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Creativity and diversity: Challenges for quality assurance beyond 2010

A selection of papers from the 4th European Quality Assurance Forum

19-21 November 2009
Hosted by Copenhagen Business School, Denmark

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Edited by:
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Foreword and Acknowledgements

The idea of a European Quality Assurance Forum was proposed by EUA to the "E4 Group" (ENQA, ESU, EUA, and EURASHE) in 2003. The proposal for an annual European QA Forum grew from the observation that the dialogue among QA agencies, higher education institutions and students was happening at national rather than at European level. Thus, it seemed important to create an annual European event that gathers together all actors in order to discuss quality issues in the context of the changing higher education landscape, to examine European and international QA trends, and to improve the articulation between quality culture and external accountability.

Since then the organisers have been delighted to notice that the event seems to have established its role as one of the main yearly discussion forums for various actors in the field of European QA. This fourth Forum, hosted by Copenhagen Business School, focused upon "Creativity and Diversity: challenges beyond 2010", again attracted 500 participants from 54 countries, including 18 from outside Europe, thus demonstrating the ever increasing international interest in this event where quality issues are the main focus. Participants included academics and administrators responsible for internal quality, students, representatives from QA agencies, national authorities, intergovernmental organisations and researchers in quality development in higher education and research.

The main themes of the 2009 Forum were to:

- gain an understanding of how higher education institutions and QA agencies' quality procedures and practices take into account the diversity of institutional missions and profiles,

- explore how internal and external quality assurance processes may stimulate or hinder creativity and innovative practices in higher education.

This publication gathers together a representative sample of the contributions to the Forum. It includes some of the keynote presentations as well as a few of the many excellent papers that generated lively discussions in the parallel sessions. The keynotes discuss how the current QA practices leave enough space for creativity and innovative changes, whereas the papers are a selection of reviews on the developments of QA practice including reflection on its development and national or institutional case studies building on the theme of the event.

The Forum Steering Committee hopes that this collection of papers will inspire higher education institutions, academic staff, students and QA agencies to reflect upon ways of ensuring quality while respecting the need for diversity and innovative practices in research and education.

On behalf of the Forum Steering Committee, I wish to thank the following for their support of this activity: Copenhagen Business School that hosted the Forum with a great sense of organisation and hospitality, those actors in the field of QA who submitted 85 papers or workshop proposals to the Forum, the keynote speakers, the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission which partially funded the Forum, and Thérèse Zhang and Réka Sipos, EUA, who spearheaded its organisation on behalf of the E4.

The next European Quality Assurance Forum will be held on 18-20 November 2010 at the University Claude Bernard Lyon I, France. We hope to repeat the success of the first four Forums and look forward to welcoming you then.

Henrik Toft Jensen
Chair, Forum Steering Committee

Part 1. 2010 is here: How far have we come and where are we going?

Higher education between the masses and the market: An outsider's reflections about trends in quality assurance

By Pedro Nuno Teixeira[1]

Today, higher education institutions (HEIs) face a complex context in which they are asked to fulfil multiple roles and to show publicly that they fully embrace them through multiple ways of formal and informal assessment. Many of these demands often run counter to the institutional and individual commitment to more traditional academic missions of promoting and advancing learning. They also have to be faced in a complex context in which traditional modes of funding have been transformed and public sources are not as generous as they once were and have often become more demanding and competitive. In fact, the financial sustainability of institutions is clearly linked to their capacity to respond well to all of this.

In this paper we review the two main trends that have contributed to explain this complex context faced by HEIs: on the one hand, the persistent expansion and massification of higher education (HE) and, on the other, changes in the perceptions of the roles played by HEIs and in the organisation of this sector. These two trends seem not only important to understand past trends in quality assurance (QA) and performance evaluation, but also to rethink the way QA mechanisms can help HEIs to respond to the challenges created by those developments.

The challenges of massification, or how to deal with an expanding, varied, heterogeneous and increasingly expensive system

Many of the current challenges in HE are the result of decades of expansion and massification (Trow, 2001). One of the major developments of this is an increasing diversity in HE. This diversity refers to a number of things: type of institution, programmes offered, students enrolled and staff recruited. Among the main changes is the development of types of higher education other than the more traditional pre-existing elite ones, namely more vocational forms of HE (Teichler, 1988). This growing institutional diversity has also led to an increasing diversity of students in terms of gender, age, geographical origin, ethnic and socio-economic background. Thus, massification has led to much more varied institutional landscape and to growing differentiation regarding institutional mission. This needs to be borne in mind when assessing the performance and the social contribution of each institution. Something, this, that is neither easy nor follows as a matter of course.

