national policies and protocols.

Critics and quality practitioners in higher education have positive and negative viewpoints on the external audits. Some critics view quality assurance as an intrusion to academic autonomy, a lack of trust of academics, increased bureaucracy, an increased focus on processes rather than on outcomes and standards, increased emphasis on measures such as student satisfaction (happiness) to assess and reward quality outcomes, and a lack of resources and infrastructure in faculties to achieve quality outcomes. Other critics found that quality assurance and external audits have contributed to improvements in many areas at national, institutional and faculty level. The changing landscape of higher education based on the external operating environment and government reforms will continue to see the rise of external monitoring of quality assurance. Dill (2010) argues that there is no alternative but to adapt to the new environment and strengthen internal quality assurance processes within our institutions by which academic standards can best be assured and improved.

Have AUQA audits improved quality assurance in universities? Has AUQA transformed higher education and improved the student experience? The evidence suggests that audits have improved quality assurance processes in Australian universities. However, there is a lack of evidence to suggest that external audits have transformed quality in Australian higher education and, more importantly, improved the student experience. Some universities that have used audit as a driver for change and improvement have indeed improved the student experience.

Over the last decade, AUQA audits have focussed on processes. This has set a platform for the next phase of quality assurance in Australian higher education. The improvement-led audit has encouraged universities to improve systems and processes for quality assurance.

References for Publication 4

- Anderson, D., Johnson, R. & Milligan, B., 2000, 'Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Australian Higher Education: An Assessment of Australian and International Practice', (Canberra, DETYA). Available online at: http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/highered/eippubs/eip00_1/fullcopy00_1.pdf (accessed 10 December 2010).
- Askling, B., 1997, 'Quality Monitoring as an Institutional Enterprise', *Quality in Higher Education*, 3 (1), pp. 17-26.
- Bradley, D., 2005, 'To What End? The Effectiveness of Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Keynote address at the INQAAHE Biennial Conference', Wellington New Zealand. (29 March).
- Brennan, J., 1997, 'Authority, Legitimacy and Change: The Rise of Quality Assessment in Higher Education', *Higher Education Management*, 9 (1), pp. 7-29.
- Brennan, J. & Shah. T., 2000, *Managing Quality in Higher Education: An International Perspective on Institutional Assessment and Change* (Society for Research into Higher Education, Buckingham, Open University Press).
- Caroll, M. L., 1997, 'Self-audit of Quality in Academic and Service Departments: A Practical Experience', *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 22 (2), pp. 225-232.
- Carr, S., Hamilton, E. & Mead, P., 2005, 'Is it Possible? Investigating the Influence of External Quality Audit on University Performance', *Quality in Higher Education*, 11 (3), pp. 195-211.
- Cheng, M., 2009, 'Academics' Professionalism and Quality Mechanisms: Challenges and Tensions.', *Quality in Higher Education*, 15 (3), pp. 193-205.
- Coates, H., 2005, 'The Value of Student Engagement for Higher Education Quality Assurance', *Quality in Higher Education*, 11 (1), pp. 25-36.
- Commonwealth of Australia. (2008). Selected Higher Education Statistics, Available online at: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Publications/HEStatistics/Publications/Pages/Students.aspx> (accessed 10 December 2010)
- Dill, D. D., 2000, 'Capacity Building as an Instrument of Institutional Reform: Improving the Quality of Higher Education through Academic Audits in the UK, New Zealand, Sweden, and Hong Kong', *Comparative Policy Analysis*, 2 (2), pp. 211-234.
- Dill, D. D., 2010, 'We Can't Go Home Again: Insights from a Quarter Century of Experiments in External Academic Quality Assurance', *Quality and Higher Education*, 16 (2), pp. 159-161.
- Fourie, M. & Alt, H., 2000, 'Challenges to Sustaining and Enhancing Quality of Teaching and Learning in South African Universities', *Quality in Higher Education*, 6 (2), pp. 115-124.
- Gerbic, P. & Kranenburg, I., 2003, 'The Impact of External Approval Processes on Programme Development', *Quality in Higher Education*, 9 (2), pp. 169-177.
- Gift, S.I. & Bell-Hutchinson, C., 2007, 'Quality Assurance and the Imperatives for Improved Students Experiences in Higher Education: The Case of the University of the West Indies', *Quality in Higher Education*, 13 (2), pp. 145-157.
- Gynnild, V., 2007, 'Quality Assurance Reconsidered: A Case Study', *Quality in Higher Education*, 13 (3), pp. 263-273.

-
- Hackman, R.J. & Wageman, R., 1995, 'Total Quality Management, Conceptual and Practical Issues', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40, pp. 309-42.
- Harvey, L. & William, J., 2010, 'Fifteen Years of Quality in Higher Education (Part Two)', *Quality in Higher Education*, 16 (2), pp. 81-113.
- Harvey, L., 2006, 'Impact of Quality Assurance: Overview of a Discussion between Representatives of External Quality Assurance Agencies', *Quality in Higher Education*, 12 (3), pp. 287-290.
- Harvey, L., 2005, 'A History and Critique of Quality Evaluations in the UK', *Quality Assurance in Education*. 13 (4), pp. 263-276.
- Harvey, L., & Newton, J., 2004, 'Transforming Quality Evaluation', *Quality in Higher Education*, 10 (2), pp. 149-165.
- Harvey, L., 2002, 'The End of Quality?', *Quality in Higher Education*, 8 (1), pp. 5-22.
- Harvey, L., 1998, 'An Assessment of Past and Current Approaches to Quality in Higher Education', *Australian Journal of Education*, 42 (3), pp. 237-255.
- Harvey, L., 1999, 'Evaluating the Evaluators', *International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)* conference: Quality without Frontiers, South Africa.
- Horsburgh, M., 1997, 'External Quality Monitoring in New Zealand Tertiary Education', *Quality in Higher Education*, 3 (1), pp. 5-15.
- Kogan, M., Bauer, M., Bleilie, I., & Henkel, M., 2000, *Transforming Higher Education: A Comparative Study* (London: Jessica Kingsley).
- Kristensen, B., 1997, 'The Impact of Quality Monitoring on Institutions: A Danish Experience at the Copenhagen Business School', *Quality in Higher Education*, 3(1), pp. 87-94.
- Kristensen, B., 2010, 'Has External Quality Assurance Actually Improved Quality in Higher Education Over the Course of 20 Years of the 'Quality Revolution'?', *Quality in Higher Education*, 16(2), pp. 153-157.
- Laughton, D., 2003, 'Why was the QAA Approach to Teaching Quality Assessments Rejected by Academics in UK HE?', *Quality in Higher Education*, 28 (3), pp. 321.
- Lemaitre, M.J., 2004, 'Development of External Quality Assurance Schemes: An Answer to the Challenges of Higher Education Evolution', *Quality in Higher Education*, 10 (2), pp. 89-99.
- Massaro, V., 2010, 'Cui Bono? The Relevance and Impact of Quality Assurance', *Higher Education Policy and Management*, 32 (1), pp. 17-26.
- Massy, W., 1999, 'Energizing Quality Work: Higher Education Quality Evaluation in Sweden and Denmark', (Stanford University).
- Meade, P. (1995). 'Utilising the University as a Learning Organisation to Facilitate Quality Improvement', *Quality in Higher Education*, 1 (2), 111 -121.
- Newton, J., 2000, 'Feeding the Beast or Improving Quality? Academics' Perception of Quality Assurance and Quality Monitoring', *Quality in Higher Education*, 6 (2), pp. 153-163.

-
- Newton, J., 2002, 'Views from Below: Academics Coping with Quality', *Quality in Higher Education*, 8 (1), pp. 39-61.
- New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit., 1997, 'Report on the review of Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit'.
- New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit., 2001, 'Report on the review of Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit'.
- PA Consulting Group. (2010). A Passing Storm, or Permanent Climate Change? Vice-chancellors' views on the outlook for universities, Available online at: www.aupo.ac.uk/5036.file.dld (accessed 10 December 2010)
- Rozsnyai, C., 2010, 'The Quality Volution', *Quality in Higher Education*, 16 (1), pp. 77-79.
- Saarinen, T., 1995, 'Systematic Higher Education Assessment and Departmental Impacts: Translating the Effort to meet the needs', *Quality in Higher Education*, 1 (3), pp. 223-234.
- Scott, G., & Hawke, I., 2003, 'Using an External Quality Audit as Lever for Institutional Change', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 28(3), pp. 323-332.
- Scott, G. (2006). Accessing the student voice: Using CEQuery to identify what retains students and promotes engagement in productive learning in Australian higher education. Available online at: http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/access_student_voice.htm (accessed 10 December 2010)
- Shah, M and Grebennikov, L., 2008, 'External Quality Audit as an Opportunity for Institutional Change and Improvement', *Proceedings of the Australian Universities Quality Forum 2008*, (AUQF2007), Canberra, Australia, pp. 98-103.
- Shah, M. & Nair, S., 2010, 'The Influence of Strategy and External Quality Audit on University Performance: An Australian Perspective'. *Journal of Tertiary Education Management*, forthcoming.
- Shah, M., 2010, 'Ten Years of External Quality Audit in Australia: Have Audits Improved Quality Assurance in Universities?'. *Quality Assurance in Education*, forthcoming.
- Shah, M., Wilson, M. & Nair, S., 2010, 'Quality Assurance in Australian Higher Education: Historical and Future Development'. *Journal of Asia Pacific Education Review*, forthcoming
- Shah, M., Roth, K and Nair, S., 2010, 'Improving the Quality of Offshore Student Experience: Findings of a Decade in three Australian Universities', *Proceedings of the Australian International Education Conference 2010*, Sydney, Australia.
- Shah, M. and Nair, S., 2010, 'Monitoring Student Attrition to Enhance Quality', *Journal of Quality and Participation*, 1 (2), pp. 24-30.
- Shah, M. and Widin, J., 2010, 'Indigenous Students' Voices: Monitoring Indigenous Student Satisfaction and Retention in a Large Australian University'. *Journal of Institutional Research*, 15 (1), pp. 28-40.
- Shah, M. and Nair, S., 2011, 'Trends in the Quality of the Student Experience: An International Perspective based on Studies in three Universities'. *Proceedings of the International Engineering and Technology Education Conference*, (IETEC), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, forthcoming.

-
- Silva, M., Reich, R. & Gallegos, G., 1997, 'Effects of External Quality Evaluation in Chile: A Preliminary Study', *Quality in Higher Education*, 3 (1), pp. 27-35.
- Singh, M., 2010, 'Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Which Past to Build on, What Futures to Contemplate'. *Quality in Higher Education*, 16 (2), pp. 189-194.
- Smeby, J.C. & Stensaker, B., 1999, 'National Quality Assessment Systems in the Nordic Countries: Developing a Balance between External and Internal Needs?', *Higher Education Policy*. 12 (1), pp. 3-14.
- Stella, A. & Liston, C. (2008). Internationalisation of Australian Universities: Learning from cycle 1 Audits. AUQA Occasional publication, Available online at: <http://www.auqa.edu.au/qualityenhancement/publications/occasional/publications/> (accessed 10 December 2010).
- Stensaker, B., 2003, 'Trance, Transparency and Transformation: The Impact of External Monitoring on Higher Education'. *Quality in Higher Education*, 9 (2), pp. 152-159.
- Stensaker, B., 1997, 'Prefekter om Effekter – en Studie av Auditprosesser i Sverige (Department Heads on the Effects of Audit – A Study of Audit Processes in Sweden)', (Stockholm, Hogskoleverket).
- Thune, C., 1996, 'The Alliance of Accountability and Improvement: The Danish Experience', *Quality in Higher Education*, 2 (1), pp. 21-32.
- Vught Van, F.A. & Westerheijden, D.F., 1994, 'Towards a General Model of Quality Assessment in Higher Education', *Higher Education*, 28 (3), pp. 355-371.
- Weusthof, P.J.M., 1995, 'Internal Quality Assurance in Dutch Universities: An Empirical Analysis of Characteristics and Results of Self-Evaluation', *Quality in Higher Education*, 1 (3), pp. 235-248.
- Wahlen, S., 2004, 'Does National Quality Monitoring Make a Difference?', *Quality in Higher Education*, 10 (2), pp. 139-147.
- Wickham, S., Coetzee, G., Jones, B., & Metcalfe, A., 2007, 'HEQC Evaluative Study of Institutional Audits 2006', Pretoria: Higher Education Quality Council. Available online at: <http://www.che.ac.za/documents/d000144/> (accessed 10 December 2010).
- Wilson, B., 1996, 'Quality in Universities'. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 18 (2), pp. 149-158.
- Woodhouse, D. and Meade, P., 2000, 'Evaluating the Effectiveness of the New Zealand Academic Audit Unit: Review and Outcomes', *Quality in Higher Education*, 6 (1), pp. 19-29.

Tables for Publication 4

Table 1: Effectiveness of External Quality Audits

Participant views about external quality audit:	Mean	% Explicit Satisfaction	Ranking
I believe that AUQA audits have improved quality assurance in my university	3.91	86.7%	2
I believe that AUQA audits, together with internal and external operating environment, have played a key role in improving quality assurance in my university	4.09	88.9%	1
I believe that AUQA audits have improved student satisfaction/experience in my university	2.78	28.9%	4
Preparation for cycle 2 audits have played key roles in improving various systems and process for quality assurance in my university	3.56	68.9%	3

Table 2: Level of Improvement in Governance, Strategic Planning and Quality Management

Governance, Strategic Planning and Quality Management	Mean	% Explicit Satisfaction	Ranking
Strategic planning process	2.98	35.6%	6
Alignment of strategic plan with operational and functional plans	3.14	42.2%	4
Quality assurance framework and implementation	3.40	55.6%	1
Self assessment of the Council, Academic Senate and university level committees	2.93	35.6%	7
Reporting on key performance indicators	3.30	53.3%	2
Review processes and improvement	3.30	53.3%	2
Benchmarking	3.07	37.8%	5
Consultation/communication with staff, students and the other stakeholders	3.21	46.7%	3
Management of university entities	2.67	33.3%	8
Financial management	2.56	24.4%	9

Table 3: Level of Improvement in Learning and Teaching

Learning and Teaching	Mean	% Explicit Satisfaction	Ranking
Consistent implementation of academic policies	2.83	26.7%	6
Quality assurance process for course development and approval	3.14	46.7%	1
Quality management of student assessments	2.71	28.9%	8
Embedding graduate attributes in the curriculum	2.95	37.8%	4
Role of learning and teaching committees	2.62	24.4%	9
External advice on course development	2.76	28.9%	7
Academic program reviews	3.07	44.4%	3
Tracking performance in learning and teaching	3.12	48.9%	2
Reward for quality teaching (individual, school and faculty)	2.86	33.3%	5
Learning and teaching outcomes	2.95	42.2%	4

Table 4: Level of Improvement in Research and Research Training

Research and Research Training	Mean	% Explicit Satisfaction	Ranking
Supervision of research students	2.59	26.7%	5
Support for research students	2.68	20.0%	4
Resources and facilities for research students	2.59	17.8%	5
Support for early career researchers and ongoing professional development	2.71	28.9%	3
Review of research centres	2.51	20.0%	6
Tracking performance in research	2.83	35.6%	2
Research and research training outcomes	2.90	42.2%	1

Table 5: Level of Improvement in Internationalisation

Internationalisation	Mean	% Explicit Satisfaction	Ranking
A processes for marketing, admissions and credit transfer	3.16	55.6%	4
Induction and cross-cultural training for teaching staff	2.95	35.6%	7
Quality assurance processes for offshore course/ partnership/contracts	3.47	53.3%	1
Process for the review of offshore program/partner	3.37	48.9%	2
Consistency and equivalence of teaching and courses (onshore and offshore)	3.05	37.8%	6
Risk management process for offshore programs	3.19	46.7%	3
Resources and support for offshore students (library, learning skills etc.)	2.88	28.9%	8
International student satisfaction	3.07	40.0%	5

Table 6: Satisfaction on the External Audit Process

Overall Satisfaction on the External Quality Audit Process	Mean	% Explicit Satisfaction	Ranking
The external quality audit process conducted by AUQA	3.43	60.0%	6
Panel composition based on the history and characteristic of your institution	3.09	46.75	9
Advice and guidance by the Audit Director of the external quality agency	3.68	71.1%	2
External quality agency website and resources available	3.57	60.0%	5
Communication with the external quality agency before, during and after the audit	3.64	71.1%	3
Preparatory visit by the Panel Chair and Audit Director	3.75	75.6%	1
Request for additional material	3.11	44.4%	8
Offshore visits	3.25	46.7%	7
Main audit visit	3.61	71.1%	4
Final audit report	3.68	68.9%	2

Table 7: Internal and External Factors and its Impact

Major Impact on Institution in the last five years	Mean	% Explicit Satisfaction	Ranking
External quality audits by AUQA	3.12	44.4%	5
Higher education policy change such as (Outcomes of Backing Australia's future and Post Bradley reforms)	3.95	66.7%	2
Changes as a result of the external operating environment	3.79	60.0%	3
Funding for your university	4.00	64.4%	1
Ongoing restructures in the university	3.58	57.8%	4

Appendix 1

Ranking on the level of Improvement (high – low)

Item no	Items in Rank Order (High to Low mean score)	Mean	% Explicit Satisfaction	Area of Focus
1	Quality assurance processes for offshore course/partnership/contracts	3.47	53.3	International
2	Quality assurance framework and implementation	3.40	55.6	Governance
3	Process for the review of offshore program/partner	3.37	48.9	International
4	Reporting on key performance indicators	3.30	53.3	Governance
5	Review processes and improvement	3.30	53.3	Governance
6	Consultation/communication with staff, students and the other stakeholders	3.21	46.7	Governance
7	Risk Management process for offshore programs	3.19	46.7	International
8	A processes for marketing, admissions and credit transfer	3.16	55.6	International
9	Quality assurance process for course development & approval	3.14	46.7	Learning & teaching
10	Alignment of strategic plan with operational and functional plans	3.14	42.2	Governance
11	Tracking performance in learning and teaching	3.12	48.9	Learning & teaching
12	Systematic management of surveys and feedback	3.12	44.4	Survey
13	Academic program reviews	3.07	44.4	Learning & teaching
14	International student satisfaction	3.07	40.0	International
15	Benchmarking	3.07	37.8	Governance
16	Consistency and equivalence of teaching and courses (onshore and offshore)	3.05	37.8	International
17	Strategic planning process	2.98	35.6	Governance
18	Improvements as a result of student and staff feedback	2.98	28.9	Survey
19	Induction and cross cultural training for teaching staff	2.95	35.6	International
20	Embedding graduate attributes in the curriculum	2.95	37.8	Learning & teaching
21	Learning and teaching outcomes	2.95	42.2	Learning & teaching
22	Self assessment of the Council, Academic Senate and university level committees	2.93	35.6	Governance
23	Data and information management capability	2.91	31.1	Survey
24	Research and research training outcomes	2.90	42.2	Research
25	Resources and support for offshore students (library, learning skills etc.)	2.88	28.9	International
26	Reward for quality teaching (individual, school and faculty)	2.86	33.3	Learning & teaching
27	Consistent implementation of academic policies	2.83	26.7	Learning & teaching
28	Tracking performance in research	2.83	35.6	Research
29	Performance development and review process	2.82	31.1	Administration
30	External advice on course development	2.76	28.9	Learning & teaching
31	Quality management of student assessments	2.71	28.9	Learning & teaching
32	Support for early career researchers and ongoing professional development	2.71	28.9	Research
33	Support for research students	2.68	20.0	Research
34	Management of university entities	2.67	33.3	Governance
35	Synergy between library, IT, flexible learning and other student support services	2.66	31.1	Administration
36	Role of learning and teaching committees	2.62	24.4	Learning & teaching
37	Training and professional development of staff	2.59	28.9	Administration
38	Supervision of research students	2.59	26.7	Research
39	Resources and facilities for research students	2.59	17.8	Research
40	Financial management	2.56	24.4	Governance
41	Review of research centres	2.51	20.0	Research
42	Workforce development and succession strategy	2.50	28.9	Administration
43	Resourcing of student support services	2.50	22.2	Administration
44	Strategy and framework for community engagement	2.45	22.2	Engagement
45	Resourcing and support for community engagement	2.45	24.4	Engagement
46	Leadership in community engagement	2.40	22.2	Engagement
47	Workload management	2.37	24.4	Administration
48	Outcomes in community engagement	2.18	13.3	Engagement
49	Incentives for staff involved in community engagement activities	2.15	11.1	Engagement
50	Key performance indicators for community engagement	2.15	13.3	Engagement

Publication 5

External Quality Audit as an Opportunity for Institutional Change and Improvement

^aMahsood Shah and ^bLeonid Grebennikov

^a Senior Project Officer, University of Western Sydney, Australia

^b Institutional Research Analyst, University of Western Sydney, Australia

Abstract

There is limited evidence regarding whether external quality audits contribute to strategic change and improvement in universities. The majority of literature on the subject is anecdotal and reflects two opposite viewpoints. First, audits do not contribute to institutional improvement and enhancement of student learning experience. Second, audits, if managed effectively and aligned well with internal systems and processes, may motivate universities to self-assess and improve their core business and services.

This paper outlines the steps taken by the University of Western Sydney to effectively prepare for the External Quality Audit by the Australian Universities Quality Agency in 2006, with the view to use this audit as a lever for internal change and improvement. The areas where improvement was needed were identified in the process of the audit preparation through the University-wide self assessment, internal reviews, tracking performance data and the outcomes of the trial audit. Further, based on the comparison of the University performance data from various sources before and after the audit the paper concludes that audits can be used as a lever for institutional change and can contribute to measurable improvement.

