Improving Quality through Review: Case of University of the Visual and Performing Arts

Samarasinghe I.A. K. C

University of the Visual and Performing Arts

Colombo 07, Sri Lanka

kamani@vpa.ac.lk

Abstract

Most of the higher education institutions employ the practice of internal and external reviews and external quality assurance to improve and ensure the quality of tertiary education. According to the available literature, most of the Sri Lankan universities are on their way to improving their quality and the main instrument for this is through audit used as a driver of change and improvement. The primary objective of this study was to analyze how programme review reports have impacted the University of the Visual and Performing Arts. The methodology involved in this was a case study and data was analyzed by using qualitative techniques. The study analyzed the programme review reports obtained for the three undergraduate faculties of the University; namely, Music, Dance & Drama, and Visual Arts. As per the reviewers' comments, performances and quality assurance practices varied from one faculty to another. The reports indicated that higher performances were reported from the faculties of Music and Visual Arts whereas the Faculty of Dance and Drama reported lower performances in comparison. Moreover, in spite being relatively better in terms of quality assurance practices, even the former two faculties' though the allocation of marks by criteria and the standards stipulated were to a minimum. Despite the reports' presenting low scores, they generated a positive impact on the university since each faculty was able to recognize its strengths and weaknesses and take steps to improve the quality of the study programmes. In fact, all three entities are of the understanding that their main purpose is to produce graduates with high quality profiles. Maintaining the quality and assuring the needs of the University's stakeholders should be a continuous, on-going process, which should be continuously monitored by each Faculty Board and the Senates of the university.

Keywords: - Programme review, quality assurance, University of the Visual & Performing Arts

Introduction:-

External Quality Assurance (EQA) or review is an important component of the Quality Assurance (QA) framework of any higher education system. Its main objectives are to ensure the quality of education provision and standards of awards. This is to be achieved by inculcating a quality culture within the institutions and promoting continuous quality improvement in all spheres of higher education facilitated through periodic review and feedback. With the globalization of higher education, policy makers and other stakeholders across the world believe that traditional academic controls are not adequate for today's challenges and as a result, they propose more explicit and stringent quality assurance measures. External quality assurance through the implementation of peer review, commissioned by the national quality assurance system, has now gained worldwide acceptance as an effective method to ensure quality and high standards of education. Hence, an institutional review analyses the effectiveness of an institution's processes for managing and assuring the quality of academic activities undertaken by it. It evaluates the extent to which internal quality assurance schemes can be relied upon to maintain the quality of provision of educational programmes over time. Moreover, such programme reviews evaluate the effectiveness of a faculty's or institute's processes for managing and assuring quality of its study programmes, student learning experience and standards of awards within a programme of study. To put it simply, it assesses the management and assurance of quality at programme level. Ultimately, institutional reviews and programme reviews both validate the self-evaluation of the institutions themselves about what they are doing well and where they need improvement.

"Improving the quality of university education in Sri Lanka: an analysis of Quality Assurance Council's Review", a paper presented by Chandra Gunawardena states that a majority of the Sri Lankan universities are on its e way to improving their quality [CITATION Gun17 \l 1033]. R. Ravi Kumar, in his study on "Quality improvement in Higher Education in India: A Review" asserts that the term "quality" can be defined as an outcome, a property, or a process [CITATION RRa13 \l 1033]. Defining Quality, a research article published by Lee Harvey and Diana Green, indicates that quality can be viewed as exception, as perfection, as

fitness for purpose, as value for money and as transformative [CITATION Lee93 \l 1033]. They further note that maintaining quality and assuring needs has to be a continuous, on-going process. Mahsood Shah (2011) in his thesis, titled "The Effectiveness of External Quality Audits on Australian Universities: A Study" collects evidence from 30 Australian Universities and suggests that audits have improved quality assurance processes in Australian universities. This study also notes that some universities have used audit as a driver for change and improvement, which has indeed improved the student experience. Another research named "Ten years of external quality audit in Australia: evaluating its effectiveness and success" conducted by Shah in 2011 states that although external audits have led to an improvement in systems and processes in Australian universities, they have not necessarily improved the student experience. Nevertheless, the researcher argues that the external quality assessment has contributed to the improvement of strategic planning processes, the establishment of self-review schemes of university committees, and the formation of evidence-based decision-making culture to enhance quality. The study of various articles published regarding the quality assurance and quality enhancement in higher education systems examined the impact of quality assessment from multiple perspectives.

Quality assessment has contributed to the improvement of strategic planning processes, the establishment of self-review schemes of university committees, and the formation of evidence-based decision-making culture to enhance quality.