One of the main implications of mass HE is that it was no longer possible, or at least advisable, for most governments to maintain a pattern of detailed regulation of HEIs (Neave and van Vught, 1991). Hence, governments needed to explore new forms of steering that could be more effective within the new context of mass higher education. As a result, the last decades have seen the development and consolidation of institutional autonomy and this inevitably shapes the current and forthcoming developments of quality assessment.

The trend towards expansion has raised significant economic challenges for institutions and governments alike. The fact that the number of students enrolled in higher education has multiplied several times in a few decades has called for a huge investment in hiring more academic and non-academic staff, and in new and better equipped facilities. The financial cost of the HE system has become a significant issue

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the world over and governments have been struggling to find additional funds to sustain (and often pursue further) the process of expansion.

Moreover, the financial challenges faced by HE have been compounded by a financial crisis that has dogged the public sector for most of the last two decades. The so-called crisis of the welfare state has challenged the sustainability of the traditional financial reliance of HE on public funding. Governments everywhere have tried to contain the growth of public expenditure, made even more difficult due to the expanding inertia of many components of public expenditure (Barr, 2004). The pressures for expanding resources being allocated to areas such as healthcare and social security has forced many governments to rethink their financial engagement in other areas. Education in general has become one of the potential areas for cost containment. Institutions have been preparing themselves for a context of declining or at least stagnant public support.

Thus, higher education has moved from an expanding sector to a mature industry (Levine, 2001). In an expansion phase, growth is seen as a sign of improvement and HE manages to keep public and social actors satisfied by managing to accommodate larger numbers of students. In a mature phase, the external stakeholders become more demanding and will not be satisfied just by adding more activities or expanding existing ones. The rising costs of higher education necessarily cause concern among policy-makers and public opinion and attract increased political and social scrutiny (Birnbaum and Shushok, 2001).

Hence, the political environment has studied the external and internal efficiency of the HE system. As in many other public services in recent years, it has become commonplace to state that higher education institutions should be more efficient in their use of taxpayers' resources (Cave *et al.*, 1996). The claim for more accountable institutions suggests that societies have become less confident in the workings and cost efficiency of institutions. These concerns also refer to the degree of external efficiency and the effectiveness of HEIs to fulfil relevant social and economic needs with many governments setting out policies to strengthen the external efficiency of the HE system and the promotion of more responsive HEIs.

This context has led to a perception of crisis in HE, especially in countries where massification has older and deeper roots. This sense of crisis has been reinforced by the fact that institutions face more adverse public attitudes towards their social role. It is not hard to find in the media and in political debates of several countries a negative view about the relevance and responsiveness of HE to economic and social needs. Institutions, especially publicly funded ones, are portrayed as costly, self-centred, inefficient, and often resistant to engaging with various external social and economic stakeholders. HEIs have had difficulty in adapting to these new times and tend to look at these challenges as temporary problems and do not necessarily understand that this corresponds to a changing social view about the nature and the organisation of higher education.

Economic rationales and changing perceptions about higher education

The changes in attitude towards HE are not only driven by financial and/or economic concerns, but also by changing perceptions about its roles. Over the last decades, societies and governments have evolved in their views about its social role, with significant implications for the identity of institutions and the organisation of the sector. These have come to be shaped by an increasing influence of economic rationality in education in general, and in higher education in particular (Teixeira, 2009). With the development of human capital theory, and the subsequent increasing interest of many economists in education, perceptions about the nature and purpose of HE have changed and this has influenced policy-makers and society in general.

The expansion of HE has come to be regarded as significantly driven by the behaviour of individuals, influenced by the human capital perspective on education (Becker, 1993). Most economists tend to consider that in the case of HE the larger portion of the benefits tend to have a private nature, namely higher lifetime earnings and greater employability (Card, 1999). Graduates derive several other benefits from a degree such as higher social status and access to jobs of greater social prestige and desirability (even if not always of higher income). Thus, a degree has remained an attractive personal investment and this has been presented as the main motivation for strong social demand for expansion.