Keywords: External quality audit, institutional change and improvement

Quality management at UWS

Some relatively older Australian universities, such as those in the “Group of Eight”, have had their systems for strategic planning and quality assurance in place for a long time. The University of Western Sydney (UWS) with its history of structural change has had to establish such systems relatively recently. In 2001 after the mergers with three member institutions UWS established the Office of Planning and Quality (OPQ) in order to coordinate University quality management initiatives, provide advice on strategic planning and review activities, provide information for tracking and improving performance, and manage complaints. In 2003-2004 UWS developed and implemented its first strategic plans, covering Learning and Teaching, Research, and Community Engagement.

Preparation for the 2006 Australian Universities Quality Agency Audit

In December 2005 the University was formally notified by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) of its intention to audit UWS in October 2006. The audit was to involve three onshore site visits to UWS campuses and three offshore visits to UWS presences in China, Hong Kong and Singapore. The University adopted a number of strategies in its preparation for the AUQA audit.

Leadership

UWS started its preparations for the audit by appointing a new Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC), Quality who led the audit process. The University formed a Strategy and Quality Committee which included all University senior staff.

Communication

In order to promote awareness among the University community of the approaching audit and to keep people in the loop, various communication strategies were used. The PVC, Quality visited all colleges, schools, research centres, entities, administrative units and student associations. The “listen, link and lead” approach was effectively used while discussing quality issues raised by staff and students during these visits. In this approach “listen” involved asking people to identify areas they saw as needing improvement and improvement strategies they perceived as being relevant and feasible; “link” meant bringing those strategies together into a plan of action which was, therefore, “owned” by those who were to implement it; and “lead” meant giving targeted support to these people to learn the “gaps” in their expertise which need to be addressed to make the change work, along with working with them to monitor and refine the pilot versions of different solutions before scaling them up. In total these visits allowed the PVC, Quality to meet more than 1,800 people across the University.

The AUQA audit was one of the standing agenda items at all University and college level committee meetings. These meetings were attended by the PVC, Quality or a delegated staff member. The University also appointed an Associate PVC, Quality, which is unique in the sector, to assist the PVC, Quality. The Associate PVC, Quality introduced a Heads of Program network around the University. This network was set up to provide peer-support for those front-line staff who actually put each quality improvement action into daily practice. The University organised two campus forums at each of its six campuses before the audit to ensure that staff and students were informed about it.

University-wide self assessment and reviews

In 2004-2005 the University conducted a quality self assessment of all academic and administrative units including research centres, entities and student associations. Key issues that emerged from the self assessment data were discussed by the Strategy and Quality Committee, and the areas warranting improvement were signed off. For example, the discussion resulted in the conception and realization of the UWS Retention Project (Shah, Grebennikov & Singh, 2007) and the UWS Assessment Project, which is currently underway. Apart from the self assessment, in 2004 the University conducted a review of its offshore programs, and in 2005 the UWS Community Engagement review which resulted in the development of the UWS Community Engagement database.

Further, as a result of this self assessment the University implemented the Tracking and Improvement system for Learning and Teaching (TILT). The system integrates a series of data gathering tools, such as student, staff and community surveys, and performance reports into an overall diagnosis of areas of good practice and areas where improvement is needed. TILT was introduced in 2005 as part of quality management at UWS to ensure that stakeholder feedback is gathered, analysed and reported to the University community, and that improvement actions are efficient.

Improvement priorities

Based on the University-wide quality self assessment, 2004-2005 reviews, and the analyses of student, staff and community feedback using TILT, the University identified several improvement priorities including:

- Learning and teaching (investment in online and flexible learning);
- Retention Project (identification of areas most important to student retention in the unique context of UWS with subsequent critical examination and improvement action);
- Assessment and unit outlines (consistency and equivalence in assessment and unit outlines at multiple teaching locations including offshore);
- Consistency of student services at all campuses (investment in student services and support at all six campus to ensure comparable standard of student experience);
- Library services for offshore students (improvement in access to library collections for offshore students as suggested by the 2005 Offshore Student Satisfaction Survey outcomes);
- Effective management of information system (production of annual courses reports with performance data for 12 areas at University, college and course specific level);
- Quality assurance for offshore programs (development and implementation of quality assurance guidelines for offshore programs and partners);
- Community engagement (development of a framework for community engagement including the appointment of Associate Dean, Engagement in each College to provide leadership);
- Human resources (development of effective University-wide human resources strategy which includes induction, professional development, performance management, reward and succession strategy);
- Improved synergy between academic and support services (e.g., Academic units, Student Support Services, Information Technology, Library, Capital Works and Facilities).

The above improvement projects were lead by senior staff members and progress was reported to the Strategy and Quality Committee.

Keeping students in the loop on improvements

The University communicated the improvement priorities to all students via the posters “Feedback – it counts” which included the improvement actions agreed by the relevant divisional heads. The posters outlined the improvements planned or underway to enhance student experience based on the feedback from a range of surveys integrated by TILT. The posters were placed on the UWS e-learning portal, the OPQ website and across all campuses at locations most popular among students.

Quality audit informational resources

While the above processes were underway OPQ liaised with several universities, which had completed the AUQA audits, in order to learn from their experience. Networking with the audited universities was very helpful for UWS in terms of planning the forthcoming audit and discussing areas for improvement. The AUQA audit reports from 33 universities completed by October 2006 were analysed and summarised in the document titled “AUQA Audit Themes” which was continuously updated as more AUQA audit reports were made public.

Trial audit

The trial audit was held between 1-3 May 2006. In total the trial audit panel spoke with 210 staff, students and board members. There was very positive feedback from all participants on the approach used by the university to prepare for the trial audit. The participants saw the outcomes of the briefing and debriefing sessions on the day as an additional and important source of self-assessment data, along with the areas of good practice and improvement identified by the trial audit panel itself.

The University found the trial audit very useful. It complimented the UWS own self-assessment and various reviews undertaken earlier. This aligns well with findings of Winchester (2003) who surveyed nine Australian universities audited in 2002 on the benefits of the trial audit. All nine institutions reported that the trial audits were extremely useful components of their self-review processes.

Using external audit as a lever for internal improvement: UWS experience

As argued by Scott and Hawke (2003), a unique benefit of an external quality audit for a university is the extrinsic motivation it provides for that university to document, critique and enhance its internal capability for continuous quality assurance, improvement and innovation. Similar conclusions were reached in a number of studies reviewing university audit processes overseas, for example in South Africa (Wickham, Coetzee, Jones, & Metcalfe, 2007), Denmark (Kristensen, 1997), United Kingdom, New Zealand, Sweden and Hong Kong (Dill, 2000). Other researchers (Harvey, 2002; Newton, 2000) argue that there is no evidence that external quality audits have positive impacts on student learning experience. A large study on change processes in higher education in the UK, Sweden and Norway during the 1990s found that external quality audits contributed to increased “bureaucratisation” (Kogan, Bauer, Bleilie, & Henkel, 2000).

The UWS experience shows that the upcoming AUQA audit motivated the University to self-assess and improve its core business and support services. Normally this happens as part of formal review processes, however, the effective use of the external driver lead to improvement or innovation as direct results of review outcomes. Some examples of such improvements at UWS resulted from both the preparations for and the process of the AUQA audit include:

- development of a range of tracking, reporting and improvement systems, which might have been developed anyway, but the speed of development and their uptake were definitely enhanced;
- development of a more evidence based culture of decision-making;
- implementing improvement projects as a direct result of reviews and stakeholder feedback;
- fostering active engagement in benchmarking with similar institutions;
- more coordinated, systematic and consistent approach to planning and review across UWS Colleges and divisions;
- University-wide Retention Project implemented in 2004-2006 and resulted in a 4.2% improvement in overall retention and a 3.9% increase for first year undergraduate students;
- University wide implementation of quality management of assessments;
- improved engagement with student associations and University entities;
- formation of network groups (e.g., Head of Program Network) to provide peer-support for those staff who put each improvement project into daily practice;
- centralised and effective management of offshore programs and partnerships;
- improved synergy between various support services, such as library, IT and student support;
- strengthening the role of OPQ to facilitate planning, reviews and improvement;
- development of a quality management framework for University-community engagement.

Is there evidence of improvements?

Having acknowledged that the varied impacts that external quality reviews have on universities are not easy to measure, Harvey (2006) summarises such impacts as “changes evident from one review to the next; improvements in performance indicators; adoption of formal internal quality processes by institutions; student feedback indicating positive changes and employer perceptions about the improvement in graduate abilities” (p. 287). Consistent with this, the UWS experience appears to suggest that external quality assurance, aligned with effective internal processes, can enhance the core business of the University. Table 1 presents a range of University performance data before and after the AUQA audit. As shown in the table, the University has made positive progress in such areas as stakeholder satisfaction in learning and teaching, research, international student experience, Indigenous student satisfaction, and community engagement.

Table 1: Tracking Performance Before and After the AUQA Audit

Performance measure	Before AUQA audit			After AUQA audit
	2004	2005	2006	2007
Retention rate (%)	74.3	73.2	76.8	77.4
<i>Student Satisfaction Survey</i> Overall Satisfaction (mean)	3.34	-	-	3.71
<i>Course Experience Questionnaire</i> All scales (% scoring 4 or 5 i.e. max)	46.4	51.3	52.5	54.3
Generic Skills (% scoring 4 or 5)	54.5	61.5	62.0	63.5
Good Teaching (% scoring 4 or 5)	41.7	44.1	45.4	45.6
Overall Satisfaction (% scoring 4 or 5)	55.4	62.0	61.7	65.6
<i>Student Feedback on Units</i> Overall Satisfaction (mean)	-	Sem 1- 3.8 Sem 1- 3.8	Sem 1- 3.9 Sem 1- 3.9	Sem 2- 3.9 Sem 2- 3.9
<i>Research Student Satisfaction Survey</i> All performance items (mean)		3.31		3.54
Overall Satisfaction (mean)		3.64		3.89
<i>International Student Survey</i> (% first choice UWS)	-	-	57.0	58.0
<i>Employer Survey</i> (% better or much better quality of the UWS graduates compared to those from other universities)	13.0	-	-	23.9
<i>Survey of Indigenous Student Experience</i> All performance items (mean)			3.52	3.53
Overall Satisfaction (mean)			3.35	3.80
<i>Retention Survey (% OK/good/excellent)</i> Quick and convenient enrolment		67.5	78.2	
Handling of administrative problems		47.3	61.7	
Experience using WebCT		91.2	96.2	

Lessons learnt from the audit

The trial and the actual AUQA audits at UWS appeared to be very well organised and coordinated. The Office of Planning and Quality received praise notes from various participants including the audit board members, staff and students on the audit organisation and administration. OPQ was commended by the Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Award in 2006 for its professional service. At the same time, there are lessons learnt from the audit that might be valuable to other institutions expecting a similar external review in the near future. These lessons include:

- Having a Project Manager who is responsible for the entire audit process with good secretarial and administrative support. The Project Manager should be familiar with the University operations, quality management in higher education and also with the AUQA audit process itself.
- The trial audit has to include offshore partners and programs. Neither the UWS trial audit nor the UWS Review of Offshore programs included offshore visits to review offshore quality assurance processes, visiting partners and students.
- The design of the performance portfolio, including the selections of art work and pictures should be done before the trial audit. This would allow the designers to spend more time on enhancing the designs and layout of the final document.
- It appears important to visit each venue at least two-three months before the audit. This would allow the assessment of the interview rooms and requests for refurbishment if required.
- While both undergraduate and postgraduate student associations helped OPQ in the audit preparations, an area for improvement could be organising campus forums with students on quality issues and engaging them more effectively.
- Ensure that the performance portfolio and supplementary materials provide an accurate reflection of activities and that all statements are evidence based. This aligns well with the Curtin University of Technology AUQA audit experience (Adams, 2003).
- Discussion with other multi-campus institutions that have already been audited (onshore and offshore) would facilitate sharing of experiences. UWS experience also shows that networking with staff from other universities involved in AUQA audit preparations is very useful;
- Using the AUQA Progress Report as a mean to consistently address areas where improvement is needed and to gain momentum.

References for Publication 5

- Adams, R. (2003). Lessons and benefits from the AUQA audit process at Curtin University of Technology. *Proceedings of the Australian universities Quality Forum 2003*. Melbourne: AUQA (50-56).
- Dill, D. (2000). Capacity building as an instrument of institutional reform: Improving the quality of tertiary education through academic audits in the UK, New Zealand, Sweden and Hong King. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis, Research and Practice*, 2, 211-234.
- Harvey, L. (2002). The end of quality? *Quality in Higher Education*, 8(1), 5-22.
- Harvey, L. (2006). Impact of quality assurance: Overview of a discussion between representatives of external quality assurance agencies. *Quality in Higher Education*, 12 (3), 287-290.
- Kogan, M., Bauer, M., Bleilie, I., & Henkel, M. (2000). *Transforming Higher Education: A Comparative Study*. London: Jessica Kinsley.
- Kristensen, B. (1997). The impact of quality monitoring on institutions: A Danish experience at the Copenhagen Business School. *Quality in Higher Education*, 3(1), 87-94.
- Newton, J. (2000). Feeding the beast or improving quality?: Academics' perceptions of quality assurance and quality monitoring. *Quality in Higher Education*, 6(2), 154-163.
- Scott, G., & Hawke, I. (2003). Using an external quality audit as lever for institutional change. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 28(3), 323-332.
- Shah, M., Grebennikov, L., & Singh, H. (2007). Does retention matter? Improving student retention: A UWS case study. *The Proceedings of the Australasian Association for Institutional Research 2007 Forum*. Sydney, 28-30 November. Available at <http://www.aair.org.au/jir/2007Papers/Index.html>
- Wickham, S., Coetzee, G., Jones, B., & Metcalfe, A. (2007). *HEQC Evaluative Study of Institutional Audits 2006*. Pretoria: Higher Education Quality Council.
- Winchester, H. (2003). Self review and trial audit or dress rehearsal: Preparations for AUQA audit undertaken by Australian Universities in 2002. *Proceedings of the Australian universities Quality Forum 2003*. Melbourne: AUQA (42-45).

Publication 6

Measuring the Impact of External Quality Audit on Universities

Can External Quality Audit be Credited for Improvements and Enhancement in Student Learning? How can we measure?

^aMahsood Shah, ^bIvan Skaines & ^cJo Miller

^{a & b}Office of Planning & Quality, University of Western, Sydney (UWS)

^cCorporate Services, Central Queensland University (CQU)

Abstract

This paper presents a brief review of literature on the impact of external quality audit on universities. It presents the thoughts of many higher education professionals who have responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement. The paper presents both national and international perspectives. Secondly the presenters of the paper will provide several possible strategies to carry out an impact study and participants will be invited to critique the proposed strategies and engage in discussion about how to measure the impact of external quality audit on universities. There will also be an opportunity for participants to discuss the impact of external quality audit on their own institutions.

The review of literature on the impact of an external quality audit brings together the findings of various writers on impact studies. The sources of information used include: journal articles, research findings and review reports of various quality audit agencies. The review of literature is based on the Australian, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Swedish, Denmark and Hong Kong experiences. It is worth noting that external quality audit in these countries are at different stages. Attachment one provides an analysis of the impact of external quality audit in various contexts.

It would be worthwhile to first define what external quality audit means and how it differs from internal reviews and audits within an institution. An external quality audit is an independent audit aimed at checking whether the organisation is structured to achieve its objectives; or whether, on the contrary, the objectives are simply theoretical or public-relations statement, unrelated to the way in which the organisation goes about its business. The aim of the external quality audit is to identify areas of good practice, areas where improvement is needed and to develop systems and processes for effective quality management. External quality audit also provides benchmarking possibilities and informs the government on the quality standards of the institution. External quality audit involves independent panel members auditing an institution's overall activities such as: governance, learning and teaching, research, community engagement, internationalisation, human resources, support and infrastructure, commercial entities and other activities the institution undertakes in its name.

Literature Review

Askling, (1997) discusses the impact of external quality monitoring on internal strategic management and quality enhancement. She concludes that external evaluation is only one of several factors influencing institutional quality enhancement. Other demands come from, for example, increase in the number of students, growing diversity in terms of previous knowledge, and the need for external funding. Swedish experience shows that developing a culture of systematic quality improvement across an institution is a long process (Wahlen, 2004). Research on the impact of quality monitoring is difficult because it is impossible to control all relevant factors to be able to map causal relationships (Harvey & Newton, 2004). There is little explicit evaluation within institutions of the impact of changes made as a result of quality assessment. Evaluation of impact is difficult because of the complexity and pace of change in most institutions (Brennan, Fredericks & Shah, 1997). There are methodological problems attached to studying the effects of the many external audit initiatives (Stensaker, 2003) and measuring impact is complicated due to universities' complex forms of information-processing and decision-making traditions (Weusthof, 1995).

Massy, (1999) also points out that it is a mistake to say that evaluations have transformed higher education in Sweden and Denmark. Universities are too complex, their governance systems too convoluted, and their faculties too traditional for real transformation to take place in only a few years. Various studies do not provide us with the full picture of the many effects related to external quality audit. While there are positive claims, such as increased attention to teaching and learning and signs of cultural change occurring, studies have also shown that the money spent on external quality audit outweighs potential benefit and various evaluation and monitoring systems trigger greater centralisation and more 'bureaucratisation' (Stensaker, 2003). Brennan & Shah, (2000), suggest that there are three types of impact: impact through reward, impact through changing policies and impact through changing higher education culture. So far the answer to the question whether external quality audit has transformed higher education has been ambiguous and not very positive when it comes to quality improvement. The findings support claims from the organisational theorist Henry Mintzberg that change seeps in by the slow process of changing the professions (Mintzberg, 1983).

Harvey, (1999) suggests that impact studies can fall under three broad types. The first type includes 'opinionated' or 'theoretical' analyses which tends to 'predict' the likely impact (Wilson, 1996). The second type is based on limited evidence, much of it is anecdotal (Harvey, 1998). The third type is analysed based on systematic data collection (Harvey, 1999). A study at Sheffield Hallam University by Harvey, Brown & Leman sought academics' perceptions of the different external monitoring processes in England. They found that some processes, notably external examination, were perceived as providing a check on standards, however there was little support for the view that *external quality evaluation improved the student learning experience* (Harvey, Brown & Leman, 2003).

Harvey, 2006 also conducted a workshop at the 2006 International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) in The Netherlands. His discussion with representatives from various countries of external quality assurance agencies focused upon the impact of quality assurance. The following change was mentioned:

1. things change from one review to another given that agencies undertake follow ups to see if recommendations are implemented.
2. tracking of performance indicators suggest improvements are following in the wake of quality assurance processes. Such indicators include: retention, graduations, graduate employment, and employability attributes e.t.c.
3. internal reviews as part of quality management system and establishment of quality office or responsible person.
4. surveys of institutions on the benefits of external audit.
5. self assessment report and improvements as a result.
6. outcomes of student satisfaction surveys and student engagement.
7. graduate survey on their preparedness of the demands of the industry/profession.

-
8. employers satisfaction with university graduates and their preparedness for the world of work and community satisfaction.
 9. cost and benefit analysis.

To this point the paper has reviewed the literature on the impact of external quality audit. It is worthwhile to provide some analysis of the impact of external quality audit in New Zealand and United Kingdom (UK) where audits have progressed at different stages. The New Zealand experience highlights the positive contributions external quality audit has made to the higher education sector. The report on the review of the New Zealand University Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU) in 1997 and 2001 highlights that the audit process has been effective in encouraging a cultural shift in the universities with respect to quality matters, although this has been uneven across the sector. However, there is a broad acknowledgement within the universities that positive benefits have resulted and the outcomes have been worth the cost. Overall, external quality audits in New Zealand have provided a stimulus for reform resulting in many initiatives.

There is little doubt that external quality audit has an impact upon institutions in the UK. It has provided an impetus for institutions to give more attention to the quality of their teaching. On the down side it has used a lot of time and resource and caused some stress. The first cycle of audit outcomes in the UK resulted in more than 50 items of negative media coverage about the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and outcomes of the audit reports. Several prestigious universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, challenged the QAA and its audit process (THES, 2000 and 2001). The first cycle of AUQA audits in Australia resulted in twenty-four critical, four mixed and seven constructive media stories about the outcomes of audits.

The cost of the first cycle of quality audits in the UK was approximately £250 million a year for the sector and £80,000 – £100,000 for an audit (THES, 2000). An analysis by the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee (AVCC) in 2002 of seven universities audited by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) shows that universities had spent between \$350,000 to \$852,000 in audit preparations. This includes both direct and indirect costs related to the audit preparations. Assuming that each university spent an average of \$426,000, this means that approximately \$16 million is spent on AUQA audit preparation by 38 Australian universities.

An analysis of twenty five progress reports of Australian universities shows that institutions have actioned 527 affirmations and recommendations and there are 1599 actions underway. The external review report of AUQA dated May 2006 suggests that there is evidence from feedback by the higher education sector, that AUQA has had a positive impact in raising the awareness of quality matters, in developing a commitment to quality and quality enhancement across the sector, and also showcasing good practice within the sector (AUQA, 2006). Based on the Australian experience it is predicted that the second cycle of audits will provide more evidence as to whether external quality audits has resulted in positive outcomes in the institutions core business and impact on student learning.

Conclusion

The literature review and the New Zealand and United Kingdom experience shows that external quality audit has made both positive and negative impact on the sector. The experience from different countries also tells us that it is possible to measure the impact of the external quality audit using both qualitative and quantitative data. However such analysis should be undertaken in countries like New Zealand and UK and others where audits are in their second or third cycle and recommendations coming out of the audits have been acted upon.

It is important to note that the outcome of the external quality audit and actions/improvement is a single factor contributing towards institutional improvement. Most institutions change and improve due to external and internal environment such as: increased student demand and diversity, competition, innovation and use of technology and many others. Many institutions already have internal quality management systems such as planning, reviews and improvement as part of the

planning and quality framework. In most cases internal or external reviews initiated by institutions are for the purpose of change and improvement. Having said that, external quality audit can be very effective and can be used as a lever for internal institutional change and improvement. Such change and improvement can only be strengthened if the follow up audit is focused on checking the progress an institution has made on the audit recommendations and effective use of tracking data from one audit to another on the institutional performance in various areas.