The primary research question of this study was as follows:

How have the programme review reports impact the university?

The main objective of this research was to analyze the review reports submitted by the three panels of external reviewers who conducted the assessment in each of the three faculties of the University of the Visual & Performing Arts (UVPA), i.e., Music, Dance & Drama, and Visual Arts, in the year 2018: namely

Methodology:

The methodology involved in this is a case study. This case was analyzed by using qualitative techniques. The study analyzed the programme review reports presented to the Faculty of Music, Faculty of Dance & Drama and Faculty of Visual Arts of the University of the Visual & Performing Arts (UVPA).

Results and Discussion:-

The "Manual for Review of Undergraduate Study Programmes of Sri Lankan Universities and Higher Education Institutions" published by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Sri Lanka in 2015 provides useful and explicit guidelines to Universities and HEIs that wish to get their academic programmes reviewed under the Quality Assurance Framework of the UGC. This manual serves as a practical guide for faculties and institutes to prepare their Self-Evaluation Reports (SER) with respect to the study programmes meant to be reviewed. It explains 8 Criterion, 152 standards for evaluation, list of sources of evidence that needs to be provided to substantiate the claims made by the SER, and a score guide. These programme reviews focus on the following aspects: 1. Programme Management 2. Programme Design and Development 3. Human and Physical Resources 4. Course/Module Design and Development 5. Teaching and Learning 6. Learning Environment, Student Support and Progression 7. Student Assessment and Awards 8. Innovative and Healthy Practices.

In 2018, during the site visit conducted on three occasions at the respective faculties the peer review team verified the evidence provided for each 'standard' by each faculty's self-evaluation report and a corresponding score was assigned according to the guideline provided in the Programme Review Manual. Subsequently, the external reviewers submitted a report with comments, scores, and recommendations.

According to the external reviewers' reports the comments, scores and recommendations received by the different faculties mostly varied.

Table 1: *Summary of Faculty-wise Performances*

Overall marks- out of 100	Faculty of Music	Faculty of Dance & Drama	Faculty of Visual Arts
Marks for overall performance	63.9	42	60

The reports indicated that the Faculty of Music and the Faculty of Visual Arts procured higher overall performance scores whereas a significantly lower rate was obtained by the Faculty of Dance & Drama due to lapses in the programmes that were being offered by it. Given that the Faculties of Music and Visual Arts

obtained scores greater than or equal to 60 for their degree programmes, these two faculties have managed to obtain the minimum level of accomplishment of quality expected of a programme of study and thus they both require improvement on several aspects.

Since the Faculty of Dance and Drama's overall performance marks are less than 60, it has managed only to demonstrate inadequate levels of accomplishment of quality expected of a programme of study, which means that this faculty requires improvement in all aspects.

Table 2: *Summary of the 8 criteria used for measuring performances*

No	Criteria	Number of Criteria	Weighted minimum score	Actual criterion-wise score obtained		
				Faculty of Music	Faculty of Dance & Drama	Faculty of Visual Arts
1	Programme Management	27	75	102	79	107
2	Human and Physical Resources	12	50	53	58	69
3	Programme Design and Development	24	75	94	33	75
4	Course / Module Design and Development	19	75	97	64	95
5	Teaching and Learning	19	75	84	53	87
6	Learning Environment, Student Support and Progression	24	50	61	38	65
7	Student Assessment and Awards	17	75	121	72	74
8	Innovative and Healthy Practices	14	25	27	25	27

According to table 2, results for the first criteria - Programme Management- scored more than the required minimum marks while the Faculty of Visual Arts showed the highest score for this criterion. For the Human and Physical Resources criteria, all three faculties performed minimum level. For the Programme Design and Development criteria, Faculty of Music performed well but unfortunately, Faculty of Dance & Drama had performed below the minimum level. In the case of Course / Module Design and Development, Teaching and Learning, Learning Environment, Student Support and Progression, Student Assessment, Awards, Innovative, and Healthy Practices criterion Faculty of Dance & Drama had performed below the minimum level but other two Faculties had performed satisfactory level.

The main function of the academic programme is Course / Module Design and Development, Teaching and Learning, and Student Assessment. One of the major impacts of this situation is that the faculty of Dance & Drama failed to obtain at least minimum marks for above main functions. So it is advised to take immediate actions. Although according to the analysis faculties of Music and Visual Arts indicated high performance among three faculty's allocation marks by criteria and the standards were minimum. All of these reflects the self-assessment of the Faculty/ Institute of the quality of the study programme and its strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement. Through the institutional, programme and subject review stakeholders, identify priorities for improving the functioning of specific or grouping factors. The improvement area has to be announced to the whole community, comments or feedbacks should be considered in defining the area in a way that helps not only the university administration but also students, alumni, parents, students, teachers, and the community understand the factors that are addressed.

