

MANAGING AND ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF SERVICE-LEARNING



OUTCOMES

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- Develop a framework for managing the quality of your academic programme.
- Develop mechanisms for the quality assurance of your academic programme including service-learning.
- Plan and develop tracking mechanisms for evaluating service-learning.
- Monitor and evaluate the quality of service-learning within the context of your programme.
- Complete the template for the design of a module integrating service-learning in the curriculum. Use Appendix A: SECTION C. You may also find it useful to draw on the content of Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

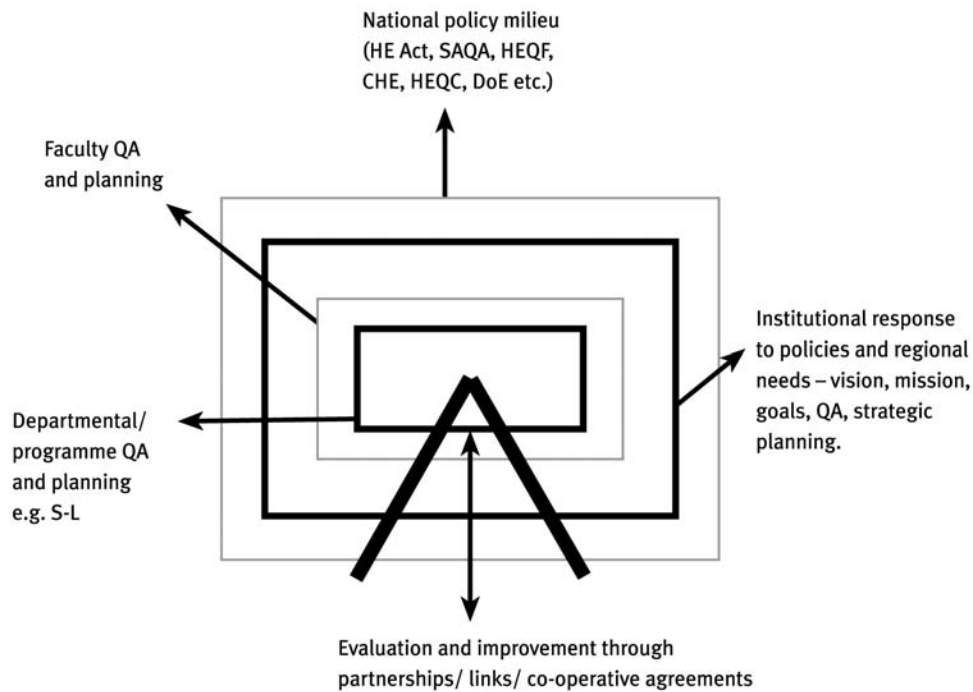
It is widely acknowledged that quality assurance is one of the most important mechanisms that is steering the higher education system in South Africa. In terms of the Higher Education Act (Republic of South Africa, 1997) quality assurance is the responsibility of the CHE, and is given effect by the HEQC – as a permanent sub-committee of the CHE. The work of the HEQC is guided and supported by the HEQC Board, whose members are elected for a three-year term of office that may be extended at the discretion of the CHE.

In its founding document (HEQC, 2001) the HEQC articulates the fundamental principles that underpin its quality assurance framework and criteria, namely:

- Fitness *for* and fitness *of* purpose;
- Value for money in relation to the achievement of the goals of the White Paper; and
- Transformation.

The vision and mission of public HEIs should be aligned with the HEQC's approach to quality as well as with other national imperatives. This must be evident in the policies, procedures, processes and systems of the institution. The relationship between the national milieu and the hierarchical structures within an institution is depicted in figure 9.1 (DIT, 2003). This diagram may also be applied to the development of an institution-wide quality assurance system and the implementation thereof at various levels within the institution.