It is yet to be seen as to how the second cycle of AUQA audits unfolds in Australia from 2008 and how institutions learn from previous audits in both the national and international context. Recent media reports highlighting a number of issues that have emerged after two years of the audit recommendations and progress reports to AUQA have raised a number of questions such as:

1. To what extent is AUQA going to review the progress on affirmations and recommendations which came out the first cycle?
2. Is AUQA only going to review the progress report of institutions or are they going to look at evidence on whether the actions taken has had positive impact on the institution?
3. Is AUQA going to look at tracking data on institutional performance from cycle 1 to cycle 2 audits?
4. How is AUQA going to measure whether the first cycle of audit and its outcomes has had positive impact on student learning,
5. What would AUQA do if there is no evidence of progress made by institutions?
6. Is AUQA going to review how effectively institutions have closed the loop on the forward actions or improvement priorities which universities have mentioned in their performance portfolio in the first cycle?

Participant discussion- Way forward

- Participant experience on the impact of an external quality audit on their institution.
- Engaging participants in discussion on various ways to conduct impact studies.
- Getting participants to critique on proposed methodology to conduct impact study.

Proposed method

Survey of all quality contacts around Australian and New Zealand universities. Survey items will be related to the themes coming out of the Australian and New Zealand audits. Rating on (how important each item is on the effective operation of the university and performance as a result of the audit).

Secondly use one or several universities as a case study and review the outcome of the audit by monitoring trend data on various performance indicators before and 2-3 years after the audit. Also look at student surveys like national Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ), student satisfaction, employee, employer, community survey results.

References for Publication 6

- Askling, B. (1997). Quality monitoring as an institutional enterprise. *Quality in Higher Education*, 3 (1), 17-26.
- AUQA, (2006). Review of the Australian Universities Quality Agency. Final report, May 2006 from AUQA website: <http://www.auqa.edu.au/aboutauqa/externalreview/index.shtml>
- Brennan, J., Fredericks, M., & Shah, T. (1997). Improving the quality of education: The impact of quality assessment on institutions, Higher Education Funding Council of England, July 1997.
- Brennan, S., & Shah, T. (2000). Managing Quality in Higher Education: An international perspective on institutional assessment and change.
- Dill, D. (2000). Designing Academic Audit: lessons learned in Europe and Asia, 6 (3), 187-207.
- Harvey, L., & Newton, J. (2004). Transforming quality evaluation. *Quality in Higher Education*, 10 (2), 149-165.
- Harvey, L. (1998). An assessment of past and current approaches to quality in higher education, *Australian Journal of Education*, 42 (3), 237-255.
- Harvey, L. (1999). Evaluating the evaluators, International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQA/AHE) conference: Quality without frontiers, South Africa.
- Harvey, L. (2006). Impact of quality assurance: Overview of a discussion between representatives of external quality assurance agencies. *Quality in Higher Education*, 12 (3), 287-290.
- Harvey, L., Brown, T., & Leman, J. (2003). External Quality Evaluation: Findings of the web survey conducted in October 2003, Sheffield Hallam University.
- HEFCE, (2005). The cost and benefits of external review of quality assurance in higher education, July 2005 from HEFCE website: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/2005/>
- Massy, W. (1999). Energizing quality work: Higher education quality evaluation in Sweden and Denmark, Stanford University.
- Mintzberg, H. (1983). Structure of Fives: Designing effective organisations.
- NZUAAU, (1997/2001). Report on the review of New Zealand universities academic audit unit, October 1997 and October 2001.
- Stensaker, B. (2003). Trance, Transparency and Transformation: the impact of external monitoring on higher education. *Quality in Higher Education*, 9 (2), 152-159.
- Wahlen, S. (2004). Does quality monitoring make a difference? *Quality in Higher Education*, 10 (2), 139-147.
- Weusthof, P.J.M. (1995). Dutch universities: an empirical analysis of characteristics and results of self evaluation. *Quality in Higher Education*, 1 (3), 235-248.
- Wilson, B. (1996). Quality in universities. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 18 (2), 149-158.
- Media articles on UK audits: <http://www.thes.co.uk/>

Attachment One
Review of Impact Studies on External Quality Audit

Writers	Country	Areas of impact
Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE)	United Kingdom (97 and 01)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two thirds of the panel recommendation has been acted upon - Actions taken involved formalisation of procedures and improved documentation - Reviews and revision of curricula and teaching assessments - Recommendation were more likely to be acted upon at departmental than institutional levels - Actions were more likely when assessment results fell below institutional expectation - Recommendation which appeared insensitive to context or mission were less likely to be acted upon
HEFCE	United Kingdom (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The cost of the external review for the English higher education sector is approximately 40 million pounds a year - Impact is mostly on institutions in small institutions with wide spread vocational programmes - Increased data requirements by the external agency - Unquantifiable cost related to the diversion of academic staff time. Danger of the creation of a culture which is cautious about innovation, or sees quality as about satisfying external agencies, rather than as an intrinsic academic objective - Being strategic about reviews and having systems and process for cyclical reviews.
Wahlen (2004)	Sweden (1995-96) and 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leadership and organisation - Student influence - Policy and strategy - Cooperation with stakeholders - Evaluation and follow up - Educational development - Internationalisation <p>Note: Second cycle showed improvements compared to the first cycle Second cycle followed up on the recommendations from first cycle At least one panel member from the first cycle was also in second cycle</p>
Dill (2000)	United Kingdom, Sweden, New Zealand and Hong Kong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Helped initiate development of quality assurance systems within institutions - Placed attention to improving teaching and student learning on institutional agendas - Helped clarify responsibilities for improving teaching and student learning at the individual academic unit faculty, and institutional level - Reinforced institutional leaders in their effort to develop institution wide quality cultures - Facilitated discussion, cooperation and development within academic units with regard to means for improving teaching and student learning - Providing system wide information on best practice - Offered visible confirmation to the public that attention is being paid to academic quality assurance.
NZUAAU	New Zealand (1997-2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improvements in strategic planning - Increased emphasis on the codification of process and practices - Strengthened internal review mechanisms - Specific staff appointments such as Quality Managers - An increased recognition for staff development - Improved promotions policies and procedures including increased recognition of teaching excellence - Streamlined and strengthened programme design process - An increased willingness to seek feedback from students - Graduates and employers and to incorporate their views in programme development and monitoring - Raised the profile for Treaty of Waitangi and social conscience issues - Enabled student groups on campus to highlight areas of particular concerns to students and finally the audit process - Has increased the credibility of the New Zealand university sector both nationally and internationally
AUQA	Australia (2006)	<p>The recent external review report of AUQA suggests that there is evidence that external quality audit has had positive impact in raising the awareness of quality matters, in developing a commitment to quality and quality enhancement across the sector, and also showcasing good practice within the sector AUQA.</p> <p>Feedback from the higher education sector shows that AUQA has had a positive impact in raising the awareness of quality matters, in developing a commitment to quality and quality enhancement across the sector and also showcasing good practice.</p>
Massy (1999)	Denmark	Large majority of stakeholders interviewed found the evaluation carried out was valuable.

Publication 7

Trends in the Quality of the Student Experience: An International Perspective based on Studies in Three Universities

Mahsood Shah

University of Canberra, Canberra
Australia
mahsood.shah@canberra.edu.au

Chenicheri Sid Nair

University of Western Australia, Perth
Australia
sid.nair@uwa.edu.au

Abstract

The trends in student experience in higher education have significantly changed in the last decade. The changing pattern of student participation with large proportion of students in full time or part time employment while also studying, growing student diversity, the use of ICT and flexible modes of learning and the demand for work integrated learning which allows students to undertake practicum's while studying is playing a key role in the changing trend in student experience. Research in student experience and satisfaction has mostly looked at individual institutions and national results on student satisfaction. There is limited research on what students see as most important in various institutions with different cohort of students which may improve student engagement, retention and improvement in student satisfaction.

This paper reviews the trend in student experience in three universities that have been using student satisfaction surveys for more than a decade with diverse student groups. The study is based on two Australian and one United Kingdom University (UK). The paper reports that student experience and high satisfaction is based on five interrelated factors including: adequate and reliable learning infrastructure and resources, quality of teaching staff, course design which enables student attainment of generic skills, quality management of student assessments and issues around administrative matters such as timetabling, admissions and enrolments. The findings of this study informs the predictors of student satisfaction which if effectively managed and improved by universities could result in improved student engagement, retention and student satisfaction.

Keywords: *Student experience and student satisfaction*

INTRODUCTION

Student experience and satisfaction matter to universities and students. It is the moral purpose of a university to provide high quality and standard of education and research to fulfil the needs of the society. In most developed countries like Australia and the UK, governments are in the process of introducing performance based funding to reward or in some cases penalise universities by using measures to assess teaching quality (BIS, 2009; Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). One of such measures is the outcome of student surveys such as the Australian Graduate Survey (AGS) used in Australia and the National Student Survey (NSS) used in the UK. On the other hand, students are the key stakeholders of the universities and they expect and deserve a high quality of education to ensure value for money.

Students are in a better position to assess quality of courses and teaching, quality of support services and the quality of resources and infrastructure based on their learning experience. Universities provide a range of services and support to students. In some cases some support services (for example disability services, learning skills and religious centres) are not used by large population of students however universities do need to provide such services to cater for the needs of the diverse student groups. Measuring student experience using both importance and satisfaction rating allows institutions to identify four scenarios. First, universities are able to identify services that students rate as *most important* with *high satisfaction* rating (i.e. services that could be rewarded), second, services that students rate as *most important* with *low satisfaction* rating (i.e. services needing immediate improvement), third, services that students rate as *high satisfaction* with *low importance* rating (i.e. services that could be rewarded) and finally services that students rate as *low importance* and *low satisfaction* (i.e. services that needs ongoing monitoring).

Students are the most important clients of universities and their experience or knowledge and understanding of higher education must be based on their voices. In other words, student experience is shaped by student judgement rather than it being defined by universities. Students play a very key role in university management by providing feedback on what they see as most important and their satisfaction. By fostering and promoting engaged partnerships with students, institutions can improve teaching, course design, assessments, and quality processes which produce the best outcomes for students. According to Ramsden (2009), prospective students do need better information about what they can expect from higher education in terms of independence in learning, contact with tutors, and other forms of support. He argues that it is not because it will improve quality by getting students to choose more wisely rather it is because higher education is different compared to school or further education. Institutions need to articulate student expectation and find ways to find out student experience in early stages of study. Such strategy will enable institutions to act on areas needing improvement in a timely manner.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND SATISFACTION: WHAT DO WE KNOW?

The changing pattern of student participation in higher education has played a key role in the student expectations and experience. The growth of student participation in higher education and the diversity of students require institutions and governments to rethink about student experience and how student learning in higher education contributes to national economy. Higher education in Australia and other parts of the world is no longer dominated by only 18-21 year olds living on campus, studying fulltime, using traditional face-to-face learning, using campus facilities such as gymnasiums, bars and pools, and being taught by elite academic. James *et al*, (2007) study in Australia suggests that more than 74 per cent of students undertaking undergraduate courses are engaged in full time or part time working while also studying full time. Mass communication and use of technology in day to day lives have opened new styles of communication outside higher education which have led to expectations of 24 hour, seven day a week availability of learning support.

Several national studies in Australia (Scott, 2006 and Krause *et al*, 2005) suggest that student judgement of quality and high satisfaction is based on both learning and teaching (course design, teaching and assessments) and administrative factors (student support, resourcing and infrastructure). According to the work of Kane *et al*, (2008), students are not particularly interested in the course-related aspects of their learning and that it is the social and union related aspects like bars, clubs other campus facilities of their experience that are most important. In contrast, student satisfaction data from a number of UK universities since the early 1990s suggest that students are more concerned with course-related issues compared to the social side of their experience. An analysis of offshore student satisfaction in a large Australian university suggests that the top ten factors students see as most important are related to library, quality of teachers, course outcomes, IT infrastructure and local support by partner institutions.

According to Alves & Raposo (2007), it is a fundamental necessity to analyse and study students' satisfaction in higher education, as the dissatisfaction of students could have ominous consequences for both the institution and the students, including for example unsuccessful students (Wiese, 1994, Walther, 2000), students quitting or transferring (Chadwick & Ward, 1987; Dolinsky, 1994; Thomas *et al.*, 1996; Astin, 2001) and 'negative word of mouth' harming future applications (Ugolini, 1999). Conversely, Alves & Raposo (2007) suggest that, institutions of higher education with satisfied students could greatly benefit from being able to establish lasting relationships with their graduates.

The analysis of literature suggests that the characteristics of high quality student experience and satisfaction includes factors related to course design, quality of teaching staff, quality management of student assessment, library and IT services and range of well resourced support services. To gather meaningful data on student satisfaction, the survey questionnaire itself needs to be reviewed in light of the changing trends in student satisfaction. Most importantly institutions need to be able to have robust and systematic survey management systems that enables the tracking and improvement of student experience at all levels of the university operations including course, subject and teacher levels.

THE STUDENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

The Student Satisfaction Survey used in the three institutions has been in place for the last ten years. Although the questions in the survey are different and it has changed overtime, all three institutions use importance and satisfaction rating in the survey questionnaires. The use of three different student satisfaction questionnaires in different institutions with consistent findings provide confidence that student experience and factors students see as most important are common in Australia, UK and possibly other countries. All three institutions have diverse student profile and different size including single and multi-campus universities. The survey measures the total student experience in a single tool including items related to teaching quality, course outcomes, admissions and enrolments, learning support, library, student support services, computing, teaching infrastructure and campus facilities managed by student associations. One of the important aspects of student satisfaction in the three institutions is the engagement of student unions or associations in the process. All three universities engaged student unions in the making of the survey questionnaires and the promotion of the questionnaires to students with the view to engage students and thus improving the response rate.

METHODOLOGY

All universities reported in this study use the student satisfaction survey on a biennial basis. The survey is sent to all undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students using online and paper survey. The response rate in the three institutions is around 40-46 per cent. The response sample in all three universities was representative based on the profile of each institution. Responses were received from domestic students, international onshore and offshore students, students from Non English Speaking Background, undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students and full time and part-time students from various disciplines.

FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY

The findings of the three separate studies in three institutions in two countries with diverse groups of students show consistent results. Such findings enable better knowledge and understanding of student experience in higher education in the 21st century. The results from three separate studies inform us that the top factors that students see as most important while studying in a university if effectively managed, enhanced and sustained could improve student satisfaction, engagement and retention in higher education. The result shows five key themes which are recurring in the three studies (see Table 1).

Table 1: Five Recurring Themes based on Three Separate Studies

Five Themes	Related Sub-Themes
Learning Infrastructure	<i>Library:</i> electronic access to library resources, library's online information resources, convenient opening hours of the library, number of up-to-date books and range/availability of materials to support the course of study <i>Information Technology:</i> quality of computing equipment and computing facilities (computers and printers) are reliable <i>Online learning:</i> quality and user friendly online learning portal <i>Classrooms:</i> well equipped lecture theatres, classrooms and other learning areas and adequate spaces on campus to work with other students on group assignments
Quality of Teacher	<i>Teachers:</i> teaching is conducted by staff who are good teachers, reliability/punctuality of teaching staff and staff treat students as mature individuals
Course Design	<i>Course Outcomes:</i> course equips students with up to-date-knowledge and skills needed by employers, course develops subject knowledge, relevance of course content to future employment and development of skills and abilities required for your future employment
Student Assessments	<i>Assessments:</i> clear assessment requirements and timely and usefulness of feedback from teaching staff
Administrative Matters	<i>Administration:</i> enrolment and reenrolment is quick and convenient, exam timetable clashes are easily resolved, early availability of class timetable to organise other aspects life (e.g. work, childcare), course enables me to construct a timetable for attendance at classes which suit my needs and security on the campus

The study shows that student experience and high satisfaction is based on five interrelated factors including: adequate and reliable learning infrastructure and resources, quality of teaching staff, course design which enables student attainment of generic skills, quality management of student assessments and issues around administrative matters such as timetabling, admissions and enrolments. These studies inform that the characteristics of quality student experience are based on the total student experience including the quality of both academic and administrative areas. The UK university included in this study had items related to work experience in the student satisfaction questionnaire. Interestingly both work experience items were rated in the top two on importance.

This finding suggests student demand of courses which integrate work-based learning which allows students to undertake practicum's while studying. Research undertaken by Grebennikov and Shah (2008) with graduate employers suggests that employers prefer courses which enable students to engage in practicums while studying thus allowing students to attain the necessary generic/employability skills. The comparative analysis between the three studies (two Australian and one UK universities) and the national studies conducted in Australia shows two key variations. First, the three studies repeatedly shows that students have voiced the need to ensure that university courses are focused on the attainment of generic/employability skills which employers recognise as important. Secondly, these studies show the need to improve quality management of student assessments including assessment clarity and timely and constructive feedback on assessments.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study inform that student experience and factors that students see as most important while studying are consistent in Australia, UK and undoubtedly elsewhere. The use of three different student satisfaction questionnaires with diverse student groups from various disciplines and with consistent results provides assurance that student experience is evolving based on the changing pattern of student participation in higher education. Students now expect universities to fit within their day-to-day lives rather than students adjusting their lives to fit within university teaching norms such as timetabling, lectures and tutorial times and flexible learning. While universities are proactive in obtaining student feedback, the challenge is to act on the results of the survey to improve student experience and satisfaction. The need to review student satisfaction questionnaires is also important based on the contemporary trends in student satisfaction in order to target improvements. The current reforms in higher education across many developed countries with performance based funding place onus on universities to take student experience as a joint venture between students and universities for long term sustainability. There is a need for universities to listen to student voices in the first year of study in teaching and administrative areas to be able to respond to student feedback by implementing rapid improvements which may improve student experience and satisfaction in 2nd and 3rd year of study. Universities also need to be prepared to change their curricula, teaching, assessments, and infrastructure and student support services to align with the changing trends in student experience.

The findings in this paper are based on the overall student experience but the similarities are interestingly similar to the engineering student experience. For instance the importance of course design in engineering courses attributing to student capabilities have been reported in a number of studies (for example, Martin et al 2005; Nair, Patil, & Mertova, 2009) and the quality of administrative matters, infrastructure as well as teaching is well articulated in the paper by Nair and Patil (2009).

This paper reinforces that the student experience is not necessarily discipline specific but takes into account the general teaching and learning environments in institutions of higher education.

The results of the study in the three institutions clearly suggest that the predictors of student satisfaction and positive experience are based on both teaching, course design and effective support systems such as IT, library and campus facilities. Institutions need to be able to monitor the changing trends in student experience in order to improve the quality of student experience.

REFERENCES FOR PUBLICATION 7

Astin, A. (2001). *What Matters in College? Four Critical Years Revisited* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass).

Alves, H., & Raposo, M. (2007). Conceptual Model of Student Satisfaction in Higher Education. *Total Quality Management*, 18 (5), 571-588.

Commonwealth of Australia. (2009). An Indicator Framework for Higher Education Performance Funding: Discussion paper. Retrieved March 8, 2010, from <http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Pages/IndicatorFramework.aspx>

Chadwick, K., & Ward, J. (1987). Determinants of consumer satisfaction with education: implications for college and university administrators, *College and University*, 62(Spring), 236–246.

Department for Business Innovation and Skills. (2009). Higher Ambitions: The Future of Universities in a Knowledge Economy. Discussion paper. Retrieved March 8, 2010, from, <http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/higher-ambitions>

Dolinsky, A. (1994). A consumer complaint framework with resulting strategies: an application to higher education, *Journal of Services Marketing*, 8(3), 27–39.

Grebennikov, L., & Shah, M. (2008). Engaging Employers with the University: Skills Needed and Changes Expected by Industries, Proceedings of the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance Conference, Queensland, Australia, 9-11 July.

James, R., Bexley, E., Devlin, M., & Marginson, S. (2007). Final report of a national survey of students in public universities. Retrieved March 8, 2010, from, <http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/content.asp?page=/publications/policy/survey/index.htm>

Kane, D., Williams, J., & Cappuccini-Ansfield. (2008). Student Satisfaction Surveys: The Value in Taking an Historical Perspective, *Quality in Higher Education*, 14 (2), 135-155.

Krause, K., Hartley, R., James, R., & McInnis, C. (2005). The first year experience in Australian universities: Findings from a decade of national studies. Retrieved March 8, 2010, from, <http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/1B0F1A03-E7BC-4BE4-B45C735F95BC67CB/5885/FYEFinalReportforWebsiteMay06.pdf>

Martin, S., Maytham, B., Case, J., and Fraser, D. 2005. Engineering graduates' perceptions of how well they were prepared for work in industry. *European Journal of Engineering Education*, 30 (2), 167- 181.

Nair, C. S. & Patil, A. (2009). Enhancing the quality of the Engineering Student Experience. In Patil, A. S. & Gary, J. G. (Eds.), *Engineering Education Quality Assurance: A global Perspective*, 247-255

Nair, C.S., Patil, A. & Mertova, M. (2009). Re-engineering Graduate Skills – A Case Study *European Journal of Engineering Education*, 34(2), pp. 131-139.

Ramsden, P. (2009). A Better Student Experience: Speech at the Group Student Experience Conference, 19 November 2009, United Kingdom. Retrieved March 8, 2010, from, http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/news/detail/2009/a_better_student_experience_speech_by_paul_ramsden

Scott, G. (2006). Accessing the student voice: Using CEQuery to identify what retains students and promotes engagement in productive learning in Australian higher education. Retrieved March 8, 2010, from http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/access_student_voice.htm

Thomas, M. et al. (1996) Student withdrawal from higher education, *Educational Management and Administration*, 24(2), 207–221.