Additionally the programme review reports included the specific strengths and weaknesses implying each 8 criterion. Therefore, each faculty was enabled to identify their own strengths and improve more on them, while understanding their own weaknesses and taking corrective actions to exclude them. The entire university was impacted positively through this. However the Impact of the Quality Assurance on Higher Education

Institutions: A literature review published by Liu, Tan and Meng asserts that, on the whole, the impact of quality assurance on changing the system at a university is not as great as expected [CITATION Liu15 \l 1033].

Considering the context of the University in which the study took place, there are nevertheless various procedures being adopted to report, monitor and document the measures taken to address the recommendations presented by the reviewers. Furthermore, in spite of the difference in marks, it can be noted that at the faculty levels there are only minor differences in the management and procedures adopted at each of the faculties since the faculties operate under a common set of guidelines, acts and rules set by the ministry, UGC and the University itself. Thus, during the decision, making processes and development of study programmes there is a sharing of good practices and there are debates and idea-sharing happening in order to raise the standards of the university to upgrade its status.

The main instrument used in this process is the university strategic plans of which the latest develop version for the year's 2018to 2022 attempts to ensure quality assurance practices at the administrative, and study programme levels. The UVPA strategic plan was also developed according to the demands of the community and it expects enhance the quality of the institution as a whole as well as to produce well-rounded graduates who are highly employable.

In order to achieve the overarching objective the learning environment of students including factors associated with learning should be improved. As such, carefully designed study programmes, productive deployment of existing courses presented to the students using modern methods of teaching and a faculty who are qualified, experienced and competent to perform the task of effectively disseminating knowledge to the learners by constantly upgrading themselves could positively contribute to augmenting the quality and status of the University as a whole. Designing, developing, and managing the courses, developing courses/modules compatible with the guidelines and the approved subject benchmarks, maintaining objective, effective and transparent assessment practices, and a qualified panel of lecturers are some crucial aspects of sustaining quality assurance in a university system.

The factors associated with learning includes the learning environment such as well-designed lecture halls, practical rooms and studios; availability of human resources - academic staff, academic support staff, non-academic staff, and administrative staff; accessibility of physical resources like musical instruments, library facilities, and infrastructure; adopting innovative and healthy practices. The quality of student learning and factors associated with learning depend on the strategic plan of the university. In fact, it is the primary guideline used to promote learning. So, when the university has a well-developed strategic plan that is pragmatic, the quality of learning and teaching will eventually be promoted.

As such, in order to develop quality policies, first, the factors to be improved and implemented should be identified. In other words, the processes and practices should be evaluated and improved.

It could be done in three ways:

1) Gathering stakeholder feedback

2) Conducting external reviews

3) Performing self-evaluation.

Satisfying stakeholders is a crucial priority in any organization. Therefore, the feedback given by the faculty, students, alumni and community helps to identify the issues that need to be addressed at the university. The institute itself could evaluate their processes and practices to find out how well they are aligned with the best standards. In the meantime, an external review also could be done to evaluate the institute. The external review may include an overall institutional review, programme review and subject review. Through these evaluations and reviews, the factors to be improved would be identified and the corrective measures can be implemented to achieve the expected levels of quality. These best standards are driven by external policies and internal policies. Considering Sri Lankan Universities, the main relatable external policies are the policies stipulated by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the Sri Lankan Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council (QAAC) Internal policies include the university's strategic plan. The corrective actions also should be included into this plan so that they could be practiced to the betterment of the institute and to produce a quality graduate output.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that the external reviews used in this case study (the programme review report) include important aspects relatable to student learning and factors associated with learning in the eight criteria. They are Programme Management, Programme Design and Development, Human and Physical Resources, Course/Module Design and Development, Teaching and Learning, Learning Environment, Student Support and Progression, Student Assessment and Awards, Innovative and Healthy Practices.