Figure 9.1: Relationship between the National Milieu and HEIs (Nested Model)



(DIT, 2003)

9.2 DEFINITIONS

The process of development of a quality assurance system tends to generate a lot of debate, not least of which are the debates pertaining to definitions. It is important to ensure that within the institution there is a shared understanding of the definitions of commonly used terms such as quality, quality management, quality assurance etc. Where these definitions are not yet established at an institutional level, it is incumbent on programme leaders to document the definitions of the terms and concepts that they use. This will ensure consistency of application and will inform the development and implementation of systems and processes.

Quality is a useful concept to link changes at the macro level of systems and policies of higher education with changes at the micro level concerned with curricula, teaching, student learning and assessment. At the macro level, quality assessment is about power and control. At the micro level it is about student experience and achievement. (Brennan, 1997: 8)

The HEQC documents provide some useful definitions in this regard. However, your institution/ department/ programme may want to go beyond a minimum standards approach to articulating its own definitions as part of its policy approval processes. This is acceptable provided that there is alignment with the HEQC definitions. Here we provide definitions of the following commonly-used terms:

- Quality management;
- Quality assurance; and
- Programme evaluation.

Quality management: The HEQC (2004b: 26) defines this as: “Institutional arrangements for assuring, supporting, developing and enhancing, and monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, research and community engagement”. Quality management may be visualised as a matrix comprising four key activities/ elements, namely: quality support, quality development, quality monitoring and quality assurance. Each of these elements in turn is assessed with regard to input, process, output and impact factors. Quality assurance is the focus of most quality management systems and may ultimately subsume quality management.

Quality assurance: The HEQC (2004b: 26) defines this as: “Processes of ensuring that specified standards or requirements have been achieved”. Woodhouse (2001: 2) defines quality assurance as “those systems, procedures, processes and actions intended to lead to the achievement, maintenance, monitoring and enhancement of quality”. Quality assurance is an ongoing internal activity to determine that what the HEI aims to achieve *is* being achieved. Harman (1998: 346) differentiates between quality assessment and quality assurance and states that the latter is an inclusive term that “embraces not only assessment but also...follow-up efforts aimed to achieve improvement”.

Programme evaluation: The HEQC (2004b: 25) defines this as “the external quality assurance processes undertaken to make an independent assessment of a programme’s development, management, and outcomes and to validate the findings of an internal programme review”.

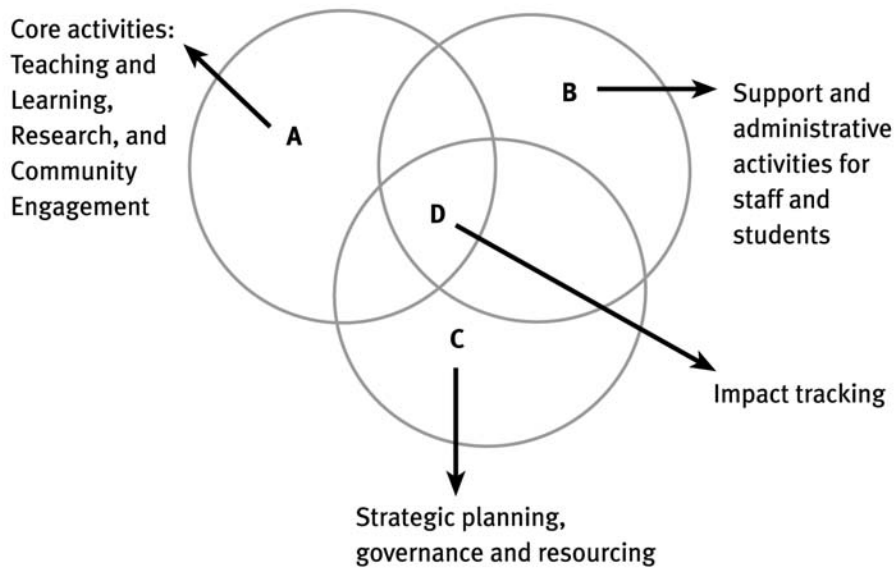
9.3 A FRAMEWORK FOR MANAGING QUALITY

Close scrutiny of the illustration in figure 9.1 makes it apparent that the institution has to develop an approach to managing quality that will inform the development of appropriate policies, processes and procedures to quality assure its activities. Within any HEI, there are a number of key activities that are crucial to the life of the institution. These activities must act in synergy if the institution is to function in a manner that contributes to the achievement of its vision, mission and goals. Furthermore, the students’ total learning experience at the HEI is a reflection of this synergy. Scott and Hawke (CTP, 2004) identify three broad categories for these activities, viz.:

