

TERTIARY EDUCATION COMMISSION

SUMMARY OF THE EXTERNAL QUALITY AUDIT REPORT (May 2005) UNIVERSITY OF MAURITIUS

1. Overview

- 1.1 Formal quality assurance activities in the tertiary education sector in Mauritius started with the development of the Quality Assurance Framework for the Tertiary Education sector in Mauritius by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) in 1998 followed up with a workshop on Setting up of Institutional Quality Assurance Systems in 1999. The University of Mauritius (UoM) actively participated in the quality assurance agenda of the sector and during the intervening period it developed its quality assurance system, implementing it and improving on it, after carrying out an internal quality audit in 2002. It volunteered to be the first institution to go for a quality audit, announcing its candidature in May 2004.
- 1.2 In preparation for the audit, the Director of Quality Assurance of the University initiated a comprehensive self-assessment exercise as from September 2004. After agreeing on the date for the audit, the TEC Board approved the audit panel on 9 December 2004 and the decision was communicated to the University thereafter.
- 1.3 The TEC received the portfolio of the UoM on 27 February 2005. The auditors were each sent a copy of the same. After scrutinising the portfolio and supporting documents the panel members discussed among themselves the material presented by the University and decided to develop lines of enquiry. In the meantime, additional information was sought from the Director of Quality Assurance. The panel met on 3 May 2005 to fine tune its strategy for the audit and visited the University the same afternoon with a view to looking at the supporting documents provided by the University. The audit visit was conducted as per planned programme, starting on 4 and concluding on 6 May 2005.
- 1.4 During the course of the audit, the panel met with most of the key committee members of the UoM responsible for quality management of teaching and learning, research and community service. It also visited the library, the Jay Baguant Centre for Distance Learning (JBCDL), the Virtual Centre for Innovative Learning Technologies (VCILT), and the Centre for Information Technology and Systems (CITS).
- 1.5 The audit panel appreciated the University's openness and its cooperation throughout the exercise in allowing the auditors to examine their key documents and for their efficient preparation as well as their hospitality and assistance.

2. Summary and Findings

- 2.1 Having examined the portfolio and interviewed various members of the University, the panel concluded that the University had orientated its mission and core functions to serve national requirements and interests. It had consulted its stakeholders at different levels and integrated their inputs in its programmes. It had also orientated its core teaching function towards national needs and to a lesser extent its research and community engagement activities. By and large it satisfied the TEC's criteria of fitness of purpose.
- 2.2 The personnel interviewed, whether they were members of Council, Court, Senate, academic or non-academic staff and students were very enthusiastic in supporting the University in its activities and were keen to see that quality permeates its responsibilities. They were conscious of the University's quality initiatives and were keen to contribute to their improvement. Both academic and non-academic staff had engaged in the self-assessment exercise of the University and had made their specific contributions in getting the portfolio mounted. In these respects, the culture of quality and commitment to continuous improvement were discernible.
- 2.3 Over the past fifteen years it has increased student enrolment from 1297 in 1988/1989 to 6045 in 2003/2004, representing a growth of 466 %. It has also increased its programmes, including undergraduate and postgraduate, to 108 in 2003/2004 compared with 65 programmes in 1998/1999. Despite having to cope with the strains exerted by the rapid growth in number of students and programmes the university strived to maintain quality of its graduates.
- 2.4 As the first University in Mauritius it has the responsibility to generate knowledge and knowledge producers to meet the socio-economic needs of the island in general and the aspiration for Mauritius to become a knowledge hub, in particular. Such a demand can be met by well resourced and adequately planned research strategies. The panel acknowledged the University's efforts to increase research qualifications of academic staff and make resources available for participation in conferences, undertaking research, establishing a Consultancy and Contract Research Centre and promoting thematic research. Despite these efforts, the panel was of the view that more attention should be paid to the research function. The University needs to come up with a strategy to develop the research and research training system that enables the production of quality research outputs and postgraduates to meet the needs of the Mauritian knowledge hub.
- 2.5 The community expects the University to provide its services to the various sectors, including government, private sector, civil society organisations, trade unions, schools and industry. Apart from interventions of individual academics and departments, the University has made timid attempts to respond to their needs and the panel is of the opinion that it is due to the University not having a clear policy and strategy for community engagement.

- 2.6 In line with the requirement to satisfy the fitness for purpose, the University had to set achievable aims and objectives compatible with its mission and which had to be understood and owned by its staff. The University had reviewed its mission in 1999 and at the same time prepared its strategic plan 1999 -2004 using a participatory bottom-up approach. The panel commended the scope of the five-year strategic plan, which identified seven objectives consonant with UoM's mission. The portfolio claimed that most of the objectives were attained.
- 2.7 However, the panel had some reservations on the effectiveness of the strategic plan and on the planning process itself. The plan did not have targets or performance indicators to be able to measure and track its performance. Not all the Faculties aligned their core activities with the seven objectives identified and there was a marked absence of a formal structure or appointed person for regular monitoring and effective implementation or achievement of the objectives. In relation to the University's approach to quality assurance, the establishment of a quality assurance unit in 2002 to oversee quality assurance issues was seen as a positive step. Since its inception, this unit has made a great effort to put in place appropriate structures and processes to meet quality assurance requirements. However, except for the external examiner system which has been implemented for a number of years, developments are relatively recent, and they have yet to be fully implemented and evaluated to be able to determine their effectiveness in ensuring quality. Such an early stage of development of the quality assurance system is reflected in the quality of the portfolio which is largely descriptive and lacking in analysis.
- 2.8 This report reflects the situation of the University at the time of the audit visit in May 2005. It is presented under six sections, namely Governance, Programmes and Teaching, Research, Community Engagement, Staffing, and Support Services, with each having sub-sections. At the end of each sub-section, the report contains commendations and/or recommendations. Commendations are in bold whereas recommendations are underscored. They are given hereunder in the order and on the page in which they appear in the text.