Ugolini, M. (1999) University dropout: a problem and an opportunity, Proceedings of the TQM for Higher Education Institutions Conference: Higher Education Institutions and the Issue of Total Quality, Verona, 30–31, 417–436.

Walther, E. (2000). *The Relationships Between Student Satisfaction And Student Retention In Higher Education*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, the University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

Wiese, M. (1994) College choice cognitive dissonance: managing student/ institution fit, *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 5(1), 35–47.

Publication 8

This publication has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

This publication is available as:

Shah, M., & Nair, C.S. (2010). Monitoring Student Attrition to Enhance Quality. *Quality Approaches in Higher Education*. 1(2), pp. 24-30.

Links to this publication:

Print	http://webpac.canberra.edu.au/record=b1688052~S4
UC Research Repository	http://www.canberra.edu.au/researchrepository/items/7243e5f6-49a9-df9b-cf8e-5201610ae9fa/1/
Online general public	http://asq.org/edu/2010/08/best-practices/quality-approaches-in-higher-education-vol-1-no-2.pdf
DOI	

Abstract

Student retention is one key performance indicator used in universities to track learning and teaching performance. Research indicates that student retention and success in higher education improves an individual's chance of securing employment opportunities, achieving career goals, and contributing to society and the economic development of the nation. Some consider retention as a moral purpose of a university to improve student success— particularly for the most disadvantaged student groups. This article outlines survey findings from a large public university in Australia with first-year undergraduate students who enrolled and later withdrew. The survey was conducted as a result of consistently high student attrition rates compared to other Australian universities. The university took the initiative to determine the reasons for student withdrawal and implemented a university-wide project to improve first-year student retention.

Publication 9

This publication has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

This publication is available as:

Shah, M., & Nair C. S. (2009). Using Student Voice to Improve Student Satisfaction: Two Australian Universities the same Agenda. *Journal of Institutional Research (South East Asia)*. 7(2), pp. 43-55.

Links to this publication:

Print	http://webpac.canberra.edu.au/record=b1688052~S4
Online subscribed content (UC community)	
Online general public	http://www.seairweb.info/journal/JIRSEA_v7_n2_2009_1st.pdf#page=43
DOI	
Abstract	
<p>The paper outlines the practices used at the University of Western Sydney (UWS) and Monash University with regards to survey management and improvement. As part of ongoing quality assurance, both universities conduct various surveys targeted at stakeholders including students, staff, employers and the general community. Feedback from students can inform decision making in universities and be part of the students' role in university management. The challenge for universities is not to gather feedback from stakeholders, but rather to implement improvement projects as a result of stakeholder feedback and to communicate the actions/improvement to all stakeholders. Stakeholders should see that their feedback is not only value adding to the university but that the university is taking appropriate and timely action to enhance student experience in academic and support services areas.</p>	

Publication 10

Does Retention Matter? Improving Student Retention: A UWS Case Study

Mahsood Shah, Leonid Grebennikov and Harmanpreet Singh

Office of Planning and Quality

University of Western Sydney

Abstract

Retention at university matters. It matters morally, as we know the life chances of people who complete a degree are dramatically improved. It matters financially, as students who leave a university take their fees with them. And it matters nationally, as the higher the education level of the population, the greater the nation's levels of productivity and innovation.

This paper provides a consolidated picture of patterns and trends in student retention in Australia's universities. Common reasons for student withdrawal and strategies to improve student retention are also explored using both empirical research and a review of the literature.

Further, the paper presents approaches effectively used by University of Western Sydney to improve student retention. These approaches include: identifying and prioritising the main reasons for student withdrawal and corresponding retention solutions; using a range of tactics to ensure that these solutions are consistently implemented; and finally, monitoring the improvement actions for two years to measure their efficiency based on student feedback, and to identify areas warranting further improvement attention.

Introduction

Among many challenges facing Australian universities, such as decreased funding, competition, student diversity, demands from industry and community, and higher education policy change, student retention is a major issue. Stable enrolment depends as much on retaining students as it does on recruiting them. There has been a dramatic fall in the proportion of public funding allocated to Australian universities over the past decade (Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee, 2005; Soutar & Turner, 2002). This has increased the importance of students as a source of income, and thus, increased the competition between universities to recruit and retain students. Withdrawals from higher education incur significant institutional and personal costs and require careful scrutiny. Acknowledging this, as part of the review of higher education (Commonwealth Department of Education Science and Training [DEST], 2003) the federal government introduced a number of initiatives such as the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund. One of the performance indicators that has been employed to assess universities' performance is student retention.

In Australia, the "Group of Eight" universities and a number of universities belonging to the Australian Technology Network have enjoyed relatively high retention rates. A highly selective entry scheme, a well developed and matured student support system and learning infrastructure may be the factors influencing high-level retention in these institutions. In recent years, government policies towards various equity groups, student diversity and increased migration have raised issues of equity and standards of higher education. Consequently, some universities have accentuated their missions as non-elite, community-focused institutions. For example, the profile of the University of Western Sydney (UWS) student population has dramatically changed in the last ten years. The university has increased numbers of students from such groups as Non English Speaking Background, first in the family to attend university, international students, students from low socio economic groups, mature age and part-time students, students with learning difficulties, and indigenous students. As the diversity of the student intake rises the university becomes increasingly interested in updated knowledge of the factors predicting their retention.

Institutional variables linked to retention

To test the relative contribution of various institutional measures to prediction of retention we examined 2004-2005 data on 38 Australian universities available on the DEST website (DEST, 2006) and the Australian Education Network (AEN) website (AEN, 2006). These variables included:

- University entry score (mean and median);
- Size (enrolments);
- Attendance mode (% of full-time students);
- Admission mode (% of school leavers)
- Student/staff ratio;
- Student load on the largest campus as a measure of university multi-campus operation (% of total load);
- Age of institution (since accreditation) in years;
- Student load in broad FOE (% of total student load, 10 variables);
- Total revenue per student EFTSL;
- Self-generated income (% of total income);
- Explicit overall satisfaction measure of the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) (% scoring 4 or 5);
- Explicit good teaching measure of the CEQ (% scoring 4 or 5);
- Explicit student support measure of the CEQ (% scoring 4 or 5).

Nine of all the variables examined showed statistically significant positive correlations with university retention rate ($r(38) > .36, p < .05$). These were: university entry score (mean and median), size of university, age, admission and attendance mode, revenue per EFTSL, the proportion of self-generated income and the proportion of students in the Architecture and Building FOE. A significant negative correlation was found between student/staff ratio and retention ($r(38) = -.39, p = .015$). There was also high intercorrelation between many examined variables, which made the assessment of the unique link between each of them and retention difficult. The stepwise regression procedure was used to remove “weak” candidate predictors from the model and identify “stronger” predictor variables among those highly correlated with retention. The procedure also tested whether retention could be influenced by any combination of the selected variables. As a result, the combination of median entry score, the proportion of full-time students and the size of university – in this order – was found to significantly contribute to prediction of retention rate (aggregate $R^2 = .64, p < .001$). These findings provide support to our assumption that, in order to sustain their equity mission, some universities may have to keep their entry score relatively low (e.g., UWS average CSP score is ranked 28th of 38 universities), as well as have relatively lower proportions of full-time students (e.g., by such proportion UWS is ranked 17th of 38 universities). Therefore, case-specific retention solutions have to be identified and implemented by such universities.

General and university-specific reasons for student withdrawal

In terms of academic reasons for student leaving, many research findings have shown a positive relationship between student withdrawal and poor academic preparation or performance (e.g., Ashby, 2004; Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005; Rickinson & Rutherford, 1996; York, 1997). Insufficient information about the course or institution before students enrol has recently been highlighted as a major reason for withdrawal (Yorke & Longden, 2007). Some studies discuss more generic factors associated with student withdrawal, such as incompatibility between the students and their course and lack of commitment to the course (Rickinson & Rutherford, 1996; Williford & Schaller, 2005).

In 2004 a national research project investigating attrition from first year university undergraduate degree courses of 4,390 domestic students was carried out in 34 Australian universities (Long, Ferrier & Heagney, 2006). The rationale for limiting the retention study to first-year students was that the most significant loss of students, as a result of withdrawal, was reported to occur during the first year of their program (Tinto, 1999). If students can be retained beyond the first year, their probability for success increases in each subsequent year (Williford & Schaller, 2005). Based on the responses of 1,917 students who did not re-enrol at the same university in the first semester of 2005, the study identified the 10 most important reasons for withdrawal of 64 possible reasons. The proportions of students citing reasons that had a large influence on their decision to discontinue their program appear in Table 1 in rank order.

Table 1: Reasons for Student Withdrawal (National Data)

<i>Reasons for student withdrawal in rank order</i>	<i>% large influence</i>	<i>Rank</i>
I needed a break from study	24.3	1
Difficult to balance study and work commitments	23.7	2
I changed my career goals	21.6	3
I found something I'd like to do better	19.3	4
I found a better path to my career goals	15.5	5
The course or program wasn't what I expected	15.1	6
I felt stressed and anxious about my study	14.0	7
Course would not help me achieve my career goals	13.3	8
I didn't like the way the course was taught	12.9	9
The subjects weren't as interesting as I expected	12.6	10

The findings from the national research show that the top reasons for student withdrawal arise from both personal and university related issues. However, personal motives appear the most commonly reported reasons for leaving. The study also demonstrates considerable intercorrelation between many factors, for example students experiencing a conflict between study and employment are also likely to have financial difficulties. A sub-sort of the University of Western Sydney results from the above study comprised 142 students who did not re-enrol at UWS in the first semester of 2005. Table 2 shows the 10 most common reasons for UWS student withdrawal in rank order as proportions of students who indicated that the cited reasons had a large influence on their decision to leave UWS. It also shows the corresponding ranks for the same items in the national data.

Table 2: Reasons for Student Withdrawal (UWS Sub-sort of the National Data)

<i>Reasons for student withdrawal in rank order</i>	<i>% large influence (UWS)</i>	<i>Rank (UWS)</i>	<i>Rank (national data)</i>
I wanted to study somewhere else	38.0	1	29
I was offered a place in a course elsewhere which I preferred	34.5	2	43
I always intended to move to another university	26.1	3	49
I found something I'd like to do better	23.9	4	4
I couldn't study the subjects I wanted	21.8	5	18
I changed my career goals	21.1	6	3
I found a better path to my career goals	20.4	7	5
The course or program wasn't what I expected	19.0	8	6
I didn't like the way the course was taught	16.9	9	9
Course would not help me achieve my career goals	16.9	10	8

From the comparison of Tables 1 and 2 a number of conclusions can be drawn. First, while nationwide students were more likely to leave because of personal reasons, the UWS students had a clear emphasis of university-related or course-related motives for withdrawal. Second, a large proportion of UWS students were leaving UWS wishing to move to another university or study elsewhere. From the above conclusions it follows that most reasons for UWS student withdrawal are indicative of the university's ability to affect them. And finally, it is useful to know students' general motives to discontinue their program, however, such motives in regard to each specific university may differ considerably from those found by national or international research.

Strategies to improve student retention

There is large body of research and theory exploring the individual, social, and organisational factors which impact on student retention. As noted by Tinto & Pusey (2006, p. 4), “it is easily one of the most widely studied topics in higher education over the past 30 years”. Some of these factors have a well-developed empirical record supporting them, others need to be explored further. It is not surprising that many factors reported as contributing positively to retention, for example, student academic preparedness, are the exact reverse of those causing student withdrawal.

Over the last decade there has been a substantial focus on the factors pertinent to retention that are internal to universities and are within the immediate institutional control and action (Tinto & Pusey, 2006). Consequently, the social climate established on campus, the academic, social, and financial support provided by institution, student in-class and out-of-class involvement in campus life, and frequent feedback provided to students and staff about their performance have received increasing attention in current research (Berger, 2001; Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Kuh, 1999; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Tinto & Pusey, 2006; Yorke, 2000).

Many studies have been particularly focused on student involvement, or what is frequently termed “engagement” or “academic and social integration” as a predictor of retention (Baker & Pomerantz, 2001; Borglum & Kubala, 2000; Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2003; Kaya, 2004; Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005; Kuh, 2003; Zhao & Kuh, 2004; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2004). The measures reported to positively affect retention include: established first-year programs, such as freshman seminars and orientation programs; provision of sufficient on-campus university-supported housing; peer support programs; peer tutoring or study groups; and extended availability of academic staff for teacher-student interaction.

Of interest to UWS can be a case study by Thomas (2002). It investigates a modern university in England that has good performance indicators of both the diversity of the student intake (with large proportion of those from low-income groups) and student retention. A recurring theme in this research is that an inclusive and equity focused university does not prioritize or valorise one set of characteristics, but rather prizes diversity, difference, flexibility and willingness to change. Students from diverse backgrounds find greater acceptance of and respect for such environment, and thus, for their own practices and knowledge. This, in turn, promotes higher levels of persistence in completing their program.

This idea – specifically in regard to flexible course design and responsive staff – is endorsed by the analysis of 285,000 comments from graduates of 14 Australian universities on the “best aspects” of the university’s performance, and on those most “needing improvement” (Scott, 2006). This study shows that it is the total experience of a university that shapes students’ judgement of quality, motivates their engagement in learning and optimises retention. The following issues are found to be of particular relevance to retention:

- a sound, responsive, flexible, relevant and clear course design – a design that uses a variety of interactive, practice-oriented and problem-based learning methods;
- capable, committed, accessible and responsive staff being in place to deliver and improve the design during implementation;
- efficient and responsive administrative, IT, library and student support systems working together to support university’s operation; and
- relevant, consistent and integrated assessment.

These findings align well with the summary of institutional strategies used to improve retention in 14 Australian universities (Long, Ferrier, & Heagney, 2006). These strategies include:

- provision of accurate and detailed information about courses before students enrol;
- general and academic support services specifically customised for variety of students and disciplines;
- assurance that no students feel isolated or lonely through responsive social environment, active orientation and transition programs, the support of campus-based clubs and societies;
- provision of financial support to students in forms of scholarships, emergency funds, containing non-tuition costs such as books, internet access, printing costs, library fines and parking fees and fines;
- the results of regular student-based assessments of teaching made known to the staff and linked to promotion and recognition systems;
- regular monitoring of withdrawal and reviewing patterns of attrition.

Though informative, the above studies do not tell a specific institution which immediate actions are more likely to yield increased student persistence. Thus, bearing in mind what types of retention strategies are effective in general, each university addressing the issue needs to develop and prioritise its specific strategies in line with a consistent pattern of attrition by college and campus. This approach was taken by UWS in 2004 as the issue of student retention became high on its list of priorities.

Costs of student withdrawal to UWS

In 2003-2004 UWS retention rate was poor compared to many Australian universities. It was ranked 20th out of 38 universities. There were clear personal costs to students who did not carry on with their tertiary studies, and there were also considerable financial costs to the university. Table 3 outlines the costs to UWS of the withdrawal of the 319 international and post-graduate students who left the university in 2004.

Table 3: Costs to UWS of the International and Post-graduate Student Withdrawal in 2004

<i>Student category</i>	<i>No of students withdrawn</i>	<i>Average annual fees</i>	<i>Annual loss</i>	Total loss
International onshore students	76	\$11,300	\$858,800	3 year undergraduate course: \$2,576,400
Post-graduate students	243	\$13,800	\$3,353,400	2 year postgraduate course: \$6,706,800

It appears difficult to calculate an accurate cost of the 1,008 Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) students who withdrew from UWS in 2004. Excluding the loss of HECS students, the loss of income to UWS resulting from the withdrawal of fee paying students in 2004 was \$4,212,200. With the pipeline effect this loss increases to \$9,283,200 over the full duration of the courses concerned. It is worth noting that in 2004 UWS had a deficit of more than \$10 million.

The UWS 2004 Exit Survey

The telephone Exit Survey was carried out with 1,520 students who enrolled in February 2004 and withdrew later in the year. The questions asked in the survey were based on a review of the higher education exit literature and input from key UWS staff. In total, 496 students responded to the survey achieving a response rate of 33%. The response sample was generally representative of the total population surveyed, with the exception of international students. Respondents were asked to rate the relative importance of a range of factors explaining their withdrawal.

The factors attracting the highest importance ratings were a mix of issues which the university can address, and more general life factors which are beyond its control. The 10 most important reasons for student withdrawal of 32 in rank order are presented in Table 4. These results are captured as the proportions of students who indicated that the cited reasons were very important in their decision to leave. The table shows that at least six of 10 highly important reasons for student attrition, such as unclear expectations about course and assessment, difficulties with administrative matters or timetable issues, are within the immediate ability of the university to affect.

Table 4: Reasons for UWS Student Withdrawal (2004 Exit Survey)

<i>Reasons for student withdrawal in rank order</i>	<i>% very important</i>	<i>Rank</i>
The course wasn't what students had expected	35.2	1
Conflicting employment commitments	24.1	2
Difficulties with enrolments, fee payments, student admission	20.0	3
Expectations about what students had to do in assessment were unclear	16.5	4
The timetable made it difficult to attend classes	16.0	5
Pressure to enrol in a University course in which they weren't really interested	15.3	6
Family pressures	13.1	7
Staff were difficult to access	10.2	8
The teaching and learning methods were un-motivating	8.8	9
Financial difficulties	8.6	10

Respondents were also asked to list other factors contributing to their decision to discontinue studies, which were not covered in the survey. Of all survey participants 65% provided such comments. The recurring university-related themes were:

- Administration: credit process is not timely, units not offered at the nearest campus, timetable clashes, tutorial registration downtime, unhelpful staff, units advertised and not offered, long queues during enrolment, late arrival of HECS notice and distance education materials;
- Teaching staff: unhelpful dealing with student enquiries, poor teaching skills, unprofessional (late to class or unprepared);
- Delivery methods: mechanical, difficult to understand, boring, insufficient teacher-student interaction;
- Communication and information: lack of information about the course, units of study and electives available, lack of communication between students and staff; information on facilities are not made clear during enrolment, unclear grading rules for assessment;
- Facilities and infrastructure: overcrowded classes, poor public transport, inconvenience of travelling between campuses, poor social activities, variety and quality of food in the cafeteria, IT facilities, poor website especially for distance students to find information.

Respondents to the Exit Survey were then asked to provide suggestions on what UWS could do to reduce the number of students choosing to discontinue their studies. Such ideas were provided by 35% of survey participants and most of them were the exact reverse of the reasons for UWS student withdrawal listed above. The majority of UWS students' comments on how to reduce attrition related to the administrative and student support aspects of the university.

The UWS 2006 Retention Project

In 2005-2006, UWS implemented a university-wide Retention Project. The aim of the project was to improve first year student experience and retention. The Retention Project was sponsored by the Pro Vice Chancellor (Quality) and coordinated by the Associate Pro Vice Chancellor (Quality) in conjunction with many UWS administrative leaders and staff members. Based on the outcomes of the Exit Survey, the Retention Project specified six areas for improvement to be immediately actioned:

- quality of student orientation;
- accuracy and speed of enrolments and fees invoicing;
- provision of contact for students to promptly resolve their administrative problems;
- first-year student engagement in learning (easy access to IT resources, use of WebCT, group projects, peer mentors);
- clarity in what is expected from students, especially regarding assessment;
- promotion and communication of support services and facilities.

Each of the above components of the Retention Project was lead by a team leader who was responsible for the relevant area(s). For example, the Director of Student Support Services was responsible for orientation, student support and provision of convenient contact for students with queries. The specific measures undertaken included tailored customer service training provided for the UWS Student Centres' staff and other administrative staff; a refurbishment of campus libraries; major upgrade of IT equipment and computer labs; online enrolment of students introduced in 2006; more online learning material made available through UWS WebCT sites. The university actively promoted peer-mentoring, advising, counselling, early intervention of at-risk students and other initiatives focused on student socialization and adjustment. Additionally, information on the financial impact of attrition and the potential revenue benefits of increasing retention along with the outcomes of the related UWS surveys were communicated to the university community (e.g., Scott, 2005).

Measuring the impacts of the Retention Project

In 2005 and 2006 the university conducted a First Year Retention Survey aimed to measure the impacts of the Retention Project. The survey participants were asked to assess various aspects of orientation, academic advice, enrolment, fee notice, online information, problems resolution, assessment, timetabling, engagement in learning activities, study assistance, online learning, library access, campus life and student services. Respondents were also asked to provide comments on the "best aspects" of the university's performance, and on those most "needing improvement".

Random samples of 1,000 first year undergraduate and postgraduate course work students were selected each year for a telephone survey. The survey generated 40.5% response rate in 2005 and 70.7% in 2006. Both response samples were representative of the first year student population.

The 2006 survey results, compared to the 2005 results, showed improvements at university, college and campus levels in most areas examined. It was found that the difference of 6% or greater between the proportions of students marking the services "ok", "good" or "excellent" in 2006 vs. 2005 was statistically significant at $p < .05$ for the given sample sizes of 405 and 707 respondents. As shown in Table 5, significant improvement in student satisfaction at university level was evident for:

- quick and convenient enrolment;
- speed at which the fee notice was sent;
- accuracy of fee notice;
- handling of administrative problems; and
- access to IT resources.

A 5% improvement was also evident in student satisfaction with their experience in using WebCT. No other areas examined showed significant changes in terms of student satisfaction in 2005 vs. 2006.

