Quality Assurance: Role, Responsibilities, and Means of Public Authorities, with a view towards Implications for Governance of Institutions and Systems

Council of Europe Higher Education Forum: Legitimacy of Quality Assurance in Higher Education – The Role of Public Authorities and Institutions

Prof. Dr. Jürgen Kohler, Greifswald (Germany)
I. The Topic – Approaches: Items to consider

Prime Tasks: Identify

- the object:
  what is ‘quality assurance’ of which concrete objects;
- the agent:
  who are, or could be seen as, ‘public authorities’;
- the action and the objective:
  how, and why are roles, responsibilities, and means – de facto or optimally – attributed, shared, and used by public authorities.

Subsequent Challenge: Consider

- implications for governance of institutions and of systems
Scope/Expected outcome

- Asking Questions, Defining the Issues
- Mapping, Systematizing
- Methodology of Validating Answers
- Not: Providing 'Blueprint' Answers
II. The Object in Focus: Quality Assurance

1. What:
   - Possible Objects
     
     (a) Staff
     (b) Programmes
     (aa) Concrete programmes
     (bb) Model curricula: templates and standardization
     (c) Institutions
     (d) Quality processes
     (e) System assessment
2. What:

- Possible Perspectives:

  (a) Internal Evaluation and external assessment
  (b) Consequences of quality: advisory, or licensing
  (c) Interests of various participants →
Higher education institution (HEI)
• providing optimized programmes
• ensuring accountability
• procuring effectivity/efficiency

HEI support institution (state)
• inducing optimal programmes
• demanding accountability
• checking effectivity/efficiency

quality/quality assurance

Students
• guaranteed quality
• transparent information
• (external) acceptance

Society (e.g., labour market)
• guaranteed quality
• transparent information
• matching needs
III. The Agent:
Public Authorities – Identification:

• Higher education institutions
• Nation state(s)/national ministries
• International public organisations
• Quality assurance agency(ies)
• Professional organisations
Overview of the Relevant Agents

*HE institutions* autonomous and responsible organization

*State(s)* national/regional public authorities

*Civil society/buffer organisations* q. a. agencies professional bodies

*International public authorities*
IV. Objectives and Action: Roles, Responsibilities, and Means

1. „Form follows function“, i.e. purpose: Need to Address „quality“ of HE operations

2. Key approach: What are higher education functions, i.e. ulterior purposes?

3. What is understood by ‘Quality’? →
3a) ‘Quality‘ as ‘fitness for purpose‘ („purposefulness“) → Relevance of HE aims and mission:

- to be productive in research and learning and to enhance quality and quantity in these fields;
- to support individual students’ personal development;
- to aim at meeting cultural needs and international, national, or regional advancement of society (“democratic citizenship”),
- also in economic terms (among others, by securing ‘employability’)
3b) ‘Quality’ (of teaching and learning): an ambiguous concept; proposals:

- excellence
- fitness of, and for purpose
- matching directives (complying with curricular templates)
- meeting thresholds (complying with standards)
- client/customer satisfaction
- value for money/time invested (efficiency)
- individual enhancement (transformation)
- (institutional) capacity for change
3c) Significance to governance and management choices at system level:

- Implementation management; or
- Entrepreneurial style of governance and management

Interdependence with understanding of programme quality →
• Features of a 'compliance-based approach':

Model template \((t)\): features \(a(t) + b(t) + c(t) + \ldots + z(t)\)

Criterion:
compliance/identity

Concrete programme \((p)\): features \(a(p) + b(p) + c(p) + \ldots + z(p)\)
• **Fitness of, and for ‘purpose approach’** – an open concept following the ‘quality cycle’:

- Fitness *of* purpose
  - (5) Enhancement: immediate
- Fitness *for* purpose
  - (1) Objectives: valid
  - (4) Monitoring: honest
  - (2) Concept: fitting
  - (3) Implementation: true
• Linking 'programme quality' (institutional 'function') and 'institutional quality' (institutional 'form')

Programme (object of activity) iteration/enhancement objective – concept – implementation – monitoring

process steering the quality cycle

institution (active subject) actors action interaction

(quality culture, governance/management support; int’l and ext’l communication, transparency, decision-making, setting milestones, et al)
4. Observing quintessential and circumstantial features: embeddedness of HE

- Freedom of research and teaching/learning: prerequisite for progress and innovation;
- Free individuals whose integration into a team is a major challenge;
- Change of paradigm towards the “entrepreneureal university”
- Increasing costs and advanced communication: ‘concerted’ structures (franchising systems, “chain-stores”, and “trusts”)?
- Difference between legitimacy to be involved (de-jure-competence) and ability to be involved (de-facto-competence) – adequate role-sharing
- Not only national/regional politics, also society as such as stakeholders.
V. Implications for Governance of Institutions and Systems

1. Towards a methodology of exploring „good governance“
a) What to do?

Sequence suggested:

• consider,
• explore,
• define,
• correlate,
• translate into governance and management structures,
• integrate into synergetic forces,
• test-run.
b) How to categorize?

- Basic and overriding points of orientation
- Concrete operational challenges: functions, actors, action, and interaction.
2. Basic and overriding points of orientation

a) In substance: Key orientation of judgment on organizational quality: to be based on aptness

- to identify valid aims (‘fitness of purpose’), and
- to achieve them by suitable means (‘fitness for purpose’);
- while distinguishing between strategic dimension (‘capacity for change [for the better]’) and managerial operations; and
- while observing ‘embeddedness’: societal expectations, legal framework, funding, mentalities of partners, stakeholders, employees.
b) In maxims: governance based on, and supporting

- motivation rather than external control (‘ownership’);
- transcending from managerial mechanisms to spirit (‘quality culture’);
- blending of leadership and responsiveness to staff incentives (‘bottom-up, top-down’);
- self-balanced system rather than permanent intervention;
- responsibility (rights) and accountability (liability) inseparable;
- values, e.g. observing ethics and education for democratic citizenship;
- permanence of review and updating (move from quality assurance to quality enhancement);
- effectiveness and (cost-)efficiency.
c) In process: transparency and integration, i.e.

- monitoring of and reporting on activities;
- internal and external communication and responsiveness.
d) In organizational clarity: Defining structures, organs, actors, action in terms of

- creation
- selection and election
- attribution of rights and duties
- interfaces and interaction
- responsibility, accountability, and liability
- cancellation, revocation
- this itemization to be concretely applied to all fields of activities.
3. Operational challenges/choices relating to concrete functions, actors, action, and interaction

a) internality and externality
b) leadership, integration, and the individual
c) centralization and devolution
d) In particular: Choice of steering and learning devices:

- legalistic/normative standards: regulation, and contract management
- economic/funding: distributive and/or competitive success, reward systems
- communicative: feedback, creating conviction, rallying support
- expertise: substantial competence
- responsibility: personal ownership and liability
- political: external values and directives given