The above could be summarized using the framework below:

```
┌──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                                                                                        │
│   ┌─────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────┐       │
│   │ Promoting Student   │ ⊕ │ Promoting Factors   │  ⇒   │ Quality Graduate    │       │
│   │ Learning            │   │ Associated with     │      │ Profile             │       │
│   └─────────────────────┘   │ Learning            │      └─────────────────────┘       │
│                             └─────────────────────┘                                    │
│                                       ↑                                                │
│                             ┌─────────────────────┐                                    │
│                             │ Strategic Plan &    │                                    │
│                             │ Corporate Plan      │                                    │
│                             └─────────────────────┘                                    │
│                                       ↑                                                │
│                             ┌─────────────────────┐                                    │
│                             │ Factors to Improve &│                                    │
│                             │ Implement           │                                    │
│                             └─────────────────────┘                                    │
│                                       ↑                                                │
│   ┌──────────────┐   ┌────────────────────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐                 │
│   │ Stakeholder  │   │ External Review:           │   │ Self-        │                 │
│   │ Feedback     │   │ Institutional, Programme,  │   │ Evaluation   │                 │
│   └──────────────┘   │ Subject                    │   └──────────────┘                 │
│                      └────────────────────────────┘                                    │
│                                                                                        │
└──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```
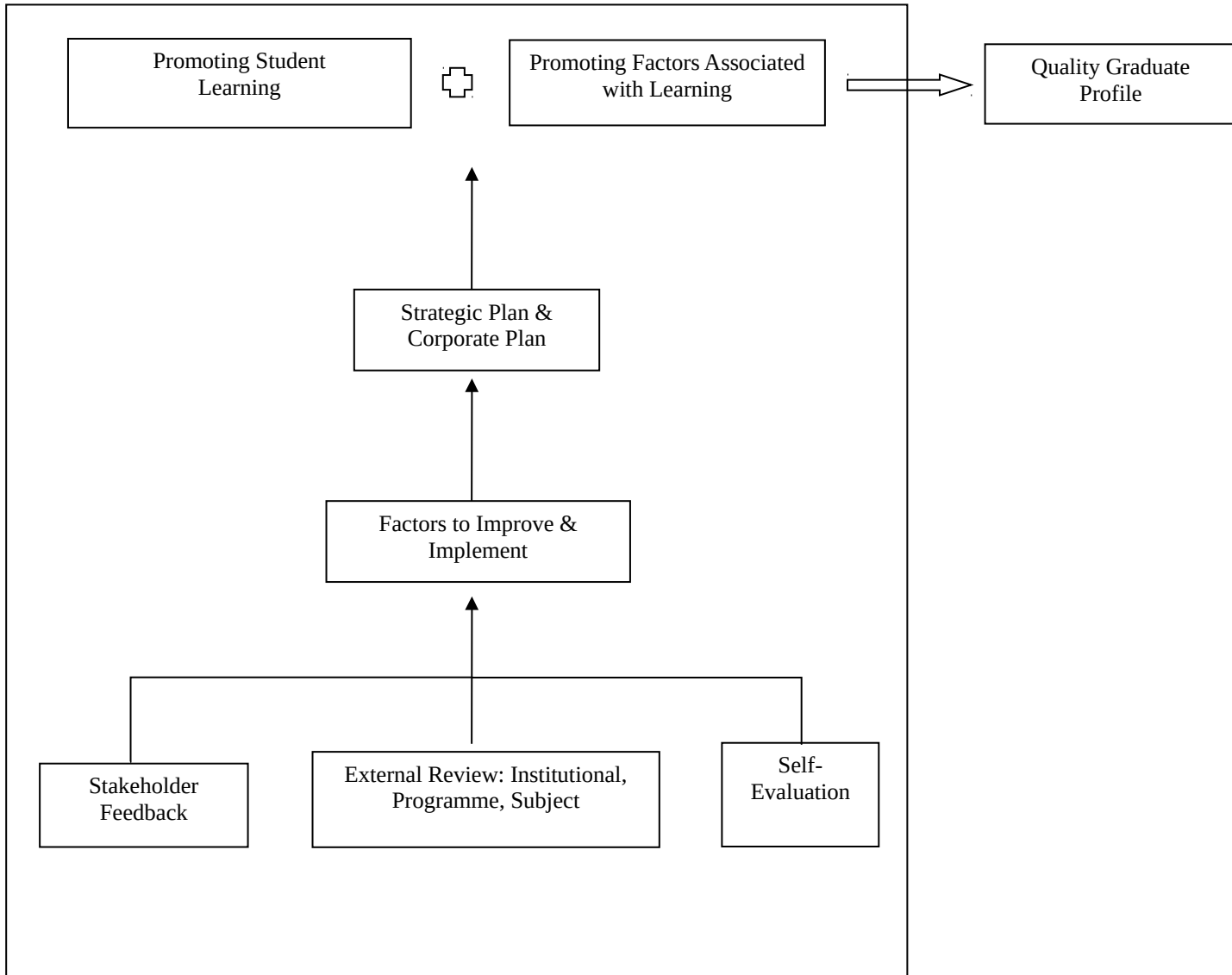
Figure 01:-Quality Related Framework

Subsequently, it can be premised that periodical quality assurance reviews play a major role in improving the quality of a higher educational institution. Indeed, continuous institutional reviews are crucial to maintaining sustainable and consistent quality levels in these contexts.

Conclusion:-

Engaging on frequent quality audits would demonstrate the commitment of the faculty to uphold its mission of producing graduates with desired attributes and also could reflect its commitment for the promotion and conformity to national policies, guidelines with regard to human resource recruitment, needs, and the upholding of quality expected by professional bodies from the graduates and academics of the faculties. . Every institute has a commitment to quality. It is important to start with a clear understanding of the destination/outcome and how improvement of the quality in graduate profile can be achieved. This involves a collaborative effort from all stakeholders concerned. Commitment to collaborative work needs to be established despite people having different perceptions of change.

Only discussing the review reports during the period in which the process takes place is not enough. It is the responsibility of the university administration/management to respond to these reviewers' comments, feedback, and recommendations and take necessary actions to make sure that quality assurance and quality enhancement of the study programme can be guaranteed. W. Edwards Deming argued that commitment to quality should involve a top-down approach as the main agents of change are the administrators who are at the top and the practices then flow from there throughout the organization.