Table 5: Comparison of the 2005 and 2006 UWS First Year Retention Survey Results

Items	% satisfied in 2005	% satisfied in 2006	% difference
Quality of orientation	Not asked in 2005	89.7	
Quality of academic advice	84.8	83.0	-1.8
Quick and convenient enrolment	67.5	78.2*	10.7
Speed at which the fee notice was sent	70.1	91.9*	21.8
Accuracy of fee notice	70.1	95.0*	24.9
Handling administrative problems	47.3	61.7*	14.4
Clarity of assessment tasks	88.3	87.3	-1.0
Timetable makes easy attendance at classes	87.5	89.9	2.4
Learning activities engage and keep interest	89.1	89.1	0.0
Staff accessibility	86.4	89.6	3.2
Access to IT resources	79.8	93.9**	14.1
Campus life and facilities	73.9	77.8	3.9
Experience in using WebCT	91.2	96.2	5.0
Library access and quality	93.7	96.0	2.3
Experience in using other student services	Not asked in 2005	78.9	

* Significant improvement in 2006 vs. 2005 at $p < .05$.

Conclusion

In 2004 UWS took the initiative to find out reasons for student withdrawal and implemented a university wide Retention Project based on various sources of tracking data. It is important to note, that from many reasons for student withdrawal the ones which were: (a) within the immediate university's ability to affect, and (b) most likely decisive based on the student voice, were given priority. As a result, six areas potentially relevant to retention were subjected to a critical examination and improvement actions in 2005. One year later, five of these six areas showed statistically significant improvement in terms of student satisfaction with their quality. One area, "clarity of assessment tasks" did not demonstrate similar improvement and thus warrants further analysis and work.

At the same time, UWS retention rates, particularly of first year undergraduate students, have been gradually increasing over the past three years: from 75.1% in 2004, to 76.9% in 2005, and to 79.0% in 2006. It appears reasonable to conclude that the improvement in the first year student satisfaction with the defined set of services has impacted on retention. Obviously, the relationship between student satisfaction with these services and retention is a complex interaction of factors rather than a simple causal link. Therefore, there is a need for more empirical evidence and further research in order to understand how and to what extent an improvement of specific university services can contribute to student retention.

References for Publication 10

- Ashby, A. (2004). Monitoring student retention in the Open University. *Journal of Open and Distance Learning*, 19 (1), 65-77.
- Australian Education Network (2006). *Historical development of Australian university sector*. Retrieved May 21, 2007, from <http://www.australian-universities.com/history-of-australian-universities.php/>
- Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee (2005). Funding Universities - Budgeting for the Future. Retrieved April 18, 2007, from <http://www.avcc.edu.au/documents/publications/policy/submissions/AVCCBudgetSubmission06.pdf>
- Baker, S., & Pomerantz, N. (2001). Impact of learning communities on retention at a metropolitan university. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 2, 115-126.
- Berger, J. (2001). Understanding the organizational nature of student persistence: Recommendations for practice. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 3, 1.
- Borglum, K., & Kubala, T. (2000). Academic and social integration of community college students: A case study. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 24, 567-576.
- Braxton, J., & McClendon, S. (2001). The fostering of social integration and retention through institutional practice. *College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice*, 3, 57-71.
- Braxton, J., Milem, J., & Sullivan, A. (2000). The influence of active learning on the college student departure process. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 71, 569-590.
- Braxton, J., Hirschy, A., & McClendon, S. (2004). *Understanding and reducing college student departure*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- DEST (2003). *Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future*. Canberra, ACT. Retrieved September 26, 2006, from <http://www.backingaustraliasfuture.gov.au/>
- DEST (2006). *Higher education*. Canberra, ACT. Retrieved September 19, 2006, from http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/default.htm
- Hoffman, M., Richmond, J., Morrow, J., & Salomone, K. (2003). Investigating "sense of belonging" in first-year college students. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 4(3), 227-256.
- Kaya, N. (2004). Residence hall climate: Predicting first-year students' adjustment to college. *Journal of the First-Year Experience*, 16, 101-18.
- Krause, K., Hartley, R., James, R., & McClinnis, C. (2005). *The first year experience in Australian universities: Findings from a decade of national studies*. Retrieved May 15, 2007, from http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/first_year_experience.htm
- Kuh, G. (1999). How are we doing? Tracking the quality of the undergraduate experience, 1960s to the present. *The Review of Higher Education*, 22, 99-119.
- Kuh, G. (2003). What we're learning about student engagement from NSSE. *Change*, 35, 24-32.
- Kuh, G., Kinzie, J., Schuh, H., & Whitt, E. (2005). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

-
- Long, M., Ferrier, F., & Heagney, M. (2006). *Stay, play or give away? Students continuing, changing or leaving university study in first year*. Retrieved May 15, 2007, from http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/stay_play_giveaway.htm
- Rickinson, B., & Rutherford, D. (1996). Systematic monitoring of the adjustment to university of undergraduate: A strategy for reducing withdrawal rates. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 24(2), 213-225.
- Scott, G. (2005). *Promoting student retention and productive learning in Universities: Research and action at UWS 2004-05*. Unpublished manuscript. Office of Planning and Quality, University of Western Sydney, Penrith, NSW.
- Scott, G. (2006). *Accessing the student voice: Using CEQuery to identify what retains students and promotes engagement in productive learning in Australian higher education*. Retrieved May 18, 2007, from http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/access_student_voice.htm
- Soutar, G., & Turner, J. (2002). Students' preferences for university: A conjoint analysis. *The International Journal of Educational Management*, 16(1), 40-45.
- Thomas, L. (2002). Student retention in higher education: The role of institutional habitus. *Journal of Education Policy*, 17(4), 423-442.
- Tinto, V. (1999). Taking retention seriously: Rethinking the first year of college. *National Academic Advising Association Journal*, 19(2), 5-9.
- Tinto, V., & Pusser, B. (2006). *Moving from theory to action: Building a model of institutional action for student success*. Washington, DC: National Postsecondary Education Cooperative. Retrieved: June 19, 2007, from http://nces.ed.gov/npec/pdf/Tinto_Pusser_Report.pdf
- Upcraft, M., Gardner, J., & Barefoot, B. (Eds.). (2004). Chapter 1, Introduction. The first year of college revisited. In *Challenging & supporting the first-year student: A Handbook for improving the first year of college*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Williford, A. M., & Schaller, J. Y. (2005). All retention all the time: How institutional research can synthesize information and influence retention practices. *Proceedings of the 45th Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research*. San Diego, 29 May – 1 June. Retrieved: June 15, 2007 from <http://www.ohiou.edu/institres/retention/AIR2005RetentionPaper.pdf>
- Yorke, M. (2000). Smoothing the transition into higher education: What can be learned from student non-completion. *Journal of Institutional Research*, 9(1), 35-47.
- Yorke, M., & Longden, B. (2007). *The first-year experience in higher education in the UK. Report on Phase 1 of a project funded by the Higher Education Academy*. Retrieved: June 23, 2007 from <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/FYEsurvey.htm>
- Zhao, C., & Kuh, G. (2004). Adding value: Learning communities and student engagement. *Research in Higher Education*, 45, 115-138.

Publication 11

Enrolling in Higher Education: The Perceptions of Stakeholders

Mahsood Shah
University of Canberra, Canberra, Australia

&

Chenicheri Sid Nair
University of Western Australia, Perth, Australia

Abstract

Though there is a substantial body of research on student satisfaction, retention and student engagement in higher education, there is however limited research on student image or perception of an university and factors contributing towards choosing a particular university. In the current, highly competitive environment universities are seeking to identify what exactly differentiates them from other institutions. In particular, it is important to understand what attracts prospective students to one university rather than another, and to ensure that these expectations are met once they enrol. Failure to meet student expectations may result in student withdrawal which limits the chances of students to participate in higher education. Fierce competition between universities and private higher education provides opportunity for students to enrol in institutions who are better able to listen to student voices and able cater the needs of students.

Student image or perception of an university and reasons for choosing to study in a particular university could be based on various characteristics and attributes of the university. Such image or perception may be different based on the diverse student groups such as recent school leavers, mature age adults and international students.

This paper is based on a study conducted in a large Australian university. The paper outlines the key findings of the study which includes; key factors influencing student choice to study with a university, student perception of the first preferred institution compared with their perception of four other Australian metropolitan universities.

Keywords: Student image, perceptions and factors influencing choice

Introduction

In essence institutional image can be articulated as the overall impression of the public about the organisation (Barich and Kotler, 1991). Though there are a number of studies on student perceptions of the learning and teaching environment, for example student responsibilities of student learning (e.g. Devlin, 2002), student identity style inventory (Boyd et. al, 2003), learning environment in science classes (e.g., Nair & Fischer , 2001) there is however, a deficiency of studies in Australian context that specifically looks at image of a university and factors contributing towards choosing a particular university from the perspective of the student. In an earlier study Terkla and Pagano (1993) assessed the image of a university using a set of over 25 indicators. These indicators measured the overall image and compared them to the desired image that had articulated by faculty. The outcome of the study showed that some parallel to the desired image but differences were explained in terms of “the desired image tends toward extremes” (p. 14).

The importance of institutional image has been clearly enunciated in the work of LeBlanc and Nguyen (1999). In this study they illustrate that there are two pivotal components that drive customer perceptions of institutional reputation and image, mainly functional and emotional. The functional component relates to tangible characteristics that can be easily measured. On the other hand emotional component is associated with psychological dimensions that are associated with feelings and attitudes towards the institution. LeBlance and Ngugen (1999) work proposed that the interaction between institutional image and reputation contributes to a better understanding of customer loyalty. In other words if the perceptions of institutional reputation and image are positive, the degree of customer loyalty tends to be higher.

Study on factors influencing student choice to study in an institution is important for a number of reasons. Primarily it gives the institution an understanding of the reasons why students choose a particular institution over others. Secondly, the information obtained can and should be used by universities to assist in the development of their marketing plans. The knowledge on student image and perception of a university can also help institutions to understand student expectations and strategies that could be implemented to improve student experience. In addition it gives empirical evidence to the institutions to strive for change. For example, Agronow & Hengstler (1995) study at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) identified problems with top students rejecting UCSB because of its academic reputation.

There is a limited research study on factors influencing student choice. The studies undertaken to date has been mostly been overseas. Chapman (1981) suggests three factors influencing student choice. They include: information obtained from friends, parent and high school staff, secondly: institutional characteristics such as cost and location and finally, institutional effort to communicate with students. Two stage studies by Joseph and Joseph (1998) with 300 students found service quality and value of education and degree are the most important factors. Similar findings were also found in a study undertaken in Scotland with Accounting and Engineering students. The study undertaken by Briggs (2006) suggested that academic reputation and distance from home and location were key factors in student choice. Studies undertaken by Canale et al (1996) and Coccari and Javalgi in the United States suggest that quality of teachers, academic reputation and cost were seen as the top three highly ranked items on student influence in choosing to study. Research on factors influencing student choice to study in higher education has so far shown that the most important factor includes characteristics related to quality of the institution, quality of teachers or quality of academic programs and infrastructure. Studies undertaken with both students and parents by Broekemier and Seshadri (1999) shows that the quality of program of study, campus safety, cost and academic reputation as the top key criteria used by students and parents to choose institutions.

In striving to be successful, every institution is concerned with portraying itself in a positive way. More specifically, university image or branding is becoming increasingly important in the higher education market. With this emphasis, and the increasing competitiveness in the higher education sector, it is not only logical but a necessity to evaluate this perception through the eyes of institutions main client, the students. This paper looks at this interesting and challenging issue through the eyes of the students. In particular the paper looks at factors that contribute to student choice to enrol at a particular Australian university.

Methodology

A survey was conducted with 4300 new students enrolled in undergraduate programs. The survey consisted of a series of items measuring university characteristics that influenced their decision to apply for university studies. The design of the questionnaire also allowed participants to justify their ratings. Respondents were asked to rate the importance (1 – low to 5 – high) on a range of university characteristics that influenced their decision to apply to the university compared with other universities in the same market.

Both paper and online methodology was used to gather student feedback. The response rate was about 40%. The response sample was representative to the profile of the university in demographics (e.g. gender, age and domestics or international students).

Results and Discussion

Table 1 reports on the various characteristics measured in the survey. The results show that the top five reasons influencing student selection for a university were *quality of teaching staff, academic facilities, employment prospects, links with industry and the professions and location of the university*. The survey was first conducted in 2004 and repeated in 2008. The results presented in table 1 shows very slight variation of findings between a four year period.

Table 1: Factors influencing selection of the university

Characteristics	Importance 2008		Importance 2004	
	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean
Quality of Teaching Staff	1	4.7	1	4.6
Academic Facilities	2	4.4	3	4.4
Employment Prospects	3	4.3	2	4.4
Links with Industry/Professions	3	4.3	4	4.3
Location of University	3	4.3	5	4.2
Flexible Study Mode	6	4.1	7	4.1
Wide Choice of Subjects	7	4.0	6	4.0
Academic Reputation	8	3.9	8	4.0
Ease of Entry	9	3.8	9	3.8
Cost of the Course	9	3.8	10	3.7
High University Admission Index (UAI) Cut Offs	11	2.6	11	2.9
International Study Opportunities	12	2.4	12	2.8

A further approach in this survey was that students were asked to rate the extent to which a set of image characteristics were associated with each of the metropolitan universities operating in the same market. The results as shown in Tables 2 and 3, consistently show that there are different student images between post 87 (universities established after 1987), Group of Eight (Go8) and Australian Technology Network (ATN) University. The top five image student's rate on a Go8 University include; the rigour of academic, prestigious, elite, traditional and theoretical. Student image of a post 87 university vary somewhat different from Go8. The top five images include; friendly, flexible, practical, progressive and fun. Interestingly, student image of an ATN university show similar image as Go8 with one image seen as distinctive from other Sydney metropolitan university, this being workplace-focussed. Table 2 briefly compares the top five student image by each group of university.

Table 2: Top Five Student Image 2008

Post 87	Go8	ATN
Friendly	Academically rigorous	Academically rigorous
Flexible	Prestigious	Prestigious
Practical	Elite	Work-place focussed
Progressive	Traditional	Practical
Fun	Theoretical	Elite

Post 87: University started after 1987, Go8: Eight old sandstone and research intensive universities, ATN: Australian Technology Network of universities

Table 3: Perceptions of Students with Four Metropolitan Universities 2008 and 2004

Image Characteristics	Post 87 2008	Post 87 2004	Go8 (1) 2008	Go8 (1) 2004	ATN 2008	ATN 2004	Go8 (2) 2008	Go8 (2) 2004
Friendly	64.6%	61%	22.4%	19%	32.0%	22%	35.2%	22%
Flexible	51.7%	56%	15.2%	14%	23.8%	23%	19.7%	20%
Practical	50.8%	50%	23.2%	18%	48.4%	34%	40.8%	22%
Progressive	39.7%	39%	32.8%	20%	32.0%	26%	32.4%	24%
Fun	34.0%	35%	16.0%	14%	26.2%	20%	39.4%	17%
Relevant	31.5%	34%	28.8%	16%	31.1%	20%	21.1%	15%
Work-place focused	24.6%	30%	26.4%	21%	54.1%	41%	38.0%	26%
Academically rigorous	24.1%	16%	84.0%	53%	68.0%	49%	87.3%	53%
Theoretical	18.0%	13%	45.6%	33%	32.8%	30%	38.0%	29%
Egalitarian	8.3%	6%	12.0%	7%	8.2%	4%	4.2%	5%
Prestigious	7.2%	8%	83.2%	70%	59.8%	53%	71.8%	61%
Traditional	6.7%	7%	58.4%	48%	25.4%	20%	39.4%	32%
Elite	2.2%	3%	59.2%	46%	41.8%	33%	45.1%	35%

The survey results suggest that the top five most important reasons that influences student choice is *quality of teaching staff, quality of academic facilities, employment prospects, links with industry and professions and location of the university*. Review of the open ended comments written by respondents in relation to quality of teaching shows the following recurring themes; teachers with excellent subject knowledge, teachers with industry experience, teachers who engage students in learning, good communication skills, responsive, committed and accessible teachers. In line with this importance, the second important factor relating to student choice was with academic facilities. Respondents also wrote extensive comments in relation to this factor. The recurring comments suggest the student expectation was for an effective and responsive administrative support system to support student learning such as library, information technology, student administration and other support services including sports facilities. These factors are imperative for a successful study program at universities.

The finding of this study on factors influencing student choice to study in a large Australian university clearly shows that students are well informed about university characteristics and their image. Secondly, this study along with the review of literature also shows that student choice is based on the *quality* characteristics such as quality of teachers, quality of academic facilities and the outcome of university education i.e. recognition of graduates by employers. The dominance of higher education league tables and ranking may play a key role in student selection and choice. The United Kingdom experience suggests that the use of league or ranking tables in newspapers and other media has resulted in 30 per cent increased student applications in top ranking universities in 2001 (Gunn & Hill, 2008). According to Clarke (2007), ranking and league tables has played a significant factor in student choice particularly with high achieving students. A study in the UK with employer groups suggests that employers cited a range of sources of information on quality and standards in higher education

including: personal experience (of past graduates), professional perceptions and network, league tables and regional links (Morley & Aynsley, 2007). According to (Morley, 2003; Marginson, 2004), quality scores play a central role in the marketisation of higher education and become prestige maximisers. Such information are used by students (where to study); for employers (where to find high quality graduates); industry (where to invest in research). The availability of such information in public domain influences student choice in domestic and international student markets.

Conclusion

The survey of student image and perception allows universities to know about student expectations of both domestic and international students. Such data plays key role in knowing new student expectations before enrolment which may help universities to both engage and retain students particularly in the first year by accommodating their needs. It would help universities to clearly outline expectations management in student orientations so that students are aware of the various services and support provided by the university. Further, the results can and must be used in the formulation of Strategic Marketing Plan as well as assisting Faculties in developing their individual marketing plans. In addition, such information will aid Faculties in relating to students expectations of university in developing their course proposals

Trend data on factors influencing student choice such as quality of teaching also allows universities to undertake comparative analysis between what students expect and the actual student experience using a range of surveys and feedback mechanisms and in turn improve the various areas.

The challenge for universities in the changing higher education landscape is to listen to student voices and manage student expectations in a timely manner. Students will continue to seek increased information to reach more informed decision making and publicly available information on university performance is evident. The current pattern of student participation in higher education with large proportion of students engaged in full-time or part-time employment informs policy makers that increasingly, students expect universities to fit around their lives rather students adjusting their lives for tertiary education. Universities inability to meet the needs and expectations of students will result in dissatisfaction, and it may also have negative impact on progression, success or possible drop-out of students. Such negative impact will have consequences on public funding of universities which is driven by performance metrics in many developed countries with student satisfaction, retention, progression and completions as key indicators.

The results of the national course experience questionnaire (CEQ) in Australia shows low student satisfaction on items related to good teaching which prospective and current students see as most important when choosing to study with a university. Australia performs well below UK universities on similar scale.

References for Publication 11

- Agronow, S. and Hengstler, D (1995) 'How Campus "Image" and Rank Among Competitors Influence Enrolment Decisions'. Presented at the 1995 Annual Conference of the Association for Institutional Research, Boston, MA, USA. May 1995.
- Boyd, V. S., Hunt, P .F., Kandell, J. J. & Margaretha S. Lucas, S. M. (2003). Relationship between Identity Processing Style and Academic Success in Undergraduate Students. *Journal of College Student Development* 44: 155-167.
- Briggs, S. (2006). An explanatory study of the factors influencing undergraduate student choice: The case of higher education in Scotland. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31 (6), 705-722.
- Broekemier. M. G. and Seshadri, S. (1999). Differences in College Choice Criteria between deciding students and their parents, *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 9 (3), 1-13.
- Chapman, D.W. (1981). A Model of Student College Choice. *Journal of Higher Education*, 52 (5), 490-505
- Coccarri, R.L. and Javalgi, R.G. (1995). "Analysis of Students 'Needs in Selecting a College or University in a Changing Environment. ' *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 6 (2), 27-39.
- Clarke, M. (2007). The Impact of Higher Education Ranking on Student Access, Choice, and Opportunity, *Higher Education in Europe*, 32 (1), 59-70.
- Delvin, M. (2002). "Taking Responsibility for Learning isn't Everything: A Case for Developing Tertiary Students' Conceptions of Learning. *Teaching in Higher Education* 7: 125-138.
- Graduate Careers Australia. (2006) Report of the Course Experience Questionnaire. Retrieved Dec 1, 2008, from <http://www.graduatecareers.com.au/>
- Gunn, R., & Hill, S. (2008). The Impact of League Tables on University Application Rates. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 62 (3), 273-296.
- Joseph, M., & Joseph, B. (1998). Identifying needs of potential students in tertiary education for strategy development. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 6 (2), 90-96.
- LeBlanc, G. and Nguyen, N., 1999, "Listening to the Customer's Voice: Examining Perceived Service Value Among Business Colleges", *The International Journal of Educational Management* , Volume 13, No. 4 , pp. 187-198.
- Long, M., Ferrier, F., & Heagney, M. (2006). *Stay, play or give away? Students continuing, changing or leaving university study in first year*. Retrieved Nov 26, 2008, from <http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/678FF919-3AD5-46C7-9F57-739841698A85/14398/final.pdf>
- Marginson, S. (2004). Competition and Markets in Higher Education: a 'Glonacal' Analysis. *Policy Futures in Education*, 2 (2), 175-244.
- Morley, L. (2003). *Quality and Power in Higher Education Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Morley, L., & Aynsley, S. (2007). Employers, Quality and Standards in Higher Education: Shared Values and Vocabularies or Elitism and Inequalities. *Higher Education Quarterly*. 61 (3), 229-249.

Nair, C. S., & Fisher, D. L. (2001). Learning environments and student attitudes to science at the senior secondary and tertiary levels. *Issues in Educational Research*, 11(2), 12–31.

Terkla, D. G. & Pagano, M.F. (1993). Understanding Institutional Image. *Research in Higher Education* 34: 11-22.

Publication 12

This publication has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

This publication is available as:

Grebennikov, L., & Shah, M., (2008) Enhancing the Research Student Experience in a University. *Proceedings of the Australasian Association for Institutional Research 2008 Forum*, Canberra, 19-21 November.