This changing view about the motivations of students has forged the view that there is a demand that approaches HE with certain economic purposes. This assumes that students are capable of making informed choices that are consistent with their interest. This clearly runs counter to the paternalistic argument, according to which students and their families are unable to assess the merits and quality of educational programmes and providers. In contrast, the human capital view regards the students as rational individuals that can act in a way that is consistent with their self-interest, following a basic economic assumption that pervades mainstream economic analysis, not unlike the behaviour of those individuals in many other market activities. This has contributed to a view that sees students as consumers that should be empowered in order to maximise their utility.

Likewise, governments have been convinced to regard the advanced qualification of human resources as a key factor in promoting economic growth and development (Blöndal *et al.*, 2002), and the economic discourse based on the creation of an institutional context favourable to the development of innovation and entrepreneurship has strengthened this view that the accumulation of human capital can improve the economic prospects of a certain community. In this global world, the improvement of the qualification of human resources has been regarded as one of the few critical factors through which governments can actually contribute to enhance national economic performance.

The emphasis on the economic cost-benefit analysis and an investment approach to educational decisions has relegated to a more secondary level those motivations seen by economists as consumption ones, such as intellectual development and fruition. Hence, these aspects, which were often regarded as the main dimension of higher learning in pre-mass HE, are now seen as less compelling to sustain the individual and social effort required to nurture financially an ever-expanding and increasingly expensive sector.

These changes in the individual and social motivations have reconfigured the economic perspective with regard to educational matters. By stressing the economic motivations of individuals and governments for the expansion of education, economists have opened the door on the role of educational institutions themselves. By viewing educational decisions as being largely motivated by economic factors and calculus, economics has contributed decisively to recognising educational institutions (also) as economic institutions thus quickly moving to encompassing the educational system into the basic framework of a market system.

This has created significant tension between two different perspectives and legitimating ideas about higher education (Gumport, 2001): a social institution with specific cultural and social functions on the one hand and, on the other, HE seen as industry and an increasingly important part of the economic system. This view of HE as an industry and as an economic sector has important effects in the way institutions are perceived, namely as quasi-corporate units that produce a wide range of educational goods and services (and not just educational), to an external environment that is increasingly competitive and demanding. Thus, the need for those institutions to adapt and respond to the changing needs of multiple economic and societal actors.

This changed view has led to a need to rethink and adapt the contextual framework in which those units operate. If we regard institutions as part of an industry, then we are just a small step away from borrowing the microeconomic rules that economists have been developing for years in order to stimulate their efficiency and effectiveness. These rules will tend to promote a rational use of resources in order to maximise the social return to the resources allocated to the HE sector. Hence, if we want higher education to behave as an industry we need to reconfigure the sector alongside market rules.

The growing influence of market mechanisms in higher education has manifested in various and complex ways (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997). Academically, the influence has been noticeable in the curriculum, and also on research activities, through a significant emphasis on the exploration of the economic benefits of technology development and transfer. This has also been visible on the administrative side, through a growing number of offices and services which are aimed at promoting institutions amongst the different groups of stakeholders.

The growing relevance of market regulation has often been promoted through policy initiatives and government intervention. Important examples of this trend can be found in funding mechanisms

(funding students directly instead of institutions, promoting competition among institutions, etc.), but also in the various stimuli encouraging closer interaction between universities and industry (favouring the commercialisation of research and knowledge). This has been particularly noticeable in countries with a mature HE sector. Government policies have pushed institutions to regard students as consumers and have nurtured commercial links between them and private companies.

The tendency to perceive institutions as a quasi-economic organisation has overshadowed the view that these are a peculiar type of economic organisation (Winston, 1999). First, most of them have non-profit rather than commercial motives, even when privately owned. Second, they use a production process that is very much dependent on the collaboration of the so-called customers. Third, they tend to adopt a selective approach regarding those demanding their services and the institutional prestige is actually strongly associated with it. Finally, we can find a level of diversity of units and production processes in the HE sector which goes well beyond what is usual in other sectors.