- The core activities of teaching and learning, research and community engagement (figure 9.2, circle A);
- A range of administrative and support activities for staff and students, which underpin and may even serve as enablers for the core activities of the institution (figure 9.2, circle B); and
- Direction-setting, governance and resourcing activities, which are critical for the wellbeing of the institution in order to achieve its mission and retain its strategic position and competitive advantage (figure 9.2, circle C).

It is necessary for the institution to engage in monitoring and evaluation of all of the above activities. The information/ data gathered may be triangulated and thus contributes to determining the impact of these activities (figure 9.2, circle D) on those whom it is set up to benefit. Scott and Hawke (CTP, 2004) illustrate these activities and the impact tracking in a model for mutual reinforcement (figure 9.2, below):

Figure 9.2: Mutual Reinforcement among Higher Education Activities



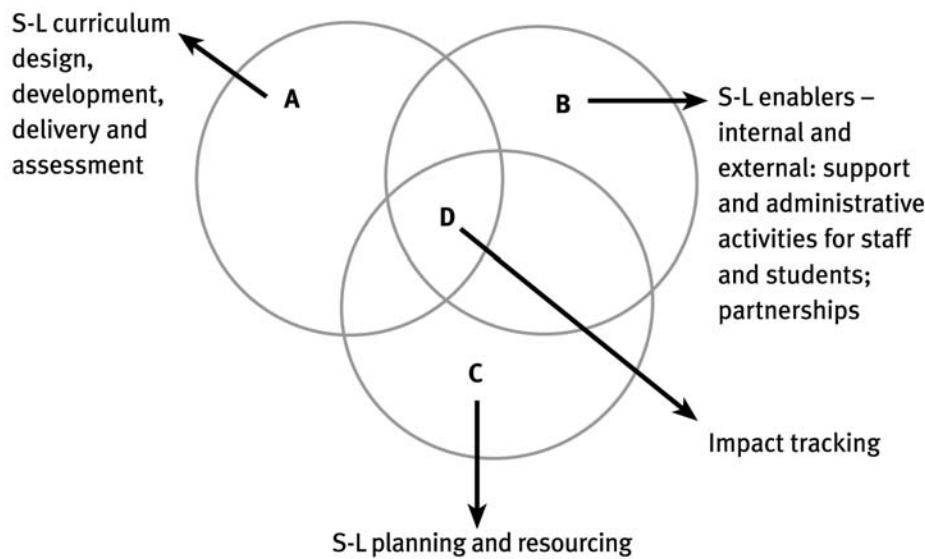
(CTP, 2004)

The above model may be used by service-learning coordinators as a framework to guide the development of a system to manage quality at institutional, departmental and programme level.⁵ The model also demonstrates the need for alignment of the three sets of activities within the institution; for example, the achievement of the outcomes for service-learning at the module/ course level is enhanced if there is guidance at an institutional level in terms of the necessary policies and processes (refer to Chapter 8 on the institutionalisation of service-learning). This does not mean that service-learning cannot be developed and implemented in the absence of such alignment – but simply that it will be more difficult and that the model for mutual reinforcement will be heavily weighted on one side without the necessary goal setting, resource allocation and support.

5. The idea of a 'service-learning component' will be used in this chapter to embrace service-learning activities at programme and/or module/ course level, as the terms module, course and programme are interpreted differently in different institutions.