Links to this publication:

Print	http://webpac.canberra.edu.au/record=b1688052~S4
Online subscribed content (UC community)	
Online general public	http://www.aair.org.au/app/webroot/media/pdf/AAIR%20Fora/Forum2008/Mahsood.pdf
DOI	
Abstract	
<p>In Australia, in the past decades increasing attention has been paid to the quality of research education by universities, governments, prospective employers and industry partners. The success of research students and quality of graduates are important national issues given the positive relationship between the educational level of the population and the national levels of productivity and innovation. Consistent with national trends towards increased numbers and diversity of the general student population, research student cohorts in Australia are becoming larger and more diverse, requiring institutions to actively manage factors influencing the research student experience of a range of academic and general services.</p> <p>This paper presents approaches effectively used by the University of Western Sydney (UWS) to improve the research student experience as a direct result of their feedback. These approaches include: (a) identifying trends in the research student experience and areas needing improvement through the UWS Research Student Satisfaction Survey conducted in 2005 and 2007, and through relevant themes that emerged from the 2006 AUQA audit; (b) prioritising and implementing improvement solutions; and (c) monitoring the improvement actions to measure their efficiency based on student feedback, and to identify areas warranting further improvement attention.</p>	

Publication 13

Employer Satisfaction of University Graduates: Key Capabilities in Early Career Graduates

Mahsood Shah^a & Chenicheri Sid. Nair^b

^a *University of Canberra, Canberra, Australia and*

^b *Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, University of Western Australia,
Perth, Australia*

Abstract

While employers are one of the most important stakeholders of universities, there is limited research in Australia on employer satisfaction with the quality of university graduates and on the key capabilities of early career graduates for employers in various professions. Such research is critical as governments in many countries are enhancing quality assurance of higher education with a focus on academic standards and the extent to which student have achieved learning outcomes. This paper outlines the findings of a survey undertaken in 2004 and 2008 in a large Australian university with 400 graduate employers and professional associations on their satisfaction with university graduates with respect to the key capabilities of early career graduates. The paper also looks at the employer's views about the key skills and attributes needed in early career graduates to meet changing industry trends in various professions.

Keywords: Employer Satisfaction of University Graduates, Graduate Capabilities

Introduction

Governments in many developed countries like Australia and the United Kingdom are strengthening the role of higher education institutions to contribute to the national economy. The focus of such development is to ensure that universities are fulfilling the moral purpose of higher education to meet the changing needs of employers and the industry. Performance based funding of universities is one of the means used by governments to ensure that the outcomes of higher education contributes to long term sustainability that is economically beneficial to the national economy and that higher education provides socially responsible education.

While not all of the problems in society can be expected to be resolved by higher education, the sector can be seen to have some responsibility for employer dissatisfaction with the attributes of university graduates they recruit from universities. In general terms, graduate attributes are understood as the general skills, knowledge and abilities, beyond the discipline content knowledge, that university graduates have gained during their tertiary studies (Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell, & Watts 2002; HEC, 1992). Graduate attributes are also commonly referred to as generic skills, graduate qualities, generic attributes, or graduate capabilities. Further, the lists of graduate attributes among Australian universities tend to vary, not only in terms of which attributes are included, but also regarding the nature and level of attainment of the attributes. The range of attributes tend to vary from simple technical skills to complex intellectual abilities and ethical values (Barrie, 2006).

There are concerns worldwide that existing undergraduate programs are not producing graduates with the kinds of lifelong learning skills and professional skills which they need in order to be successful in their professions (AAGE, 1993; AGR, 1995; BHERT, 1992; Candy & Crebert, 1991; Candy, Crebert & O'Leary, 1994; Harvey, 1993; Harvey & Green, 1994; ICAA, 1994; NBETT, 1992). Articles in the media (for example, *The Australian*) have also highlighted the views of various professional accrediting bodies in relation to the gap between employability skills attained by graduates and what employers want in professions including accounting, finance and economics. Also, the most recent study undertaken in Australia by the Business Industry Group (Australian Industry Group, 2009) with employers suggest that employers recognise employability skills, a positive attitude and work experience as the most important factors when recruiting graduates. The same study also showed employer dissatisfaction in some specific areas including teamwork skills, business and customer awareness and lack of relevant work experience.

Harvey and Green (1994) suggest that in relation to the skills they most prize, the majority of employers are moderately satisfied with the quality graduates they recruit. Studies in the United Kingdom (UK) by Hesketh (2000) with 372 employers suggest the following five skills as most important: verbal communication, learning, written communication, problem solving and teamwork. His study also shows clear evidence that employers are well aware of the quality of graduates from various universities based on previous recruitment experience and some employers use the success of previous graduates to target recruitment from universities with a reputation of producing high quality graduates. According to Murray and Robinson (2001), there is strong evidence that large scale graduate recruiters in UK target a limited number of universities primarily because of the quality of graduates. A study in the UK by Morely & Aynsley (2007) with employer groups suggests that employers cite a range of sources of information on quality and standards in higher education including: personal experience (of past graduates), professional perceptions and networks, league tables and regional links.

A study by Harvey (1993) in the UK found that the top five important qualities sought by employers in recruiting graduates include interpersonal skills, communications skills, intelligence and personality. Similar studies undertaken in Australia by Graduate Careers Australia (GCA) (2007) show that interpersonal and communication skills (written/oral); critical reasoning and analytical skills; problem solving; lateral thinking; technical skills; passion and knowledge of industry; drive; commitment; attitude; cultural alignment; values fit and academic qualification(s) are the top criteria used in graduate recruitment.

A review of recent literature suggests rapidly growing interest amongst Australian universities in becoming engaged with employers and industry bodies (Etzkowitz 2002; Garlick 2000; Gunasekara, 2004; Holland, 2001; Nair & Mertova, 2009). This engagement is very important for universities in order to review and address graduate skills needed in professional practice (e.g. Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry [ACCI], 2007; Australian Council for Educational Research [ACER], 2002; Australian Industry Group (2006); Department of Education Science and Training [DEST], 2007; Graduate Careers Australia [GCA], 2007).

In 2007 nationwide studies by DEST and GCA on capabilities and skills, articulated clearly what employers see as the most important in university graduates (DEST, 2007; GCA, 2007).

These studies show that recruiters are generally satisfied with job-specific skills of graduates, but place greater importance on their interpersonal skills, industry-related experience and ability to promptly apply the knowledge gained at university in the real work settings.

The purpose of this paper is to report on the views of employers on their satisfaction of the quality of university graduates and key capabilities they see as most important in early career graduates. The paper also looks at the employer's views on key skills and attributes needed in early career graduates to meet the changing industry trends in various professions.

Background: About the university

The study was undertaken in a large Australian university. The university offers wide range of courses to more than 40,000 students. The survey was part of the university's quality management framework for learning and teaching.

Methodology

The graduate employer survey which was first initiated in 2004 is part of a suite of surveys available at the university and regarded an important tool primarily for

- acquiring employer feedback on the university's graduate skills and attributes that employers consider as most important;
- identifying areas for curriculum development; and,
- building closer relationships and continued goodwill between the university and key employers.

The survey invited respondents to identify, from their perspective as an employer, the most important attributes, abilities, skills and knowledge needed by graduates for effective performance in their particular profession in coming years. Respondents were asked to rate the relative importance (1-low to 5-high) of 44 specific aspects of professional capability identified in a set of national and international studies of early career graduates in nine professions (Vescio, 2005). Respondents were then asked to rate the extent to which the graduates possess each of these capabilities

In most cases the contact in the database was the human resources manager or staff member responsible for graduate recruitment. After an initial phone call, an email invitation which included the link to the online survey was forwarded to the employers. A total of 880 employers were approached and 760 agreed to participate in the survey. Of these 400 valid responses were received. The response sample was representative to most of the field of education offered by the university and it was also representative to public, private and non profit organisations.

A courtesy call was made to non respondents three weeks after the first invitation. Following the courtesy call, a subsequent reminder was sent via email with the link to the online survey.

Results and Discussion

The findings of the 2004 and 2008 survey are consistent with employers ranking almost the same top 10 items as most important capabilities with early career graduates. Figure 1 reports the top ten items rated by employers as most important and their performance (measured in terms of the mean satisfaction rating). Performance ranking describes the employers view of the graduates' competency in the attributes measured in the questionnaire. The full results of the survey including the abilities measured, the mean scores on importance and performance on all 44 items are presented in Table 1, Appendix 1.

Overall the results indicate a significant gap between many attributes developed at the University compared to the expectations of industry. The findings of the two separate studies (2004 and 2008) indicate that employers consistently rate the following 10 areas as most important:

- Being able to communicate effectively (generic skills and knowledge);
- Being flexible and adaptable (personal);
- A commitment to ethical practice (personal);
- Being willing to face and learn from errors and listen openly to feedback (personal);
- Being able to organise work and manage time effectively (generic skills and knowledge);
- Wanting to produce as good a job as possible (personal);
- The ability to empathise with and work productively with people from a wide range of backgrounds (interpersonal);
- A willingness to listen to different points of view before coming to a decision (interpersonal);
- Being able to develop and contribute positively to team-based projects (interpersonal);
- Being able to set and justify priorities (intellectual).

Legend

No	Capability	No	Capability
1	Being able to communicate effectively	6	Wanting to produce as good a job as possible
2	Being flexible and adaptable	7	The ability to empathise with and work productively with people from a wide range of backgrounds
3	A commitment to ethical practice	8	A willingness to listen to different points of view before coming to a decision
4	Being willing to face and learn from errors and listen openly to feedback	9	Being able to develop and contribute positively to team-based projects
5	Being able to organise work and manage time effectively	10	Being able to set and justify priorities

Figure 1: Importance and performance of the top ten items rated by employers

Of the 10 high importance capabilities, six were ranked relatively low by employers in terms of performance (gap analysis between mean ratings on importance and extent to which graduate possess those capabilities > 1.0). These items were:

- Being able to communicate effectively;
- Being able to organise work and manage time effectively;
- Being willing to face and learn from errors and listen openly to feedback;
- Being able to set and justify priorities;
- Being flexible and adaptable; and
- A willingness to listen to different points of view before coming to a decision.

Studies undertaken by Vescio, (2005) with successful graduates in nine professions in Australia also found similar results with two additional capabilities seen as important: being able to remain calm under pressure or when things go wrong and a willingness to persevere when things are not working out as anticipated. The finding of this survey also aligns with the study undertaken in the UK by Andrews and Higson, (2008) in the business profession. Their study found that work-experience gained during work-based learning programmes such as formal placements and internships represented a significant aspect of graduate experience.

There are significant advantages in reviewing such survey findings especially in the development and review of curriculum and student assessment. According to James *et al*, (2002), student assessments play a key role in the attainment of learning outcomes and generic or employability skills. Further, Bowden and Marton (1998) argue that the curriculum for any university needs to be developed around the idea that students are being prepared for a future based on the needs of the industry. The study reported in this paper is consistent with these studies and generally point to areas that universities need to concentrate to improve their curriculum.

Employer surveys generally provide a picture of the needs of the industry and the possible shortfall in the curriculum. It is however, important to acknowledge that to get an overall picture other stakeholder information would need to be sought. One example of such information includes student perception of their courses covered particularly by the generic skills scale used in the national Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ). An analysis of the national CEQ results by the authors on this scale suggests that graduates have rated two areas (items) with low satisfaction. Satisfaction in the CEQ is measured as the percentage of respondents responding to 4 (Agree) and 5 (Strongly Agree) on a five-point likert scale. The two areas with low satisfaction are ‘the course helped graduates to develop their ability to work as a team member’ (57%) and ‘as a result of my course, I am confident about tackling unfamiliar problems’ (62%). Generally, items in the Generic Skills Scale had satisfaction ratings of less than 80% (*see Table 2*).

Table 2: Satisfaction ratings for the CEQ Generic Skills Scale

No	CEQ Item	Satisfaction (%)
1	The course helped graduates to develop their ability to work as a team member’	57
2	As a result of my course, I am confident about tackling unfamiliar problems	62
3	The course sharpened my analytic skills	71
4	The course developed my problem solving skills	67
5	The course improved my skills in written communication	71
6	The course helped me to develop the ability to plan my own work	69

In comparison, results from the National Student Survey (NSS) which is used in UK universities show a much more positive view of stakeholders to generic skills. The two items which measure generic skills in NSS comparable to the CEQ items show percentage satisfaction ratings well above 80% (*see Table 3*).

Table 3: Comparison of Satisfaction ratings, NSS vs CEQ

No	NSS Item	Satisfaction (%)	
		NSS	CEQ
1	My communication skills have improved	87	71
2	As a result of my course, I am confident about tackling unfamiliar problems	84	62

Analysis of the data (by the authors) on the outcome of generic skills perceptions by stakeholders, revealed a variation existed between private providers in Australia compared to Australian universities.. Graduates from private higher education providers show a much more negative view (by as much as 10%) to this dimension compared to Australian university graduates.

The data generally suggests that both students and employers are on the same page in that generic skills are important contributors to employment and education. The data also suggest that the pedagogical environment is an area that needs further fine tuning so as to narrow the gap between the needs of the industry and that delivered by institutions of higher education. This argument is supported by the more positive view of students in the UK.

The quantitative findings reported in this paper also align with qualitative data provided by the employers. Respondents wrote extensive comments not only on the key trends and changes taking place in various professions but as well outlined key attributes, skills and knowledge needed by early career graduates. The recurring themes on key trends and changes in the industry included: use of technology in business; dealing with a diverse client base; the need for multilingual graduates; addressing the ageing workforce; wages and working conditions of graduates in some professions with high turnovers; shortage of talented graduates; impact of the global economy on business and the need for graduates to be strategic thinkers; recruitment and retention of graduates in regional areas and the need for a national curriculum in some professions to allow graduate mobility (for example, engineering – see Nair, Patil & Mertova, 2009). Respondents also wrote extensively on key attributes, abilities, skills and knowledge needed by graduates. The comments were in close alignment to the quantitative findings presented in Table 1.

Conclusion

The results of the employer survey shows a gap between what employers see as most important in terms of the skills, knowledge and attributes of recent graduates and their satisfaction. Some of the key areas identified in the survey where such gaps exist include communication, the organisation of work and managing time effectively, the willingness to face and learn from errors and listening openly to feedback, the ability to set and justify priorities, being flexible and their adaptability and willingness to listen to different points of view before coming to a decision.

The findings of this research with employers and professional bodies aligns with the current Australian government priorities related to improving the quality, standard, equity and meeting the needs of the industry and professions. The research findings could be used in curriculum reviews to ensure that course design, student assessments and teaching methods enable students to attain generic skills rated by employers as most important in early career graduates.

Thus, as with all survey data, the collection of data is just the first stage in developing a good quality system. What is done with the data is the most critical aspect. A key element of any quality assurance process is the union of evaluation and improvement (Grebennikov & Shah, 2008). A possible approach to address the issues highlighted in the employer survey is to adopt a comprehensive quality monitoring mechanism in the educational process cycle, which would assure a proper alignment of graduate attributes with feedback from employers and further research to enhance the design of course curricula. This may be approached, for example, by

- Utilising employer survey data to review courses across the university. This was achieved in a elite group of eight (Go8) University in Australia which utilised the Employer Survey data for the purpose of course reviews, including engineering.
- Utilising research findings to address the shortfall in generic or transferable attributes (e.g. communication and teamwork) by integrating project-based learning with more traditional instructions. Such was an approach adopted by the University of Queensland, School of Engineering (Crosthwaite *et al.*, 2006).
- Design curricula to include assessment of attributes

Clearly, the employer's survey falls within this scope where institutions of higher education must act on the results to ensure that their graduates are at the forefront in the recruitment process. The results of the employer survey highlighted three key areas relevant to universities more broadly in relation to graduate attributes, that:

- a) there is a need to have a clearer understanding of essential generic and professional attributes needed in the workplace;
- b) universities, in general, need to work more closely with industry so that graduates were better equipped for employment; and,
- c) competencies required by the industry need to be aligned in educational programmes.

This paper also highlights that though data is easily collectable, there is a need to use the data for effective change. However, there is little in research literature of the use of data to effectively change or design curricula. Further, an area that will be important to investigate is the designing of curricula to include assessment of core attributes highlighted in employer surveys. The findings of this survey and other research conducted with employers in Australia could be used by the government to design a generic skills survey or assessment to measure the extent to which final year student have achieved the generic skills rated as most important by employers.

Limitations of Study

1. The study is based on the general view of employers. Discipline specific areas were not investigated
2. Employers participating in this survey come from a limited database maintained by the university. There is a critical need for university faculties, research centres, careers office to maintain a database of employers so as to achieve a reasonable response sample.

References for Publication 13

- Australian Association of Graduate Employers (AAGE), (1993). *National Survey of Graduate Employers*. Sydney, Australia: AAGE.
- Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR), (1995). *Skills for Graduates in the 21st Century* Cambridge: AGR.
- ACCI (2007). *Skills for a nation: A blueprint for improving education and training 2007–2017*. Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Canberra.
- ACER (2002). *Employability skills for Australian industry: Literature review and framework development*. A report to the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Department of Education, Science and Training, Canberra.
- Andrews, J., & Higson, H. (2008). Graduate Employability, ‘Soft Skills’ Versus ‘Hard’ Knowledge: A European Study. *Higher Education in Europe*, 33, 411-422.
- Australian Industry Group (2006). *World class skills for world class industries: Employers’ perspectives on skilling in Australia*. Australian Industry Group, Sydney. Retrieved from <http://www.aigroup.com.au/policy/reports/archive06>
- Australian Industry Group (2009). *Skilling Business in Tough Times*, Australian Industry Group Sydney. Retrieved from <http://www.aigroup.com.au/policy/reports>
- Barrie, S.C. (2006), Understanding what we mean by the generic attributes of graduates, *Higher Education*, 51, 215-41.
- Bowden, J., and Marton, F. (1998). *The University of Learning: Beyond Quality and Competence*. London: Kogan Page.
- Bowden, J., Hart, G., King, B., Trigwell, K. and Watts (2002). Generic capabilities of ATN university graduates Retrieved from <http://www.clt.uts.edu.au/ATN.grad.cap.project.index.html>
- Business/Higher Education Round Table (BHERT), (1992). *Educating for Excellence*, Commissioned Report No. 2 Camberwell: BHERT.
- Candy, P. & Crebert, G. (1991). ‘Ivory tower to concrete jungle’, *Journal of Higher Education*, 62, 572-592.
- Candy, P., Crebert, G. & O’Leary, J. (1994). *Developing Lifelong Learners through Undergraduate Education*, Report to the NBEET. Canberra, Australia: Australian Government Publishing Service.
- Crosthwaite, C., Cameron, I., Lant, P., & Litster, J. (2006). Balancing curriculum processes and content in a project centred curriculum: In pursuit of graduate attributes. *Education for Chemical Engineers*, 1, 39–48.
- DEST (2007). *Graduate employability skills*. Retrieved from <http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/E58EFDBE-BA83-430E-A541-2E91BCB59DF1/20214/GraduateEmployabilitySkillsFINALREPORT1.pdf>
- Etzkowitz, H. (2002). Incubation of incubators: Innovation as a triple helix of university-industry-government networks. *Science and Public Policy*, 29, 115-128.
- Garlick, S. (2000). *Engaging universities and regions: Knowledge contribution to regional economic development in Australia*. Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra.
- Graduate Career Australia (GCA) (2007). *Snapshot: Graduate outlook 2007. A summary of the graduate outlook survey*. Melbourne, Victoria: Graduate Careers Australia.