Furthermore, we should not forget that higher education is more than an organisation. Universities are institutions, with a mission, and not merely an organisation, though these terms are often used interchangeably and the latter has tended to predominate in recent times (Gumport, 2001). The focus on the organisation tends to (over)simplify the nature and the social role of HE and it devalues the role of history, tradition, norms, path-dependency. Thus, these changes in HE language reveal significant changes about the political and social perceptions, at the same time they contribute to promote a certain view about it. Namely, it contributes to give a narrower view of the scope and legitimacy of HE as a social institution.

Higher education institutions cannot escape the fact that they need resources to develop their activities. However, they can do this in very different ways. One approach is to limit itself essentially to being an organisation that merely provides academic services or simply balances the need to respond to short-term economic and social demands with the long-term commitment to their (long-term) institutional mission. Moreover, HEIs must realise that responsiveness to social and economic needs may not only bring benefits, but also costs and problems and must be ready to discuss this openly. Using economic rationality in academic management is not an excuse but rather another possible criterion to organise the decision-making process and legitimise institutional decisions.

Quality Assurance as an instrument to strengthen institutions

The consolidation of mass HE and the growing influence of economic ideas in institutions and in HE systems are both relevant to understanding some of the recent developments regarding quality assurance and performance evaluation as seen by the increasing scrutiny of institutions' performance and their capacity to respond effectively to a series of multiple economic and social demands, which have been added to their traditional missions.

These trends have brought about a changing relationship between HEIs and governments, not only increasing institutional autonomy but also a growing influence of economic rationality in institutional regulation and decision-making. This has led to more extensive accountability and scrutiny of an institution's activity, with a notable emphasis on the promotion of explicit assessment of the institutions' internal and external efficiency and effectiveness.

Nevertheless, the development of quality assurance practices seems to highlight the difficulties in European HE due to the "incomplete transformations of systems of elite universities into systems of mass higher education" (Trow, 2001, p.114). European systems have moved from a small group of tiny elite institutions into hundreds of large-scale institutions catering for a much more diverse student population, notably through the establishment of more vocationally-oriented sectors. Thus, the development of mass systems has often brought the co-existence of elite institutions, often struggling to keep that status, and mass-oriented ones, and this new reality has neither been always clear nor simple to articulate at the policy level.

Quality assurance systems can play an important role here by adopting an approach that accommodates this more diverse institutional landscape. Thus, quality evaluation should not be exclusively