By adopting this model for developing a system to manage the quality of service-learning, it is possible to ensure that the key components of the system are addressed. Furthermore, use of the model facilitates the development of appropriate mechanisms for information and data-gathering as well as the triangulation thereof for the assessment of impact. Thus, service-learning coordinators and academic staff (where applicable) may adapt the model specifically for service-learning, as illustrated below:

Figure 9.3: Model for Mutual Reinforcement, Adapted for Service-Learning



In the context of service-learning:

- Circle A may be visualised as having three segments representing (a) design and organisation of the curriculum, (b) delivery of the curriculum, and (c) assessment.
- Circle B represents internal and external support (enablers) for service-learning. Examples of external support would be the service-learning partners, i.e. the community and service agencies. Internal support would be the HEI support structures that would facilitate service-learning activities, for example, the library.
- Circle C represents the HEI's policies, procedures and processes that inform the development and implementation of service-learning activities in alignment with the institutional mission and objectives. Also included here are the resources that are allocated for this activity.
- In each of the above activities, i.e. circles A, B and C, information is gathered and various activities are monitored. The information that is gathered may be used to review various aspects of the service-learning component (formative evaluation) and may also be triangulated and used in the evaluation of the service-learning initiative as a whole (summative evaluation). Payne (2000) provides interesting reading on the models for evaluation and proposes a model that includes qualitative and quantitative sources of data/information.

The various elements that comprise each of the circles specifically for service-learning are clearly articulated in the *Good Practice Guide* (HEQC/ JET, 2006). Through use of that Guide and the above model, service-learning coordinators will be able to develop a system for managing the quality of service-learning at programme and/or institutional level.

For academic staff (lecturers), it will be useful to develop a checklist to determine whether you have the necessary policies, procedures and processes in place. If you find they are not in place, identify what needs to be addressed and communicate this to your line manager for the attention of the Dean and/or the unit that has responsibility for quality assurance at your institution.

Remember the nested model (figure 9.1): your initiative is at the core of the nest and is a component of a much bigger picture – in the context of both the HEI and national policy!

9.4 QUALITY ASSURANCE OF SERVICE-LEARNING

It is easy to be overwhelmed by the plethora of literature available on quality assurance generally. Just breathe deeply and start by considering, in the context of your service-learning component, the different moments in the quality cycle:

- Planning;
- Implementing;
- Reviewing;
- Evaluating (when you ask: What are we doing? How are we doing it? Why are we doing it this way? How do we know it works? So what?); and
- Improving (when you ask: How will we improve it, and why?)

Figure 9.4: The Quality Cycle



Having read thus far in this chapter, you should by now be familiar with the activities that comprise or should comprise the process of managing the quality of service-learning at your institution. However, it is necessary for you to plan a strategy for monitoring the implementation of service-learning so that you are able to gather information and/or data in an organised manner. Information thus gathered may be used for reviewing the service-learning activities and making improvements where possible. The information and/or data may also be triangulated, allowing you to evaluate (i.e. make judgements about) your service-learning component and develop an appropriate improvement plan.

At this point, it is important to clarify some of the new terms that are being used:

- Evaluation;
- Review; and
- Quality tracking and improvement.

Evaluation: According to the CTP:

This entails specific groups (usually external) making judgements about the worth of a programme activity or institution. It can involve making judgements about the quality of an activity's conception, resourcing, delivery or impact. At the heart of evaluation is value judgement. (CTP, 2004: 48)

Evaluation may also take place as an internal activity (internal evaluation) with external support in the form of the evaluation panel team. Evaluation may be formative or summative and will usually be the responsibility of the service-learning coordinator.

Review: "To look back on, take stock, with a view to determining what is working up to expectation and what is not" (CTP, 2004: 50). Review is an internal, ongoing process that is usually formative in nature and thus lends itself well to reflective practice carried out by lecturers for the purpose of continuous quality improvement of the service-learning module.

Quality tracking and improvement: To quote the CTP once again:

Using agreed quantitative and qualitative measures these systems track activities, processes and programmes as they are implemented in order to identify what is working well (for use in benchmarking for improvement) and what is not (in order to identify key areas for enhancement). (CTP, 2004: 50)

Quality tracking/ benchmarking is usually a high level activity applicable to the service-learning coordinator or institutional quality assurance department. However, this does not preclude academics from benchmarking their service-learning work; this should be encouraged and is recognised as good practice.