-
- Grebennikov, L., & Shah, M. (2008). Engaging Employers with the University: Skills Needed and Changes Expected by Industries. *Proceedings of the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance Conference*.
- Gunasekara, C. S. (2004). The third role of Australian universities in human capital formation. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 26, 329-343.
- Harvey, L. (1993). Employer views of higher education , *Proceedings of the Second QHE 24-Hour Seminar*, (Birmingham, University of Central England, CRQ).
- Harvey, L. (1993). *Quality Assessment in Higher Education: Collection Papers*, Quality in Higher Education Project, Innovation in Higher Education Unit, University of Central England/University of Lancaster.
- Harvey, L. & Green, D. (1994). *Employer Satisfaction*. Birmingham, QHE.
- Hesketh, J. A. (2000). Recruiting an Elite? Employers' perceptions of graduate education and training. *Journal of Education and Work*. 13, 245-271.
- Higher Education Council of Australia (HEC) (1992), *Achieving Quality*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing.
- Holland, B. (2001). Toward a definition and characterization of the engaged university. *Metropolitan Universities: An International Forum*, 2, 20-29.
- Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia (ICAA), (1994). *Chartered Accountants in the 21st Century*. Sydney, Australia: ICAA.
- James, R., McInnis, C. & Devlin, M. (2002). *Assessing student learning in Australian Universities*. Australian Universities Teaching Committee.
- Morley, L., & Aynsley, S. (2007). Employers, Quality and Standards in Higher Education: Shared Values and Vocabularies or Elitism and Inequalities. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 61, 229-249.
- Murray, S., & Robinson, H. (2001). Graduate into Sales – Employer, Student and University Perspectives. *Emerald Education and Training*, 43, 139-144.
- Nair, C. S. & Mertova, P. (2009). Conducting a graduate employer survey: a Monash University experience. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 17, 191-203.
- Nair, C.S., Patil, A. & Mertova, M. (2009). Re-engineering Graduate Skills – A Case Study, *European Journal of Engineering Education*, 34, 131-139.
- National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET), (1992). *Skills Required for Graduates: One test of quality in Australian higher education*, Higher Education Council Commissioned Report No. 20. Canberra, Australia: Australian Government Publishing Service.
- Vescio, J. (2005). *An investigation of successful graduates in the early stages of their career across a wide range of professions*. Retrieved from http://www.uws.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/7363/UTS_Succ_Grads_project_report_J.Vescio_2005.pdf

Appendix 1

Table 1: Importance-Performance rating for areas of graduate capability

Importance			Areas of Graduate Capability		Performance		
Mean 04	Mean 08	Rank 08	Item #		Mean 04	Mean 08	Rank 08
The Personal Abilities of Graduates							
4.50	4.58	4	1	Being willing to face and learn from errors and listen openly to feedback	3.46	3.38	9
4.10	4.19	16	2	Understanding personal strengths & limitations	3.23	3.16	21
3.70	3.61	42	3	Being confident to take calculated risks and take on new projects	3.22	2.99	29
4.23	4.27	12	4	Being able to remain calm under pressure or when things go wrong	3.17	3.01	27
3.88	4.09	22	5	Having the ability to defer judgement and not to jump in too quickly to resolve a problem	3.03	3.00	28
4.07	4.24	14	6	A willingness to persevere when things are not working out as anticipated	3.19	3.23	18
4.49	4.54	6	7	Wanting to produce as good a job as possible	3.73	3.63	3
4.17	4.27	13	8	Being willing to take responsibility for projects, including how they turn out	3.4	3.32	12
3.44	3.66	41	9	Having an ability to make a hard decision	2.74	2.87	39
4.13	4.16	18	10	A willingness to pitch in and undertake menial tasks when needed	3.09	3.28	14
4.20	4.18	17	11	Having a sense of humour and being able to keep work in perspective	3.49	3.54	4
4.64	4.60	3	12	A commitment to ethical practice	3.93	3.75	1
4.10	4.23	15	13	A commitment to sustainable practice	3.35	3.42	8
4.59	4.64	2	14	Being flexible and adaptable	3.42	3.52	5
The Interpersonal Abilities of Graduates							
4.45	4.46	7	15	The ability to empathise with and work productively with people from a wide range of backgrounds	3.65	3.48	7
4.37	4.40	8	16	A willingness to listen to different points of view before coming to a decision	3.54	3.37	11
4.13	4.29	11	17	Being able to develop and use networks of colleagues to help solve key workplace problems	3.43	3.28	15
3.79	4.12	19	18	Understanding how the different groups that make up the organisation operate and how much influence they have in different situations	2.88	2.96	33
3.95	4.05	25	19	Being able to work with senior staff without being intimidated	3.28	3.27	16
3.97	3.96	30	20	Being able to give constructive feedback to work colleagues and others without engaging in personal blame	3.04	2.97	32
3.70	3.69	40	21	Being able to motivate others to achieve great things	2.98	2.80	41
4.24	4.40	9	22	Being able to develop and contribute positively to team-based projects	3.56	3.50	6
3.31	3.22	44	23	Having an international perspective	2.92	2.79	42
The Intellectual Abilities of Graduates							
3.82	3.90	33	24	Knowing that there is never a fixed set of steps for solving workplace problems or carrying out a project	2.95	3.15	22
4.20	4.06	24	25	Being able to identify from a mass of detail the core issue in any situation	2.93	2.92	35
3.72	3.92	32	26	The ability to use previous experience to figure out what is going on when a current situation takes an unexpected turn	2.75	2.92	36
4.04	3.96	31	27	Being able to diagnose what is really causing a problem and then to test this out in action	3.03	2.95	34
3.97	3.99	27	28	An ability to trace out and assess the consequences of alternative courses of action and, from this, pick the one most suitable	3.04	2.98	31
4.03	4.10	21	29	Being able to readjust a plan of action in the light of what	3.03	3.05	24

Importance			Areas of Graduate Capability		Performance		
Mean 04	Mean 08	Rank 08	Item #		Mean 04	Mean 08	Rank 08
				happens as it is implemented			
3.80	3.99	28	30	Being able to see how apparently unconnected activities are linked and make up an overall picture	2.84	2.92	37
4.29	4.31	10	31	Being able to set and justify priorities	3.01	3.14	23
3.72	3.87	35	32	An ability to recognise patterns in a complex situation	3.01	3.02	26
4.09	4.07	23	33	Being an independent thinker	3.25	3.17	20
3.97	3.99	29	34	Being creative and enterprising	3.11	3.21	19
				Generic and Specific Skills & Knowledge of Graduates			
3.83	3.88	34	35	Having a high level of current technical expertise relevant to current work requirements	3.16	3.04	25
3.83	3.80	37	36	Understanding the role of risk management and litigation in current professional work	.90	2.72	44
3.76	3.85	36	37	Understanding how organisations operate	2.65	2.83	40
4.10	4.11	20	38	Being able to use IT effectively to communicate & perform key work functions	3.67	3.66	2
4.03	4.03	26	39	Being able to manage ongoing professional learning and development	3.21	3.23	17
3.34	3.46	43	40	An ability to chair and participate constructively in meetings	2.70	2.77	43
4.60	4.68	1	41	Being able to communicate effectively	3.40	3.38	10
3.84	3.73	39	42	Knowing how to manage projects into successful implementation	2.79	2.89	38
3.60	3.74	38	43	An ability to help others learn in the workplace	3.03	2.98	30
4.54	4.54	5	44	Being able to organise work and manage time effectively	3.35	3.28	13

Items ranked high on importance and performance are marked in grey. These should continue to be emphasised in the curriculum. Areas attracting the lowest performance ratings are marked in black.

Publication 14

This publication has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

This publication is available as:

Shah, M., Roth, K., & Nair, S. (2010). Improving the Quality of Offshore Student Experience: Findings of a Decade in Three Australian Universities. *Proceedings of the Australian International Education (AIEC) Conference*. Sydney, Australia.

Links to this publication:

Print	http://webpac.canberra.edu.au/record=b1688052~S4
Online subscribed content (UC community)	
Online general public	http://www.aiec.idp.com/pdf/Improving%20the%20Quality%20of%20Offshore%20Student%20Experience_PeerReviewed.pdf
DOI	

Abstract

The last 10 years has witnessed growth in the enrolment of international students in Australian Universities. The growth of international students has been experienced in both onshore and offshore component. The number of offshore programs and partnerships has also increased with some universities opening offshore campuses. The offshore component of all Australian universities has been under scrutiny by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) since 2002. A large number of universities have closed various offshore programs and partnerships after AUQA cycle one audits due to poor management and quality assurance of offshore operations. The large number of recommendations in public audit reports and negative media stories related to offshore operations has been heralded in almost all University audit reports. The vulnerability of quality assurance and the risk associated with the quality and standard of offshore education have been such that in 2006 the Australian government included internationalisation as a default theme in cycle two audits of almost all universities. Such a decision was made to protect the image and branding of Australian higher education and to improve the quality assurance of international education.

While the findings of various audit reports related to offshore education are known, there is limited research on student experience and satisfaction explicitly with offshore students. This paper outlines the findings of offshore student experience and satisfaction in three Australian Universities. The findings from the three studies with offshore students suggest that student experience, satisfaction and issues raised by offshore students are common in all three Universities. The paper also draws on the analysis of recurring themes related to offshore education based on AUQA cycle one and two audits of Australian universities.

References for the Thesis

- Alderman, G. (2009). Defining and Measuring Academic Standards: A British Perspective. *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 21 (3), pp. 1-14.
- Anderson, D., Johnson, R., & Milligan, B. (2000). Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Australian Higher Education: An Assessment of Australian and International Practice, (Canberra, DETYA). Retrieved 10 December, 2010 from: http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/highered/eippubs/eip00_1/fullcopy00_1.pdf
- Askling, B. (1997). Quality Monitoring as an Institutional Enterprise. *Quality in Higher Education*, 3 (1), pp. 17-26.
- Astin, A. (1980). When Does a College Deserve to be Called 'High Quality'? *Current Issues in Higher Education*, 2 (1), pp. 1-9.
- The Bologna Declaration, 1999, Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education. Retrieved 22 July, 2011 from: http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/MDC/BOLOGNA_DECLARATION1.pdf
- Australian Universities Quality Agency. (2006). *Review of the Australian Universities Quality Agency*. Final report. Retrieved 7 December, 2010 from: <http://www.auqa.edu.au/aboutauqa/externalreview/index.shtml>
- Australian Universities Quality Agency. (2007). *Constitution: AUQA*. Retrieved 7 December, 2010 from: http://www.auqa.edu.au/aboutauqa/mission/AUQA_Constitution.pdf
- Australian Universities Quality Agency. (2010). *Glossary and abbreviations*. Retrieved 20 December, 2010 from: <http://www.auqa.edu.au/glossary>
- Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, *2011-2012 Criteria for Performance Excellence*. Retrieved 25 December, 2010 from: http://www.nist.gov/baldrige/publications/business_nonprofit_criteria.cfm
- Baldwin, G. (1997). An Australian Approach to Quality in Higher Education: the case of Monash University. In J. Brennan, R de Vries, and R, Williams (Eds), *Standards and Higher Education*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publisher.
- Barrows, M. (1999). Quality Management Systems and Dramaturgical Compliance. *Quality in Higher Education*, 5 (1), pp. 27-36.
- Benjamin, R., & Chun, M. (2009). *Returning to Learning in an Age of Assessment: A Synopsis of the Argument, Introducing the Rationale of the Collegiate Learning Assessment*. Council for Aid to Education, New York
- Bradley, D. (2005). *To What End? The Effectiveness of Quality Assurance in Higher Education*. Keynote address at the INQAAHE Biennial Conference, Wellington, New Zealand. (29 March).

-
- Brennan, J. (1997). Authority, Legitimacy and Change: The Rise of Quality Assessment in Higher Education. *Higher Education Management*, 9 (1), pp. 7-29.
- Brennan, J., & Shah. T. (2000). *Managing Quality in Higher Education: An International Perspective on Institutional Assessment and Change*. Society for Research into Higher Education. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Brink, C. (2008). "Standards will drop" – and other fears about the equality agenda in higher education. Paper presented at the Institutional Management in Higher Education conference. September, 2008.
- Brown, R. (2004). *Quality Assurance in Higher Education: The UK Experience since 1992*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Brown, R. (2009). *The Changing Architecture of Quality Assurance*. Proceedings of the 2009 Australian Universities Quality Forum. pp.1-11, Alice Springs, Australia.
- Brown, R., Carpenter, C., Collins, R., & Winkvist-Noble, K. (2007). Recent Developments in Information about Programme Quality in the UK. *Quality in Higher Education*, 13 (2), pp. 173-186.
- Brown, R. (2010). The Current Brouhaha about Standards in England. *Quality in Higher Education*, 16 (2), pp. 129-135.
- Caroll, M. L. (1997). Self-audit of Quality in Academic and Service Departments: A Practical Experience. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 22 (2), pp. 225-232.
- Carr, S., Hamilton, E., & Mead, P. (2005). Is it Possible? Investigating the Influence of External Quality Audit on University Performance. *Quality in Higher Education*, 11 (3), pp. 195-211.
- Cheng, M. (2009). Academics' Professionalism and Quality Mechanisms: Challenges and Tensions. *Quality in Higher Education*, 15 (3), pp. 193-205.
- Cheng, M. (2011). The Perceived Impact of Quality on the Work of Academics. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 30 (2), pp. 179-191.
- Coates, H. (2005). The Value of Student Engagement for Higher Education Quality Assurance. *Quality in Higher Education*, 11 (1), pp. 25-36.
- Commonwealth of Australia. (2000). *The Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework*. Retrieved 25 December, 2010 from: <http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/highered/occpaper/00g/00g.pdf>.
- Commonwealth of Australia. (2007). *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes*. Retrieved 5 December, 2010 from: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Programs/StudentSupport/NationalProtocolsforHEApprovalProcesses/Documents/NationalProtocolsOct2007.pdf>
- Commonwealth of Australia. (2008). *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report*. Retrieved 5 December, 2010 from: http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Review/Documents/PDF/Higher%20Education%20Review_one%20document_02.pdf
- Commonwealth of Australia. (2008). *Selected Higher Education Statistics*, Retrieved 10 December, 2010 from: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Publications/HEStatistics/Publications/Pages/Students.aspx>
- Commonwealth of Australia. (2009). *An Indicators Framework for Higher Education Performance Funding*. Discussion Paper. Retrieved 21 March, 2011 from: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Documents/HIEDPerformanceFunding.pdf>

-
- Commonwealth of Australia. (2009). *Mission-based Compacts Funding for Universities*. Retrieved 21 March, 2011 from: <http://www.innovation.gov.au/Research/MissionBasedCompacts/Documents/MissionBasedCompactsforUniversities.pdf>
- Commonwealth of Australia. (2009). *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System*. Retrieved 5 December 2010 from: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/highereducation/Pages/TransformingAustraliasHESystem.aspx>
- Commonwealth of Australia. (2010). *Higher Education Provider Standards and Requirements*. Retrieved 21 March, 2011 from: http://www.tda.edu.au/resources/Draft_Provider_Registration_Standards.pdf
- Crebert, G., Bates, M., Bell, B., Patrick, C., & Cragnolini, V. (2004). Developing Generic Skills at University, during Work Placement and in Employment: Graduates' Perceptions. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 23 (2), pp. 147-165.
- Creswell, J. (2003). *Research Design. Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (2nd ed). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Creswell, J. (2009). *Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Dano, T., & Stensaker, B. (2007). Still Balancing Improvement and Accountability? Developments in External Quality Assurance in the Nordic Countries 1996-2006. *Quality in Higher Education*, 13 (1), pp. 81-93.
- Danziger, J.N. (1994). *Understanding the Political World* (2nd ed). New York: Longman.
- Deming, W.E. (1986). *Out of the Crisis*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.
- Dill, D. D. (2000). Capacity Building as an Instrument of Institutional Reform: Improving the Quality of Higher Education through Academic Audits in the UK, New Zealand, Sweden, and Hong Kong. *Comparative Policy Analysis*, 2 (2), pp. 211-234.
- Dill, D. D. (2010). We Can't Go Home Again: Insights from a Quarter Century of Experiments in External Academic Quality Assurance. *Quality and Higher Education*, 16 (2), pp. 159-161.
- Dodgson, M. (1993). Organisational Learning: A Review of Some Literatures. *Organization Studies*, 14 (3), pp. 373-394.
- Ewell, P. (2010). Twenty Years of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: What's Happened and What's Different. *Quality in Higher Education*, 6 (2), pp. 173-175.
- Fourie, M., & Alt, H. (2000). Challenges to Sustaining and Enhancing Quality of Teaching and Learning in South African Universities. *Quality in Higher Education*, 6 (2), pp. 115-124.
- Federkeil, G. (2002). *The CHE-/Stern-ranking*. Presentation at the International Roundtable on Statistical Indicators for the Quality Assessment of Higher/Tertiary Education Institutions, Warsaw, Poland. 13-15 June 2002.

-
- Fullan, M., & Scott, G. (2009). *Turnaround Leadership for Higher Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Garratt, B. (1987). *The Learning Organisation*. London: HarperCollins
- Gerbic, P., & Kranenburg, I. (2003). The Impact of External Approval Processes on Programme Development. *Quality in Higher Education*, 9 (2), pp. 169-177.
- Gift, S.I., & Bell-Hutchinson, C. (2007). Quality Assurance and the Imperatives for Improved Student Experiences in Higher Education: The Case of the University of the West Indies. *Quality in Higher Education*, 13 (2), pp. 145-157.
- Grebennikov, L., & Shah. M. (2008). *Enhancing the Research Student Experience in a University*. Proceedings of the Australasian Association for Institutional Research (AAIR) 2008 Forum, Canberra, 19-21 November.
- Gymild, V. (2007). Quality Assurance Reconsidered: A Case Study. *Quality in Higher Education*, 13 (3), pp. 263-273.
- Hackman, R.J., & Wageman, R. (1995). Total Quality Management, Conceptual and Practical Issues. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40, pp. 309-42.
- Hannan, A., & Silver, H. (2006). On Being an External Examiner. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31:1, pp. 57-69.
- Harvey, L. (1998). An Assessment of Past and Current Approaches to Quality in Higher Education. *Australian Journal of Education*, 42 (3), pp. 237-255.
- Harvey, L. (1999). *Evaluating the Evaluators*. International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) conference: Quality without Frontiers, South Africa.
- Harvey, L. (2002). The End of Quality? *Quality in Higher Education*, 8 (1), pp. 5-22.
- Harvey, L. (2005). A History and Critique of Quality Evaluations in the UK. *Quality Assurance in Education*. 13 (4), pp. 263-276.
- Harvey, L. (2006). Impact of Quality Assurance: Overview of a Discussion between Representatives of External Quality Assurance Agencies. *Quality in Higher Education*, 12 (3), pp. 287-290.
- Harvey, L., & Green, D. (1993). Defining Quality. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education: an International Journal*, 18 (1), pp. 9-34.
- Harvey, L., & Newton, J. (2004). Transforming Quality Evaluation. *Quality in Higher Education*, 10 (2), pp. 149-165.
- Harvey, L., & Williams, J. (2010). Fifteen Years of Quality in Higher Education (Part Two). *Quality in Higher Education*, 16 (2), pp. 81-113.
- Heine, C., Kerst, C., & Sommer, D. (2007). *Studienanfänger im Wintersemester 2005/06 Wege zum Studium, Studien – und Hochschulwahl, Situation bei Studeinbeginn*. Forum Hochschule 1/2007. HIS Hochschul – Informations-System GmbH.

-
- Heine, C., & Willich, J. (2006). *Informationsverhalten und Entscheidungsfindung bei der Studien- und Ausbildungswahl Studienberechtigte 2005 ein halbes Jahr vor dem Erwerb der Hochschulreife*. Forum Hochschule 2/2006.
- Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). (2005). *The Cost and Benefits of External Review of Quality Assurance in Higher Education*, Retrieved 5 December, 2010 from: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/2005/>
- Horsburgh, M. (1997). External Quality Monitoring in New Zealand Tertiary Education. *Quality in Higher Education*, 3 (1), pp. 5-15.
- Hoxby, C.M. (1997). *How the Changing Market Structures of US Higher Education Explains College Tuition*. NBER Working Papers 6323. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Hoxby, C.M. (2001). *The Return to Attending a More Selective College: 1960 to the Present*. Harvard University, 2001.
- Hugo, G. (2005). Academia's own demographics time bomb. *Australian Universities Review*, 48 (1), pp. 16-23.
- International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (2010). *About INQAAHE*. Retrieved 20 December, 2010 from: <http://www.inqaahe.org/main/about-inqaahe>
- Jackson, N. (1997). Academic Regulation in UK Higher Education: Part 1 – The Concept of Collaborative Regulation. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 5 (3), pp. 120-135.
- James, R., Krause, L.K., & Jennings, C. (2010). *The First Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings from 1994–2009*. Retrieved 20 December, 2010 from: http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/research/FYE_Report_1994_to_2009.pdf
- Jeliazkova, M., & Westerheijden, D.F. (2002). Systematic Adaptation to a Changing Environment: Towards a Next Generation of Quality Assurance Models. *Higher Education*, 44 (3-4), pp. 433-448.
- Juran, M. J. (1992). *Juran on Quality by Design: The New Steps for Planning Quality into Goods and Services*. USA: Free Press.
- Keohane, O. N. (2006). *Higher Ground: Ethics and Leadership in a Modern University*. USA: Duke University Press.
- Kogan, M., Bauer, M., Bleilie, I., & Henkel, M. (2000). *Transforming Higher Education: A Comparative Study*. London: Jessica Kinsley.
- Kristensen, B. (1997). The Impact of Quality Monitoring on Institutions: A Danish Experience at the Copenhagen Business School. *Quality in Higher Education*, 3(1), pp. 87–94.
- Kristensen, B. (2010). Has External Quality Assurance Actually Improved Quality in Higher Education Over the Course of 20 Years of the 'Quality Revolution'? *Quality in Higher Education*, 16(2), pp. 153–157.
- Kristoffersen, D., & Woodhouse, D. (2005). *An Overview of World Issues in Quality Assurance for Higher Education*. Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), Victoria, June 2005.

-
- Laughton, D. (2003). Why was the QAA Approach to Teaching Quality Assessments Rejected by Academics in UK HE? *Quality in Higher Education*, 28 (3), pp. 321.
- Lee, A. (2010). *AUQA Impacts: Auditor Reflection*. Keynote Address at the 10th Anniversary of AUQA, July. Melbourne, Australia. pp. 1-10.
- Lemaitre, M. J. (2004). Development of External Quality Assurance Schemes: An Answer to the Challenges of Higher Education Evolution. *Quality in Higher Education*, 10 (2), pp. 89-99.
- Long, M., Ferrier, F., & Heagney, M. (2006). Stay, play or give it away? Students continuing, changing or leaving university study in their first year. Retrieved 20 December, 2010 from: http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/stay_play_give_away.htm
- Massaro, V. (2010). 'Cui Bono? The Relevance and Impact of Quality Assurance. *Higher Education Policy and Management*, 32 (1), pp. 17-26.
- Massy, W. F. (1999). *Energizing Quality Work: Higher Education Quality Evaluation in Sweden and Denmark*. Stanford University.
- Massy, W. F., Graham, W. Steven., & Short, M. P. (2007). *Academic Quality at Work: A Handbook for Improvement*. Bolton, USA: Anker Publishing.
- Massy, W.F. (2003). *Honoring the Trust: Quality and Cost Containment in Higher Education*. Bolton, USA: Anker Publishing.
- McDonough, P.M., Antonio, A.L., & Perez, L.X. (1998). College Rankings: Democratized college knowledge for whom? *Research in Higher Education*, 39 (5), pp. 513-537.
- McWilliam, E. (2004). Changing the Academic Subject. *Studies in Higher Education*, 29 (2), pp. 151-163.
- Meade, P. (1995). Utilising the University as a Learning Organisation to Facilitate Quality Improvement. *Quality in Higher Education*, 1 (2), pp. 111-121.
- Mertens, D. M. (2005). *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology* (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. (2007). *Australian Qualifications Framework: Implementation Handbook* (4th ed). Retrieved 5 December, 2010 from: http://www.aqf.edu.au/Portals/0/Documents/Handbook/AQF_Handbook_07.pdf
- Mintzberg, H. (1994). *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Moodie, G. (2008, 13 November). Don't Let Masters Slip Down, *The Australian*.
- Moodie, G. (2010, 17 March). Qualifications Hit by Scatter-gun Training Approach, *The Australian*.
- Morgan, E. D., & Zeffane, R. (2003). Employee Involvement, Organizational Change and Trust in Management. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14 (1), pp. 55-75.