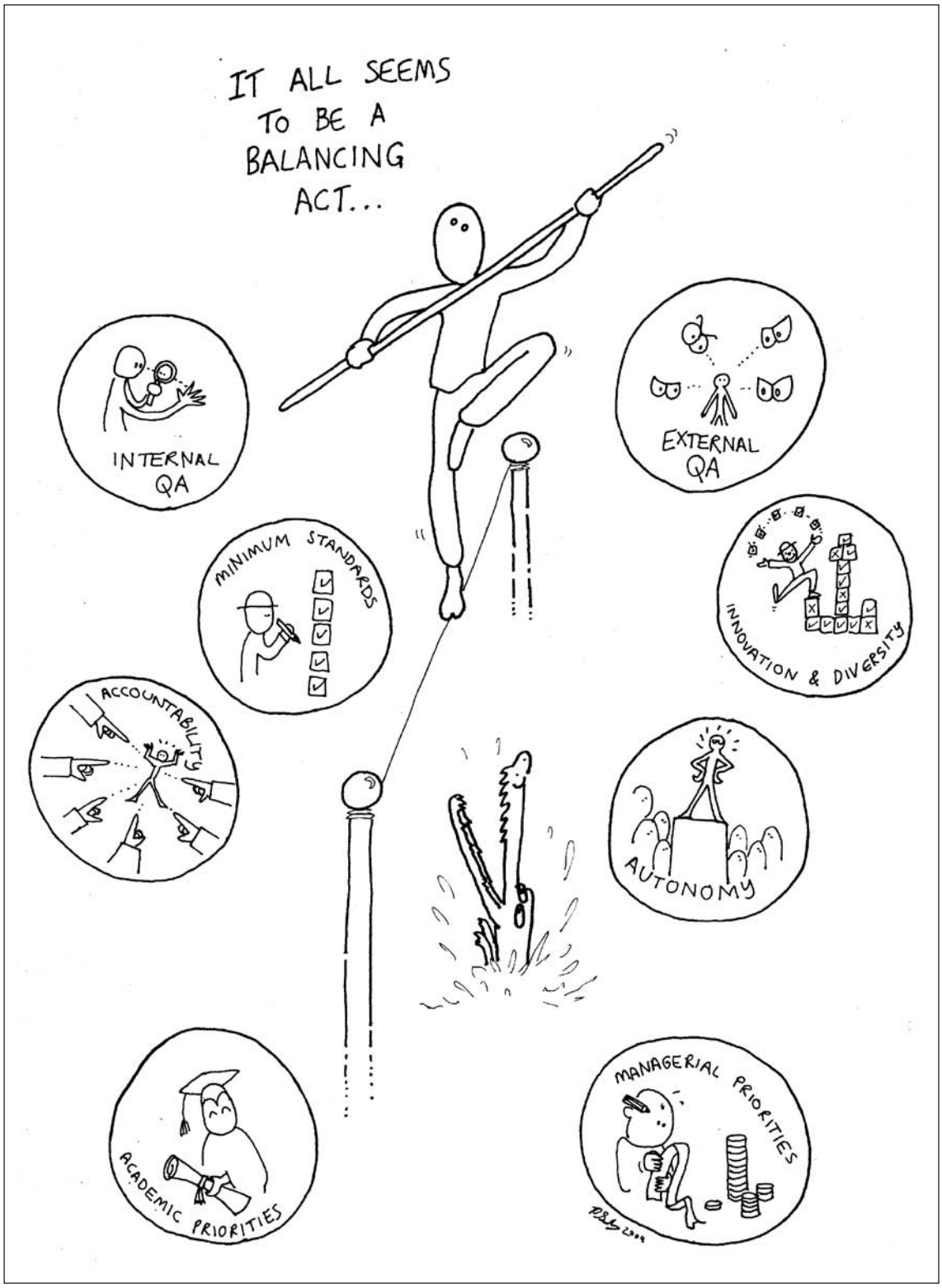
focused on assessing institutions within a standardised and externally defined framework, but should see the capacity of institutions to stand out through innovation and individual and institutional creativity. This is not simple, and governments and agencies will often need to adopt a balance between what should be done and what can be done. However, they should also strive to avoid adopting the pessimistic resignation that reality is the only possibility which will engender risk-averse behaviour in many institutions. A more adaptive QA mechanism can be achieved through greater participation of institutions, which will not only reflect better the institutions' aspirations, but will also stimulate a more transparent behaviour from institutions when they face those evaluation exercises.

The question of transparency is certainly not trivial. The promotion of quality assessment is often justified as a necessity to make higher education socially accountable. However, it is not clear if the current practices are making it more transparent to society or to bureaucratic demands. Moreover, many institutions wonder whether the level of complexity of current evaluation mechanisms are actually making institutional activities and their results more apparent to HE stakeholders and to society in general. There are fears that quality systems become entangled in a bureaucratic web of jargon, procedures and indicators that are neither intelligible nor useful for many of those individuals that government and government agencies are supposed to represent.

The regulatory challenges are not restricted to the need to reflect the reality of a much more diverse and complex sector. There is a different type of relationship between governments and autonomous HEIs and, although governments are under significant social pressure to demonstrate the efficiency and effectiveness of institutions, they should not forget that the development of autonomy presupposes a degree of confidence in the institution to define its mission more clearly and to pursue it consistently and QA should not be used as an indirect mechanism of bureaucratic central control. Moreover, that institutional autonomy has become a pre-requisite at a time when policy-makers are stimulating increasing institutional responsiveness by enhancing a growing marketisation of higher education systems.

Envoi

The challenges faced by European HEIs in these times of mass and market-oriented higher education are not trivial. Higher education's patrons are becoming more demanding and require that it not only performs its missions well, but also that it provides clear and substantive evidence that it is doing so. Caught in the middle of what the late Burton Clark called the *overload demand* (2002), institutions are finding it difficult to align resources and expectations and to balance their mission with their responsiveness. Moreover, they often feel that quality assurance systems are subject to external mistrust and worries about homogenisation. QA mechanisms need to evolve beyond this initial stage of development of mass higher education, accommodating better the realities of a diverse institutional landscape and strengthened institutional autonomy. This is a necessary step if regulators want to enhance the institutional capacity to stay focused and to be able to define and adapt their mission to a rapidly evolving context that asks institutions to do more and is less willing to follow-up those demands with additional resources.