Table 9.1 (below) summarises the differences between formative and summative evaluation (adapted from Payne, 2000; and CHE, 2004).

Table 9.1: Differences between Formative and Summative Evaluation

	MONITORING	FORMATIVE EVALUATION	SUMMATIVE EVALUATION
Purpose	Adjust implementation, identify necessary actions	To improve service-learning	To accredit service-learning/ programme
Audience	Department that is implementing service-learning	Staff, service-learning partners, HEI administrators, students	HEQC, possibly even service provider
Who does it?	Internal	Internal	External
Frequency	Continuous	Periodic	Periodic
Main action	Keeping track of trends and progress	Developmental	Making judgements
Focus	Inputs, outputs, processes, instruments	Inputs, outputs, processes, impact	Input versus output; impact; process versus results; cost-benefit analysis
Questions asked	What is working? What can be improved, and how?	What is working? What needs to be improved How can it be improved?	What results occur? How do the community, students, and HEI benefit? How is this contributing to 'the public good'?

Table 9.1 (above) may be adapted further to suit your needs. For example, you may expand the table to include the monitoring mechanisms that you as an academic will implement and also document the purpose of the monitoring activity. Service-learning coordinators and/or quality assurance staff may find it useful also to include the data sources/ evidence that will be used to facilitate triangulation and interpretation of data.

9.4.1 Planning an approach for quality assurance

You will have planned your service-learning component taking into consideration your institution's policies and procedure requirements, i.e. the system for managing the quality of service-learning. Where such a system is not formally articulated, it is important to develop a set of guidelines for yourself so that you develop service-learning within the parameters that you have established. The *Good Practice Guide* (HEQC/ JET, 2006) will assist you in this regard. You now need to document the mechanisms you will use to quality assure the service-learning component. There is a limited number of quality assurance methodologies used internationally; the following are the most common:

- Self-evaluation;
- Peer review by a panel;
- Use of statistical information and performance indicators; and
- Data/ information gathering (from key stakeholders).

(Harman, 1998)

A combination of the above is the recommended approach; that is, a self-evaluative approach through reflection on experience(s) (review), analysis of data and/or information, and triangulation using agreed performance indicators culminating in the compilation of a self-evaluation report. The self-evaluation is then validated through a process of 'peer review' by a panel comprising a number of selected external 'experts'.

9.4.2 Review and evaluation

Determine the frequency of *review* and *evaluation* activities. Evaluation usually requires external evaluators and is a process of making judgements on all aspects of provision of service-learning. The service-learning coordinator should therefore consider an evaluation cycle that allows for sufficient, relevant data to be gathered about the service-learning activity within the context of the whole qualification. The cycle may thus relate to the duration of the qualification; for example, a three-year cycle for an undergraduate qualification (that is, the evaluation will be conducted every three years).