In sum, quality requires gentle prodding from internal audits to sustain a quality system put in place to continuously improve the quality of an institution. . In this scenario, external quality reviews have played a significant role in improving quality assurance in major and minor areas of universities. As a result, effective handling of these reviews can facilitate the UVPA to produce high quality graduates with enhanced graduate profiles. Maintaining the quality and assuring the needs of all stakeholders at the faculty level should be a continuous and on-going process, so the Faculty Board, the Senate of university and its leadership, must systematically monitor it. Hence, regular meetings, planning sessions, and decision processes involving the relevant stakeholders are very important to improve systems and processes for quality assurance in core and support areas of the university.

References

African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA). (2018, July). Retrieved from Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation: https://haqaa.aau.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ASG-QA_2018_edited_EN.pdf

Blackstock, D., Hou, Y.-C., Moldt, C., Udam, M., & Zele, E. (2013). *Internal Quality Assurance Assessing Impact: Using External Reviews and Evaluations in Internal Quality Assurance*. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from http://biblioteka-krk.ibe.edu.pl: http://biblioteka-krk.ibe.edu.pl/opac_css/doc_num.php?explnum_id=690

Cheng, M. (2011). The perceived impact of quality audit on the work of academics. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 179-191.

Ewell, P. (2010). Twenty Years of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: What's Happened and What's Different? *Quality in Higher Education*, 173-175.

Gunawardena, C. (2017). Improving the quality of university education in Sri Lanka: an. *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences*, 3-15.

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*, 153-157.

Kumar, R. R. (2013). Quality improvement in Higher Education in India: A Review. *International Journal of Educational Research and Reviews*, 44-46.

Lee Harvey, D. G. (1993). Defining Quality. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 9-34.

Liu, S., Tan, M., & Meng, Z. (2015, 12 1). *Impact of Quality Assurance on Higher Education Institutions: A Literature Review*. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/291946514_Impact_of_Quality_Assurance_on_Higher_Education_Institutions_A_Literature_Review

Peiris, C. (n.d.). *Sri Lanka's Quality Assurance System.* Retrieved from world Bank: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/srilanka_qaa-council.pdf

Shah, M. (2011). Ten years of external quality audit in Australia: evaluating its effectiveness and success. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 761-772.

Shah, M. (2011, September 11). *The Effectiveness of External Quality Audits on Australian Universities: A Study with 30 Australian Universities*. Retrieved from http://www.canberra.edu.au: http://www.canberra.edu.au/researchrepository/file/f36e5f7a-f6f8-c214-cc8e-abdbc5e7c04e/1/full_text.pdf

Shah, M. (2013, November 20). The effectiveness of external quality audits: a study of Australian universities. *Quality in Higher education*, pp. 358-375 .

Singh, M. (2010). Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Which Pasts to Build on, What Futures to Contemplate? *Quality in Higher Education*, 189-194.

Wickramsinghe, S. (2013, April). *INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE: Experiences of Sri Lankan Universities.* Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287488713_INTERNAL_QUALITY_ASSURANCE_Experiences_of_Sri_Lankan_Universities