2009 Bologna Stocktaking findings on higher education quality assurance

By Andrejs Rauhvargers[1]

Bologna Process Stocktaking is carried out every two years in order to measure progress in the implementation of the main Bologna Process action lines including quality assurance (QA). The latest Stocktaking was based on the 2008-2009 National Reports[2] of the 48 Bologna signatory countries[3]. Part of the analysis allows quantifying the progress (Rauhvargers *et al.*, 2009, pp. 98-122). More specific questions are aimed at gathering information for qualitative analysis.

Although usually prepared by a wider working group, National Reports are submitted by the ministries of education and thus represent the views of the government. For this reason the Stocktaking working group included members from the relevant stakeholder organisations to cross-check Stocktaking findings with the EUA *Trends* report (Crosier *et al.*, 2007), ESU *Bologna with student eyes* report (Cacciagrano *et al.*, 2009) and with Eurydice Focus report (Eurydice, 2009).

The aim of this paper is to present the stocktaking results of the qualitative analysis with regard to implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines for QA in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

Evaluating national QA systems against ESG

The commitment to implement the ESG (ENQA, 2005) was declared already in 2005 (BPMC, 2005), therefore it was surprising that just above half of the countries have reviewed their QA systems against the ESG and quite a number either just give a year in future when the review could take place or have no plans for such a review (Table 1).

Table 1. Reviewing QA system against ESG (number of countries)

QA system reviewed	QA agency only reviewed	Review planned (year given)	Review not planned
28	3	11	4

Just nine countries explicitly mention reviewing the internal QA inside higher education institutions (HEIs) against ESG, others possibly have left out the review of internal QA against Part I of the ESG.

After the review more than half of the countries have carried out consultations with stakeholders and introduced financial incentives or other measures to improve QA processes, e.g. establishing internal quality units in HEIs.

Internal quality assurance inside HEIs

Countries often mention that the requirement for HEIs to create internal QA systems has been embedded into national laws, regulations or codes of practice. However, answers from some countries suggest that they limit internal QA within HEIs to preparing self-assessment reports for external reviews.

In some countries HEIs have established performance-based management systems rather than improvement-oriented and learning outcomes-based quality culture. While quality of teaching as such is

[1] Secretary General, Latvian Rectors' Council, Latvia
[2] The 2009 national reports can be found at http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/actionlines/stocktaking.htm
[3] Strictly speaking – there were 48 reports of 46 countries participating in the Bologna Process, with two reports each for Belgium and the United Kingdom.

often mentioned, there is no notion of learning and learning outcomes in the general descriptions of the internal QA systems, suggesting there is a need to focus more on internal QA and accordingly to Part I of the ESG.

In some countries with binary higher education (HE) systems the establishment of an internal QA within HEIs may be required for the applied HE sector but not to universities. Another group of countries underline that universities are free to chose what kind of internal QA system they establish. Some countries indicated that the internal QA systems in their HEIs may be based on the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO), European Foundation of Quality Management (EFQM), various Total Quality Management-based quality management methodologies or self-developed ones.

Strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality

Only one third of countries answered that all their HEIs have published a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality while in more than a third of countries quality strategies are published by just some or no HEIs (Table 2). Several countries noted that HEIs are not obliged to publish their QA strategies, or stated that the quality issues are represented in the overall strategy of a HEI, others referred to the presence of quality aspects in the strategic plans which HEIs must prepare in accordance with the overall ministry strategy.

With over a third of countries where QA strategies are published by just some or no HEIs and questions remaining whether the strategies specifically address implementation of ESG, the message is that HEIs should be encouraged to engage more actively in internal QA.

