

Responding to the lack of student voice and participation in the quality assurance (QA) process at Stellenbosch University (SU)



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Background to the study



The Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2000) and SU advocate for student representation in the QA process:

BUT

- The Roles of elected students are not clearly defined
- Students are not provided with information or guidelines

At my first meeting with the departments – I am ALWAYS asked the question....

“What are students supposed to do once elected onto the self-evaluation committee”?

Background to the study... Cont...



As a **quality assurance practitioner** at SU – realised that there was a Lack of student voice and participation in the QA process at SU and decided to **respond to this**.

My attention was drawn to the **Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland, “sparqs”** - publicly-funded **agency** for Scotland’s university and college sectors that support student engagement in quality of learning experience in UK and internationally.

Contacted The Director, Eve Lewis - encouraged me to initiate and develop a QA workshop for students at SU

Background to the study... Cont...



- The CHE was also interested in the work that the **Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland** was doing.
- Invited Eve Lewis to South Africa to facilitate a National student workshop: *Developing Student Engagement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement*.
- 9th/10th October 2017.
- CHE's commitment to student participation in QA – was an encouragement.
- Timing was right – Plan to offer student workshops in 2018 → beginning of the 5th Cycle of QA at SU

Purpose of the study



To explore the student's perception of the workshops, arranged for students selected by the *Faculty of Theology* to be part of the internal QA process and to find out if the workshop prepared them sufficiently enough to participate in the QA process

Student participation in QA...



- Currently the only time students participate in QA is when they are interviewed by the external panel.
- In order to **fully participate in QA process**:
 - THREE phases of student participation was identified.
 - TWO separate workshops were organised – not to over-load students with information

Outline of the Workshop



Workshop I



Phase I:

The self-evaluation committee



Phase II:

Reading and feedback to the
draft self-evaluation report

Workshop 2



Phase III:

Interview Sessions

Workshop 1

Phase I: The self-evaluation committee



- Background to the **national structure**:
 - CHE/HEQC and its relation to Higher Education Institutions and SU
- CHE and SU's view of **quality**
- **QA process** at SU
- **Criteria** used by the departments
- The importance of **Students participation** in the QA process

Workshop 1

Phase I: The self-evaluation committee



- How to use the information to ask questions and give feedback (SE Com).
- How to give constructive feedback.
- How to give voice to their concerns.
- What is graduate attributes and how they can attain and develop these.
- How to take responsibility for their own learning experiences (partnership).
- Confidence and respect

Workshop 1

Phase II: Reading & feedback to the draft self-evaluation report



- Information on the criteria
 - Criteria gives structure to draft self-evaluation report
 - Its content and details (impact for students)
- How to give constructive feedback?
- Feedback can also be positive and complimentary

Workshop 2

Phase III: Interview session with external panel members



- What to expect?
- Names, no. of EEP members and where they come from
- Possible questions that may be asked (linked to SE report)
- Confidence and respect
- Constructive feedback
- Engaging and asking questions
- Issues of confidentiality

Research Method



- A qualitative research approach was used.
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 out of 36 students that attended the workshop.
- Students were invited to participate in the interview.

After the external site visit: interviews



Within three weeks of the external site visit 16 students were interviewed

Students were asked....



Did the workshop prepare you sufficiently enough to participate in the QA process?

Responses



Questions were focused mainly on the three phases of what was identified as key areas that students can participate in.

Responses



PHASE I: **Preparation - self-evaluation committee**

- Yes the workshop was good.
- I was not aware of any of the information that was given – very informative.
- Never heard of QA – even at home (Nigeria).
- The way you run the workshop was helpful.
- As a student leader/student rep in the faculty – not knowing what QA was about – that was useful.

Responses



PHASE I: Preparation - self-evaluation committee

- The group discussion - brainstorming was good.
- We heard things that we were not aware of before.
- Hearing from other students – about what happened to him in his 4th year – changed my mind – I want to now do post-graduate studies.

Responses



PHASE I: **Preparation - self-evaluation committee**

- Yes the workshop was good and gave us the opportunity to be open and honest and it was good that the dean was there to hear about some of our concerns.
- I was pleased that the dean took note of the things we raised at the workshop e.g. access to the building, need of new computers.
- I have a better understanding now of the faculty and how it operates.

Responses



PHASE I: **Preparation - self-evaluation committee**

- I was upset with my lecturer because she took long to give me feedback – but now I realise that she is supervising many other students – I am very patient with her now.
- I have a wonderful relationship with my lecturer – he promotes me and understands me and has assisted me many times.
- The Faculty of Theology really cares about their students

Responses



PHASE II: Preparation – Feedback to SE Report

- Yes the workshop gave me the background to read the report.
- Yes I was able to give extensive feedback to the report.
- I did not feel like it was a waste of my time giving feedback – I was prepared.
- As a student I feel like it is my responsibility to provide feedback and the workshop prepared me for this – confident.

Responses



PHASE II: Preparation – Feedback to SE Report

- Reading the criteria before hand helped me understand the report.
- I did not read the report but feel honoured that the faculty allowed me to read this.