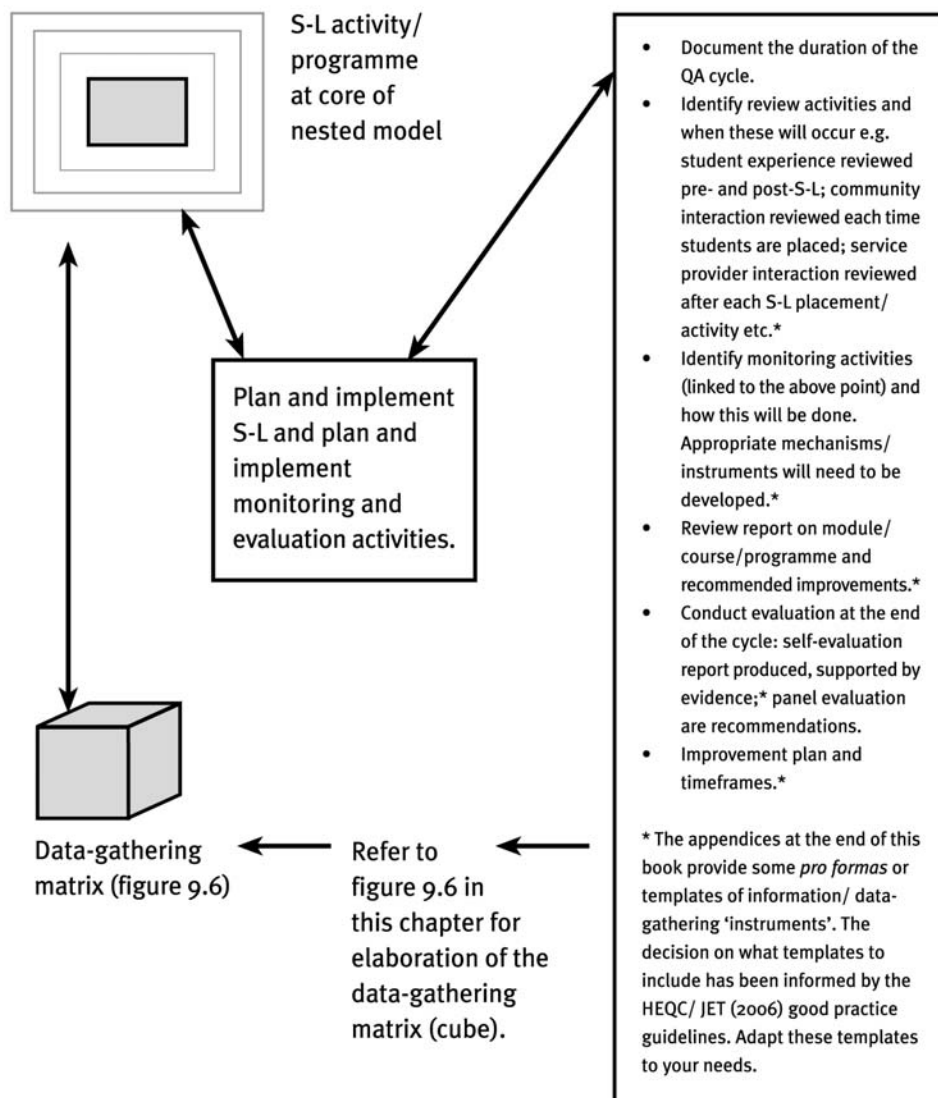
Once you have decided on the frequency of evaluation, you should consider the review activities in which you wish to engage. Remember that the review process is an ongoing one and therefore takes place more frequently than evaluation. Review activities will provide indicators of progress and areas for improvement on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, you may review different aspects of service-learning provision at different points in time; for example, you may choose to review partnerships separately from programme design and delivery. It is, however, advisable that you conduct a review of all aspects of service-learning provision midway in the evaluation cycle. This will assist you in preparing for the evaluation at the end of the cycle. A schematic representation of the quality assurance activities is presented below. Adapt this to suit the needs of your service-learning component.

9.4.3 Gathering information and/or data

In order to reflect on the extent to which you are achieving what you set out to achieve, you will need to gather information from participants and stakeholders in the service-learning component. It is important that you plan and develop these information/ data-gathering activities and associated instruments as you are planning your service-learning component, thus avoiding duplication. For example, you will find that much of the data you gather for quality assurance purposes may also be used to inform research that you are conducting, and *vice versa*. The following two figures, adapted from Payne (2000), and the nested model (figure 9.1) illustrate the complexities of the partnerships in service-learning. At the same time, however, they help identify the role-players from whom feedback is required and the inter-relationships of these role-players.

As you have worked through this book, you will have noticed that you have been referred to the development of various types of feedback instruments and data-gathering mechanisms; for example, self-evaluation of teaching, approval of the service-learning site and feedback from partners. A number of templates for such instruments have been developed and are presented as appendices at the end of the book (see Appendices **K-R**).