-
- Morley, L. (2003). *Quality and Power in Higher Education*. Buckingham, UK: Society for Research into Higher Education/Open University Press.
- New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit. (1997). *Report on the Review of New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit*.
- New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit. (2001). *Report on the Review of Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit*.
- New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit. (2009). *External Review Report*. Retrieved 30 December, 2010 from: <http://www.nzuaau.ac.nz/sites/all/files/NZUAAU%20External%20Review%20Report%20Aug%202009.pdf>
- Newton, J. (2000). Feeding the Beast or Improving Quality? Academics' Perception of Quality Assurance and Quality Monitoring. *Quality in Higher Education*, 6 (2), pp. 153-163.
- Newton, J. (2002). Views from Below: Academics Coping with Quality. *Quality in Higher Education*, 8 (1), pp. 39-61.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2006). *Education at a Glance*.
- PA Consulting Group. (2010). *A Passing Storm, or Permanent Climate Change? Vice-Chancellors' Views on the Outlook for Universities*. Retrieved 10 December, 2010 from: www.aupo.ac.uk/5036.file.dld
- Quality Assurance Agency. (2010). *Academic Standards and Quality*. Retrieved 20 December, 2010 from: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/default.asp>
- Quality Assurance Agency. (2010). *Evaluation of the Academic Infrastructure: Final Report*. Retrieved 10 December, 2010 from: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/evaluation10findings/>
- Ramsden, P. (2003). *Learning to Teach in Higher Education* (2nd ed). London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Rolfe, H. (2003). University Strategy in an Age of Uncertainty: The Effect of Higher Education Funding on Old and New Universities. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 57 (1), pp. 24-27.
- Rout, M. (2007, 18 July). Public Audits See Unis Tighten Act, *The Australian*.
- Rozsnyai, C. (2010). The Quality Volution. *Quality in Higher Education*, 16 (1), pp. 77-79.
- Saarinen, T. (1995). Systematic Higher Education Assessment and Departmental Impacts: Translating the Effort to Meet the Needs. *Quality in Higher Education*, 1 (3), pp. 223-234.
- Schwarz, S., & Westerheijden, D. (2004). *Accreditation and Evaluation in the European Higher Education Area*. Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Press.
- Scott, G., & Hawke, I. (2003). Using an External Quality Audit as Lever for Institutional Change. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 28(3), pp. 323-332.

-
- Scott, G. (2006). *Accessing the Student Voice: Using CEQuery to identify what retains students and promotes engagement in productive learning in Australian higher education*. Retrieved 10 December, 2010 from: http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/access_student_voice.htm
- Scott, G., Coates, H., & Anderson, M. (2008). *Learning Leaders in Times of Change*. Sydney, Australia: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.
- Scott, G., Grebennikov, L., & Shah, M. (2008). Using Qualitative Data to Prove and Improve Quality in Australian Higher Education. *Proceedings of the Australasian Higher Education Evaluation Forum (AHEEF)*, pp. 97-111.
- Shah, M. (2011). Ten Years of External Quality Audit in Australia: Have Audits Improved Quality Assurance in Universities? *Quality Assurance in Education*, forthcoming.
- Shah, M. (2012). The Effectiveness of External Quality Audits: A Study with Australian Universities. *Quality in Higher Education*. forthcoming.
- Shah, M., & Grebennikov, L. (2008). External Quality Audit as an Opportunity for Institutional Change and Improvement. *Proceedings of the Australian Universities Quality Forum 2008*, Canberra, Australia, pp. 98-103.
- Shah, M., Grebennikov, L., & Singh, H. (2007). *Does Retention Matter? Improving Student Retention: A UWS Case Study*. Paper presented at the Australasian Association for Institutional Research Forum (AAIR), Sydney, 28-30 November.
- Shah, M., & Lewis, I. (2010). Private Higher Education in Australia: Growth, Quality and Standards. *Journal of Institutional Research (South East Asia)*, 8 (2), pp. 80-95.
- Shah, M., Lewis, I., & Fitzgerald, R. (2011). The Renewal of Quality Assurance in Australian Higher Education: The Challenge of Balancing Academic Rigor, Equity and Quality Outcomes. *Quality in Higher Education*, paper accepted for publication in November, 2011.
- Shah, M., & Nair C. S. (2009). Using Student Voice to Improve Student Satisfaction: Two Australian Universities, the Same Agenda. *Journal of Institutional Research (South East Asia)*. 7 (2), pp. 43-55.
- Shah, M., & Nair, C.S. (2010). Enrolling in Higher Education: The Perceptions of Stakeholders. *Journal of Institutional Research*, 15 (1), pp. 9-15.
- Shah, M., & Nair, S. (2010). Monitoring Student Attrition to Enhance Quality. *Journal of Quality and Participation*, 1 (2), pp. 24-30.
- Shah, M., & Nair, S. (2011). The Influence of Strategy and External Quality Audit on University Performance: An Australian Perspective. *Journal of Tertiary Education Management*. 17 (2), 139-150.
- Shah, M., & Nair, S. (2011). Trends in the Quality of the Student Experience: An International Perspective based on Studies in three Universities. *Proceedings of the International Engineering and Technology Education Conference, (IETEC)*, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Forthcoming.
- Shah, M., Nair, S., & Wilson, M. (2011). Quality Assurance in Australian Higher Education: Historical and Future Development. *Journal of Asia Pacific Education Review*, 12 (1).
- Shah, M., Roth, K., & Nair, S. (2010). Improving the Quality of Offshore Student Experience: Findings of a Decade in three Australian Universities, *Proceedings of the Australian International Education Conference 2010*, Sydney, Australia.

-
- Shah, M., & Skaines, I. (2008). A Model for Strategic Planning and Reviews in a University: Changing a Myth into Reality. *Proceedings of the Australian Universities Quality Forum (AUQF)*, pp. 104-113. Melbourne: Australian Universities Quality Agency.
- Shah, M. Skaines, I., & Miller, J. (2007) Measuring the Impact of External Quality Audit on Universities: Can External Quality Audit be Credited for Improvements and Enhancement in Student Learning? How Can We Measure? *Proceedings of the Australian Universities Quality Forum (AUQF)*, pp. 136-142. Melbourne: Australian Universities Quality Agency.
- Shah, M., & Widin, J. (2010). Indigenous Students' Voices: Monitoring Indigenous Student Satisfaction and Retention in a Large Australian University. *Journal of Institutional Research*, 15 (1), pp. 28-40.
- Shah, M., Wilson, M., & Nair, S. (2010). *The Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework: Its Success, Deficiencies and Way Forward*. Paper presented at the Australian Associations for Institutional Research forum, November, Melbourne, Australia.
- Silva, M., Reich, R. & Gallegos, G. (1997). Effects of External Quality Evaluation in Chile: A Preliminary Study. *Quality in Higher Education*, 3 (1), pp. 27-35.
- Singh, M. (2010). Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Which Pasts to Build on, What Futures to Contemplate. *Quality in Higher Education*, 16 (2), pp. 189-194.
- Sitkin, S. B., Sutcliffe, K.M., & Schroeder, R.G. (1994). Distinguishing Control from Learning in Total Quality Management: A Contingency Perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, 18 (3), pp. 537-564.
- Skolnik, L. M. (2010). Quality Assurance in Higher Education as a Political Process. *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 22 (1), pp. 1-20.
- Smeby, J. C., & Stensaker, B. (1999). National Quality Assessment Systems in the Nordic Countries: Developing a Balance between External and Internal Needs? *Higher Education Policy*. 12 (1), pp. 3-14.
- Standards Australia. (2000). *Quality Management Systems - Requirements AS/NZS ISO 9001:2000*.
- Stella, A., & Liston, C. (2008). *Internationalisation of Australian Universities: Learning from cycle 1 Audits*. AUQA Occasional Publication. Retrieved 10 December, 2010 from: <http://www.auqa.edu.au/qualityenhancement/publications/occasional/publications/>
- Stensaker, B. (1997). *'Prefekter om Effekter – en Studie av Auditprosesser i Sverige* (Department Heads on the Effects of Audit – A Study of Audit Processes in Sweden). Stockholm: Hogskoleverket.
- Stensaker, B. (2003). Trance, Transparency and Transformation: The Impact of External Monitoring on Higher Education. *Quality in Higher Education*, 9 (2), pp. 152-159.
- Stensaker, B., Langfeldt, L., Harvey, L., Huisman, J., & Westerheijden, D. (2010). An In-Depth Study on the Impact of External Quality Assurance. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, pp. 1-14.

-
- Sursock, A., & Smidt, H. (2010). *Trends 2010: A Decade of Change in European Higher Education*. Retrieved 10 December, 2010 from: http://www.eua.be/fileadmin/user_upload/files/Publications/EUA_Trends_2010.pdf
- Swedish National Agency for Higher Education. (2005). *How Did Things Turn Out?* Sweden.
- Thune, C. (1996). The Alliance of Accountability and Improvement: The Danish Experience. *Quality in Higher Education*, 2 (1), pp. 21-32.
- Trounson, A. (2008, 10 December). Land of the Rare Go for the Poor who Dream of University, *The Australian*.
- Trounson, A., & Hare, J. (2011, 2 March). Minister Chris Evans Warns Universities Ahead of Uncapping, *The Australian*.
- Vught Van, F. A., & Westerheijden, D. F. (1994). Towards a General Model of Quality Assessment in Higher Education. *Higher Education*, 28 (3), pp. 355-371.
- Wahlen, S. (2004). Does National Quality Monitoring Make a Difference? *Quality in Higher Education*, 10 (2), pp. 139-147.
- Westerheijden, F. D., Hulpiau, V., & Waeytens, K. (2007). From Design and Implementation to Impact of Quality Assurance: An Overview of Some Studies into What Impacts Improvement. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 13 (4), pp. 295-312.
- Weusthof, P. J. M. (1995). Internal Quality Assurance in Dutch Universities: An Empirical Analysis of Characteristics and Results of Self-Evaluation. *Quality in Higher Education*, 1 (3), pp. 235-248.
- Wickham, S., Coetzee, G., Jones, B., & Metcalfe, A. (2007). *HEQC Evaluative Study of Institutional Audits 2006*, Pretoria: Higher Education Quality Council. Retrieved 10 December, 2010 from: <http://www.che.ac.za/documents/d000144/>
- Williams, P. (2009). *The Result of Intelligent Effort: Two Decades in the Quality Assurance of Higher Education*. London: Institute of Education, University of London.
- Wilson, B. (1996). Quality in Universities. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 18 (2), pp. 149-158.
- Meade, P., & Woodhouse, D. (2000). Evaluating the Effectiveness of the New Zealand Academic Audit Unit: Review and Outcomes. *Quality in Higher Education*, 6 (1), pp. 19-29.

Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire Used

Study on the Effectiveness of External Quality Audits of Australian Universities

Introduction

External quality audits of Universities have been introduced in many countries over the past decade. They include the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa. However, there is limited evidence about the effectiveness of external quality audit of universities.

This survey seeks to address this issue with a number of Australian universities.

Completing the survey

This online survey should take about 15 minutes to complete. The researcher may have already contacted you on your willingness to participate in this study.

Please contact me on: mahsood.shah@canberra.edu.au if you have any questions regarding this survey.

Many thanks for your assistance in completing this survey. I am aware of the time pressures of a very busy work schedule and so I am especially grateful for your participation.

Mahsood Shah

SECTION A: ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT OF EXTERNAL QUALITY AUDIT

This section of the survey seeks to identify some general background information. The data will only be used for statistical purpose and no individual or institution will be identified in the results. For each item, please click on the most appropriate response.

University details

1. **Name of your University** (only to be used for statistical purposes and will not be referred to by name in the results)

Australian Catholic University	La Trobe University	University of Newcastle
Australian National University	Macquarie University	University of Queensland
Bond University	Monash University	University of Sydney
Central Queensland University	Murdoch University	University of South Australia
Charles Darwin University	Queensland University of	University of Southern Queensland
Charles Sturt University	Technology	University of Tasmania
Curtin University of Technology	RMIT University	University of Technology Sydney
Deakin University	Southern Cross University	University of the Sunshine Coast
Edith Cowan University	Swinburne University of Technology	University of Western Australia
Flinders University	University of Adelaide	University of Western Sydney
Griffith University	University of Ballarat	University of Wollongong
James Cook University	University of Canberra	Victoria University
	University of Melbourne	
	University of New England	
	University of New South Wales	

2. **Does your University have specific people appointed to manage Quality across the uni?** *y/n*
3. **Did your university form a committee/group to provide leadership in the preparation of the external quality audit?** *y/n*
4. **What was the approx cost to prepare the university for the external quality audit?** *e.g. trial audit, audit fees, staff cost e.t.c)*

\$100,000 - \$ 500,000
 500,000 - \$1,000,000
 more than \$1,000,000

5. **Your views about the external quality audits conducted by AUQA?**

Your views about external quality audits		SD	D	N	S	SA
a.	I believe that AUQA audits have improved quality assurance in my university	1	2	3	4	5
b.	I believe that AUQA audits together with internal and external operating environment have played key role in improving quality assurance in my university?	1	2	3	4	5
c.	I believe that AUQA audits have improved student satisfaction/experience in my university	1	2	3	4	5
d.	Preparation for cycle 2 audits have played key role in improving various systems and process for quality assurance in my university	1	2	3	4	5

6. **In your view what are some of the improvements as a direct result of external quality audit in your university?** (*open ended question*)

Sections B, C, D, E and F seek your views on the effectiveness of self assessment and external quality audit had on the areas of governance, core business and support services in your university. Please rate the level of improvement in each item as a result of the self assessment and external quality audit where (1- low improvement and 5 - high improvement). There is also opportunity to write open ended comments on improvements in each area.

The items in section B, C, D and E are based on literature review on impact of external audit and audit outcomes in various countries.

SECTION B : EFFECTIVENESS OF SELF ASSESSMENT AND EXTERNAL QUALITY AUDIT ON THE GOVERNANCE, STRATEGIC PLANNING AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY

Governance, Strategic Planning and Quality Management	Level of improvement as a result of the external audit process				
	Low		Moderate		High
Rate the level of improvement as a result of the self assessment and external quality audit					
1. Strategic planning process	1	2	3	4	5
2. Alignment of strategic plan with operational and functional plans	1	2	3	4	5
3. Quality assurance framework and implementation	1	2	3	4	5
4. Self assessment of the Council, Academic Senate and university level committees	1	2	3	4	5
5. Reporting on key performance indicators	1	2	3	4	5
6. Review processes and improvement	1	2	3	4	5
7. Benchmarking	1	2	3	4	5
8. Consultation/communication with staff, students and the other stakeholders	1	2	3	4	5
9. Management of university entities	1	2	3	4	5
10. Financial management	1	2	3	4	5

Please identify up to 3 areas where external audit has improved Governance, Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance in your university. *(open ended question)*

SECTION C : EFFECTIVENESS OF SELF ASSESSMENT AND EXTERNAL QUALITY AUDIT ON THE CORE BUSINESS OF THE UNIVERSITY'S LEARNING AND TEACHING, RESEARCH, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INTERNATIONALISATION

Learning & Teaching	Level of improvement as a result of the external audit process				
	Low		Moderate		High
Rate the level of improvement as a result of the self assessment and external quality audit					
1. Consistent implementation of academic policies	1	2	3	4	5
2. Quality assurance process for course development & approval	1	2	3	4	5
3. Quality management of student assessments	1	2	3	4	5
4. Embedding graduate attributes in the curriculum	1	2	3	4	5
5. Role of learning and teaching committees	1	2	3	4	5
6. External advice on course development	1	2	3	4	5
7. Academic program reviews	1	2	3	4	5
8. Tracking performance in learning and teaching	1	2	3	4	5
9. Reward for quality teaching (individual, school and faculty)	1	2	3	4	5
10. Learning and teaching outcomes	1	2	3	4	5

Please identify up to 3 areas where external audit has improved Learning and Teaching in your university. *(open ended question)*

Research and Research Training	Level of improvement as a result of the external audit process				
	Low		Moderate		High
Rate the level of improvement as a result of the self assessment and external quality audit					
1. Supervision of research students	1	2	3	4	5
2. Support for research students	1	2	3	4	5
3. Resources and facilities for research students	1	2	3	4	5
4. Support for early career researchers and ongoing professional development	1	2	3	4	5
5. Review of research centres	1	2	3	4	5
6. Tracking performance in research	1	2	3	4	5
7. Research and research training outcomes	1	2	3	4	5

Please identify up to 3 areas where external audit has improved Research and Research Training in your university. *(open ended question)*

Community Engagement	Level of improvement as a result of the external audit process				
Rate the level of improvement as a result of the self assessment and external quality audit	Low		Moderate		High
1. Strategy and framework for community engagement	1	2	3	4	5
2. Leadership in community engagement	1	2	3	4	5
3. Resourcing and support for community engagement	1	2	3	4	5
4. Incentives for staff involved in community engagement activities	1	2	3	4	5
5. Key performance indicators for community engagement	1	2	3	4	5
6. Outcomes in community engagement	1	2	3	4	5

Please identify up to 3 areas where external audit has improved Community Engagement in your university. *(open ended question)*

Internationalisation	Level of improvement as a result of the external audit process				
Rate the level of improvement as a result of the self assessment and external quality audit	Low		Moderate		High
1. QA processes for marketing, admissions and credit transfer	1	2	3	4	5
2. Induction and cross cultural training for teaching staff	1	2	3	4	5
3. Quality assurance processes for offshore course/partnership/contracts	1	2	3	4	5
4. Process for the review of offshore program/partner	1	2	3	4	5
5. Consistency and equivalence of teaching and courses (onshore and offshore)	1	2	3	4	5
6. Risk Management process for offshore programs	1	2	3	4	5
7. Resources and support for offshore students (library, learning skills etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
8. International student satisfaction	1	2	3	4	5

Please identify up to 3 areas where external audit has improved Internationalisation in your university. *(open ended question)*

Has your university closed any offshore programs as a result of the external quality audit? *y/n*

SECTION D : EFFECTIVENESS OF SELF ASSESSMENT AND EXTERNAL QUALITY AUDIT ON THE SUPPORT SERVICES OF THE UNIVERSITY: HUMAN RESOURCES, LIBRARY, STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Administrative Support Services	Level of improvement as a result of the external audit process				
Rate the level of improvement as a result of the self assessment and external quality audit	Low		Moderate		High
1. Workload management	1	2	3	4	5
2. Performance development and review process	1	2	3	4	5
3. Workforce development and succession strategy	1	2	3	4	5
4. Resourcing of student support services	1	2	3	4	5
5. Training and professional development of staff	1	2	3	4	5
6. Synergy between library, IT, flexible learning and other student support services	1	2	3	4	5

Please identify up to 3 areas where external audit has improved Administrative Support Services in your university. *(open ended question)*

SECTION E: EFFECTIVENESS OF SELF ASSESSMENT AND EXTERNAL QUALITY AUDIT ON INSTITUTIONAL SURVEYS, MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND OTHER MECHANISMS USED TO COLLECT FEEDBACK

Survey Management	Level of improvement as a result of the external audit process				
Rate the level of improvement as a result of the self assessment and external quality audit	Low		Moderate		High
Systematic management of surveys and feedback	1	2	3	4	5
Improvements as a result of student and staff feedback	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION F: THE EXTERNAL QUALITY AUDIT PROCESS

This section seeks feedback on the external quality audit at your institution. For each item, please select your response where 1 – low satisfaction, 3 – undecided and 5 – high satisfaction

Rate your overall satisfaction in relation to the external quality audit process	Level of satisfaction on the external audit process				
Items	Low		Undecided		High
1. The external quality audit process conducted by AUQA	1	2	3	4	5
2. Panel composition based on the history and characteristic of your institution	1	2	3	4	5
3. Advice and guidance by the Audit Director of the external quality agency	1	2	3	4	5
4. External quality agency website and resources available	1	2	3	4	5
5. Communication with the external quality agency before, during and after the audit	1	2	3	4	5
6. Preparatory visit by the Panel Chair and Audit Director	1	2	3	4	5
7. Request for additional material	1	2	3	4	5
8. Offshore visits	1	2	3	4	5
9. Main audit visit	1	2	3	4	5
10. Final audit report	1	2	3	4	5

Please identify the best aspects of the external quality audit based on your experience. *(open ended question)*

Please identify the areas where improvement is needed. *(open ended question)*

SECTION G- THE INSTITUTION

Please identify the extent to which the following had major impact on your institution in the last five years. (1 - low impact, 3 - undecided and 5 - high impact)

Rate the level of impact the following had on your institution in the past five years	Level of satisfaction on the external audit process				
Items	Low		Undecided		High
1. External quality audits by AUQA	1	2	3	4	5
2. High education policy change such as (Outcomes of Backing Australia's future and Post Bradley reforms	1	2	3	4	5
3. Changes as a result of the external operating environment	1	2	3	4	5
4. Funding for your university	1	2	3	4	5
5. Ongoing restructures in the university	1	2	3	4	5

Would you like to receive a summary of the findings of this survey? *y/n*

If yes, please include your email address:

If you experience any problems submitting the survey, please contact me on email

mahsood.shah@canberra.edu.au

Thank you very much for your participation.

The Effectiveness of
External Quality Audits on
Australian Universities:
A Study with 30 Australian Universities

Mahsood Shah
PhD student
University of Canberra