Responses



PHASE III: Preparation – Interview session with External Panel

- I was comfortable because I was familiar with the names and where they were from.
- No surprises – I knew what to expect from the panel.
- We wanted more time with the panel – very engaging.
- The experience was wonderful – good – they asked questions about the programme I was studying.
- I felt like they were listening to me.

FINDINGS on the Value of the Workshop



- **None** of the students were aware of QA or its processes at SU.
- Students found the **workshop useful** because they were made aware of quality and the process at SU and how this worked from the HE level.
- Students realised that **they can voice their concerns** and **give constructive feedback** regarding their learning experiences.
- Students found the basic and **relevant information** (criteria) and the **clear guidelines** on their role in the QA process, valuable.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS



- Students appreciated the **transparent process** of the QA and that they **had the opportunity** to give feedback.
- **Students felt a sense of partnerships** between themselves and staff of **the faculty** and this changed their understanding of the faculty and expressed appreciation for their interest in them.
- Students requested for **regular staff/student discussions** in “safe spaces” so that the Faculty can draw on their insights and not only through the student feedback process.
- According to the Faculty of Theology “students can play an important role in **curriculum design**, voicing their **concerns** and giving **feedback** – and we can also draw on them when making certain **strategic decisions**”.

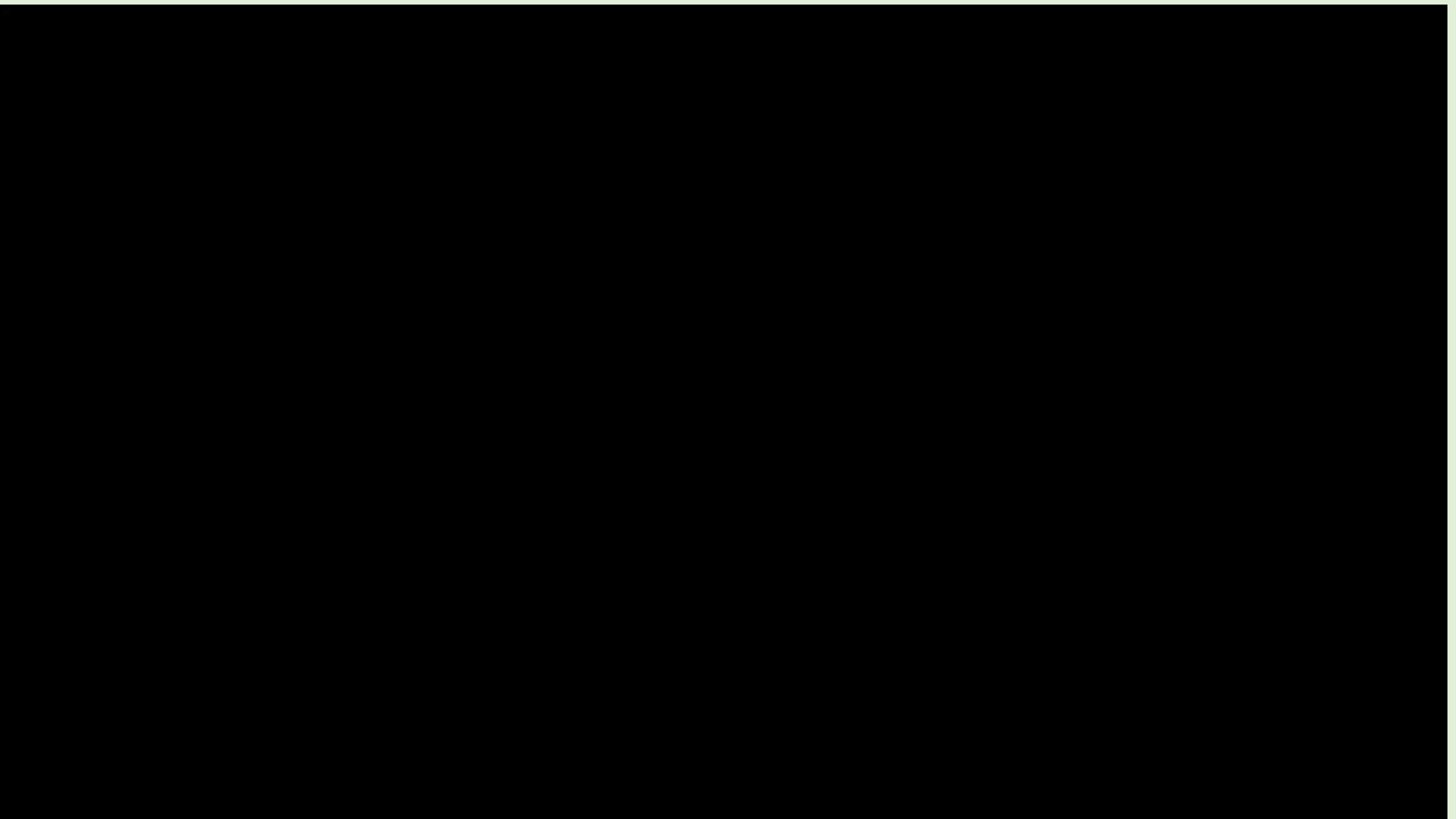
CONCLUSION: STUDY



**The workshop(s) can offer opportunities
to create meaningful QA processes,
systems and good practices @ SU**

In their own voices...







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Questions?