Figure 9.5: Review and Evaluation of Service-Learning



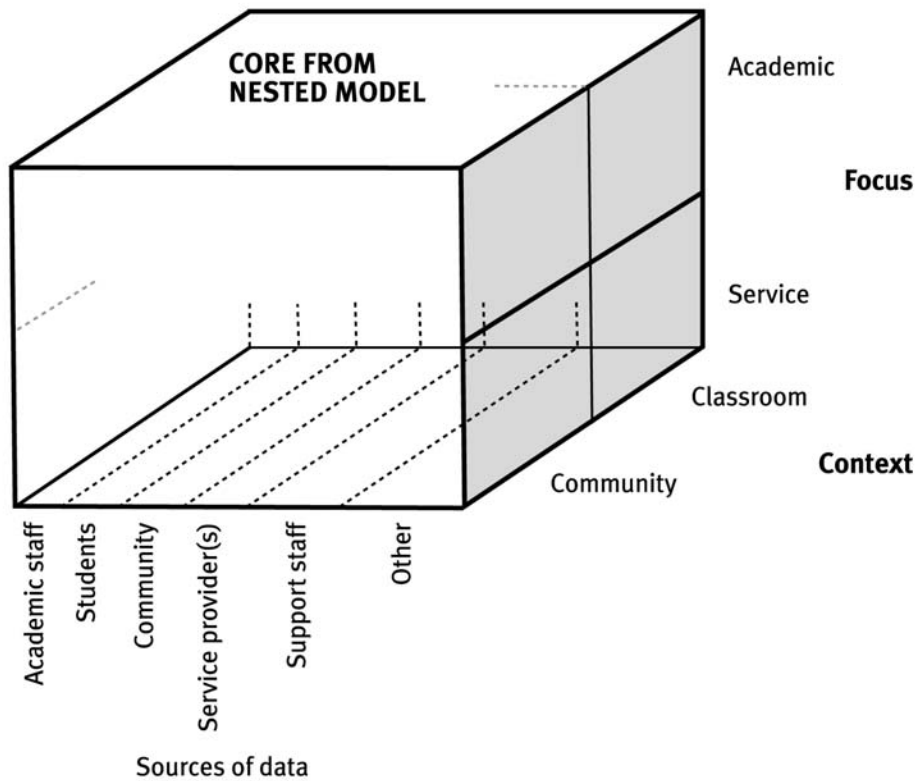
(Adapted from Payne, 2000)

It is important to record processes, activities, outcomes, etc. from the outset; that is, from the point of considering the development and implementation of the service-learning component.

It must be stressed that evaluation is an evidence-based process and that any claims that are made must be substantiated. Such documentation is described as: "...special knowledge about how service-learning has changed the lives of students, teachers, parents, and community members" (Payne, 2000: 17).

Documenting/ recording is initially a challenge for academics, many of whom tend to regard this as yet another example of managerialism, from which they may consider themselves

Figure 9.6: Data-gathering Matrix



(Adapted from Payne, 2000)

exempt. This is not true; for quality assurance initiatives in any institution to succeed, quality assurance activities must become an integral part of academics' *modus operandi*; and this includes gathering evidence. This is especially important when the learning environment shifts to the community and additional role-players enter the teaching-learning arena. Recording could initially be on sheets of flipchart paper (dated). It is necessary to collect information (tracking service-learning) from a range of sources at different times and to triangulate this information. Triangulation without criteria is fraught with problems and the validity of the self-evaluation report will be questioned. It is necessary for lecturers and service-learning coordinators, at the outset, to develop and agree on the criteria to be used for the evaluation of service-learning.

9.4.4 Evaluation

Evaluation entails making judgements about the value of the service-learning activity and is usually conducted by the service-learning coordinator or quality assurance department. The evaluation process also presents an opportunity for reflection on the service-learning process and outcomes. The extent to which internal peer review is successful is dependent on the level of 'maturity' of quality assurance at an institutional level and the extent to which quality assurance is embedded in teaching, learning, assessment and research. Where quality assurance is a 'bolt-on' activity based on compliance (immature system), external peer review is less likely

to have the desired effect (i.e. quality improvement). However, this is largely dependent on the expertise within the evaluation panel and the extent to which those being evaluated demonstrate confidence in the competence of the panel. According to Brennan (1997: 16), “Strong and credible self-evaluation...probably remains the best chance for disciplinary units to assert their authority in the quality assessment process”.