3. List of Commendations

- 3.1 The audit panel commends the University for using a participatory bottom-up approach to develop its strategic plan 1999 – 2004.
- 3.2 The quality Assurance Unit is commended for making significant strides to put in place quality assurance measures in a relatively short time frame, since its inception.
- 3.3 The University, through its liaison with employers, ensures that its programmes are relevant to the needs of the country.
- 3.4 The audit panel commends the University for integrating the Student Work Experience Programme as well as the Internship in the academic programmes. They are positive steps to ensure that the programmes on offer are relevant to the world of work.

- 3.5 The audit panel commends the University for exploring new technologies to enhance access and flexibility.
- 3.6 The panel commends the Faculty of Science for its impressive research output.
- 3.7 The panel commends the University for encouraging staff development, resulting in an increase of PhD holders from 24% to 40% in the last 10 years.
- 3.8 The University is commended for developing comprehensive promotion tools and for continuously improving on them.
- 3.9 The audit panel commends the University for providing the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning to enable its staff to sharpen their teaching skills.
- 3.10 The Centre for Information Technology and Systems is commended for preparing its own strategic plan and evaluating its performance and for its commitment to meeting the needs of the University.

4. List of Recommendations

- 4.1 The University is invited to consider giving an induction to new members, be they in Court, Council or Senate, or alternatively to provide a brochure which deals with responsibilities of members of the committees mentioned.
- 4.2 Council as the body responsible for overall management of the University needs to play a more active role in setting directions for the University.
- 4.3 Court needs to assume a greater role in providing an oversight to the University by meeting on more than one occasion annually and actively taking up matters of national importance having impact on the University and advising Council and Senate in the overall management of the University.
- 4.4 The University should aim to develop its strategic plan based on sound research of national imperatives, undertake continuous evaluation of its performance, and seek to develop performance indicators for attainment of its objectives.
- 4.5 The University should seek to develop its quality assurance measures in a comprehensive manner and ensure that they are implemented and evaluated and that such evaluations are reflected in its self-assessment/portfolio.
- 4.6 Quality promotion, including building capacity, should be made a permanent feature of the University's quality management system.
- 4.7 The University is advised to rationalise and streamline its committees such that faculties are not unduly loaded with responsibilities best located elsewhere.
- 4.8 The University needs to review its management policy with regard to the following and consider:
- integrating the Faculty of Agriculture as a Department in the Faculty of Science.
 - optimising the resources afforded by the SSR Centre for Medical Research in the interest of the University's students.
 - redefining the role of the Virtual Centre for Innovative Learning Technologies and the Lifelong Learning Cluster against the need to strengthen the Jay Baguant Centre for Distance Learning and the Centre for Information Technology and Systems.
- 4.9 The University should develop clear policies on the relative importance of Student Work Experience Programme against the Internship applicable to the respective programmes and assume responsibility for placements of students.

- 4.10 The University should develop appropriate systems for appraising performance of lecturers and develop performance indicators for assessing teaching and learning.
- 4.11 Given the high importance the University places on the feedback of the external examiners in ensuring academic standard, the Senate should give due importance to the feedback and any action taken and respond to the external examiners on the action taken. The University should also ensure that external examiners revisit their previous recommendations and comment on any action taken.
- 4.12 The panel has strong reservations on the way the University is undertaking its collaborative provisions, particularly with the SSR Medical College and recommends that it reconsiders them as a matter of urgency and makes awards only in fields and up to standards in which it is appropriately equipped, and ensures quality of programme delivery.
- 4.13 The University should seek solutions to making the Centre for Applied Social Research more productive or alternatively integrate it with the Faculty of Social Studies and Humanities.
- 4.14 The Panel recommends that the University develop clear policies on research students and ensure that they are put into practice, including monitoring of research supervision and obtaining feedback from students without exposing them to any disadvantages.
- 4.15 The University should develop clear strategies on how it aims to provide its services to the community.
- 4.16 The UoM should consider developing a formula for total workload and not only teaching load.
- 4.17 The University should consider the need to give explicit and explanatory feedback to applicants who have been unsuccessful, and make the criteria on which final decisions for promotion are taken fully transparent.
- 4.18 The University should consider putting in place and implementing a continuing professional development plan for all its staff.
- 4.19 The University should ensure that its administrative staff are adequately allocated to the respective departments to ensure smooth execution of their responsibilities.
- 4.20 The University should as a matter of principle make provisions for induction/orientation programmes for student representatives to enable them to participate as fully as possible in the committees to be able to make their contributions.
- 4.21 UoM should be more sensitive to the needs/concerns of students and take appropriate measures to address them positively.
- 4.22 It is recommended that the UoM reviews the library as a matter of urgency towards ensuring that it meets the needs of the University.
- 4.23 It is recommended that the University considers reviewing its employment policy in allowing upward mobility for staff having higher qualifications and potential to add value to the University as a measure to retain appropriately qualified staff.

Note:

The above is a reflection of the status as at May 2005. Since then the UoM has already taken steps to implement a number of the recommendations made by the Audit Panel. The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Division of the TEC is working in close collaboration with the Director, Quality Assurance of the UoM to monitor implementation of the recommendations.