In addition, institutional structures for managing quality have a key role in closing feedback loops, thus inspiring confidence in quality assurance as a worthwhile activity that is beneficial to all stakeholders. The closure of feedback loops also has implications for any surveys that are conducted. For example, students will not participate in a survey if their experience demonstrates that no action has resulted from their responses to a previous survey. Therefore, the communication of the outcome of any survey, and an achievable improvement plan with realistic timeframes, are crucial to the success of any quality assurance system at any level.

9.4.5 The self-evaluation report

The self-evaluation report is a reflective account of the service-learning component. Where service-learning is a component of a programme, it must be evaluated in the context of the programme. The report could include the following areas (refer to figure 9.2):

- Programme design, development and delivery;
- Teaching, learning and assessment;
- Resourcing of service-learning;
- Service provider’s role;
- Community benefits;
- HEI support for service-learning;
- Implementation and efficacy of policies and procedures;
- Impact tracking;
- Data sources and analysis of data;
- Student performance; and
- Performance indicators.

A template is provided as Appendix **R** and may be used as a guide to develop an appropriate template for the report. The evaluative questions in the *Good Practice Guide* (HEQC/ JET, 2006) will assist you with writing an analytical report.

9.4.6 The evaluation panel

For the evaluation of service-learning, a representative evaluation panel is usually appointed. The panel should include a community representative, a representative from the service provider(s), a student representative, a representative from a cognate department and representative(s) from another HEI. It is advisable that the panel chairperson is from another HEI and has had experience with service-learning.

In order to conduct its work, the panel should have at its disposal the mutually agreed criteria

that will be used to make judgements. The *Good Practice Guide* (HEQC/ JET, 2006) may be used to facilitate the development of criteria in your department. The department that has quality assurance responsibilities in your HEI will assist you with this as well as provide you with the guidelines for the appointment of evaluation panels, including the chairperson.

It is wise to take a systematic approach to evaluation and to arrange the evidence for ease of reference in relation to the self-evaluation report.

9.4.7 Responding to the recommendations

The evaluation panel chairperson's report will contain recommendations as well as comments on good practice. *Celebrate the good practice!* Recommendations must be translated into a plan for improvement. Clear timeframes must be identified and where the responsibility for the required action does not lie with your department, refer it to your Head of Department and/or Dean for action, with a request for a written response. This is your evidence (audit trail) for follow-up activities regarding the improvement plan (refer to Appendix S for a template for the improvement plan). An improvement plan is not just a list of activities; it is a detailed plan of action to bring about the desired change.

Good practice indicates that the report and improvement plan should be tabled at the meetings of the relevant committees with quality assurance responsibility; for example, Faculty Board, quality assurance committee, Senate etc. In this way, the evaluation and its outcomes may be tracked, especially with regard to actions taken at an institutional level.



SELF-STUDY ACTIVITY

You are a lecturer in an academic department and plan to implement service-learning in your programme.

- With regard to developing a framework for managing quality, refer to the model for mutual reinforcement (figures 9.2 and 9.3) and apply the model to your own academic programme, with specific reference to service-learning. In attempting to apply the model for mutual reinforcement to your own programme, what gaps or challenges become apparent in your institution? Identify the structures and positions within your institution that have a role to play in 'closing the loop'; that is, in ensuring that quality improvements are resourced and are implemented. What are your reasons for identifying these structures and positions? How do they fit into the model and how will they assist in effecting improvements?
- Design two feedback instruments/ mechanisms that you will use for service-learning and give reasons for the design of the instruments.
- What other evidence will you use to triangulate the data from the two instruments that you have designed?
- Develop and document a system for evaluating your programme including service-learning. What are the resource implications of your system?