Table 2. Summary of answers on internal QA aspects (number of countries giving each kind of answers)

	All HEIs	Most HEIs	Some HEIs	No HEIs
Published strategy for the continuous quality enhancement	16	14	16	2
Arrangements for internal approval and monitoring of programmes	22	20	5	1
Describing programmes in terms of learning outcomes	12	15	19	2
Student assessment procedures designed to measure achievement of learning outcomes	6	17	18	7
HEIs publishing information	30	16	1	1

Arrangements for approval and monitoring of programmes at HEIs

Most countries have approval and monitoring of programmes in place in their HEIs (Table 2). In some countries monitoring is done by programme committees including staff and students (and employers), others use internal audit and train teaching staff to act as auditors. Assessment can also be based on student questionnaires, or feedback from alumni. In a number of countries internal QA is modelled on the external QA: using self-assessment reports and peer reviews of programmes. Programmes may be approved by HEIs' curriculum board or senate. Several countries use EFQM screening for self-assessment of programmes.

While approval/monitoring is one of the more developed parts of the internal QA, further work is needed to link monitoring of programmes to learning outcomes.

Describing programmes in terms of learning outcomes

Twenty one countries admit that only some or no HEIs have described their programmes in terms of learning outcomes (Table 2). Countries themselves underline that HEI staff need assistance in understanding and formulating learning outcomes. Some countries indicate that a culture of learning outcomes exists only in applied higher education sector; others underline the strong traditions of content-centred curricula.

The over-optimistic view of how far HEIs have progressed in describing programmes using learning outcomes may be partly due to confusion between "learning outcomes" as statements of what the learner will know, understand and be able to demonstrate after completion of a programme of learning (or individual subject/course), and the overall aims or expectations of programmes and particular tasks of teachers in curriculum delivery, which, of course, have existed in HEIs for decades. Also, several countries state that their HEIs have always linked programmes with learning outcomes and some others - that learning outcomes used in their HEIs "are not related to Dublin descriptors" or "not in the understanding of Tuning". In this respect the findings fit well with the Qualifications Frameworks Coordination group survey, which concluded that the implementation of learning outcomes still is the greatest challenge (Bologna Process Coordination group for qualifications framework, 2009).

Student assessment

Introduction of student assessment procedures designed to measure achievement of the intended learning outcomes is slow: only six countries answered that it is done in all HEIs (Table 2), but more than half the countries – that it is implemented in just some or no HEIs. Some have included quality of student asssessment into external quality reviews.

The very issue of student assessment based on learning outcomes continues to be unclear: in some answers it is understood as summative assessment; in others – identified with descriptions of general national grading scales. This demonstrates one of the difficulties in Bologna implementation – each new issue is always completely unfamiliar to some of the countries and therefore, apart from a narrow group of specialists, the new elements of Bologna jargon are often misunderstood.

External QA, student and international involvement in QA

General descriptions of the national systems of external QA

Nearly all countries answer that they follow the self-assessment/peer review/publication of results/ follow-up pattern and that external QA systems operate in all HEIs. However in five countries it does not cover either pre-Bologna degrees or short cycle programmes. In some countries the QA system operates in universities or professional HEIs only, different agencies are in charge of sectors of HE or audit of internal QA is used for universities while accreditation for applied HEIs. Some countries which had already established their external QA systems in the early/mid-nineties have replaced their QA agencies after re-definition of QA principles within the Bologna Process. Some small HE systems use QA agencies of neighbouring countries or organise international assessment instead of creating their own QA agency. In several countries QA has been introduced as a kind of state control rather than as a way to improve quality of itself.

It is important that the QA agencies of all 'Bologna' countries should be assessed against the ESG – both to ensure coherence across the EHEA and to make mapping of the national situations easier. Yet, by the time of the Leuven ministerial conference in 2009, just one third of the countries had carried out an external review of their QA agencies.

Student participation QA (Table 3) in expert teams is rather high although in a substantial number of countries just as observers. Yet, in 40% of countries they are left out from decision making. In three quarters of the countries students seem to be involved in internal QA. However, the data do not allow us to judge whether it means full involvement or just via the periodical student surveys.

Table 3. Student participation in QA

Aspects:	Countries (out of 48)
Governance of QA agency	31
Review teams as full members	26
Review teams as observers	16
Decision making on the outcome of assessment	29
Consultations during the review	38
Procedures of internal QA	37
Drafting self-assessment report	31
In follow-up measures at HEI	21

Student involvement in QA has grown over the last few years, still, some countries restrict student participation in some issues (governance of QA agency, decision-making) but a third group seem to be rather reluctant to student participation in general.

There has been progress in international participation in QA, especially in the participation in external review teams, but more international involvement in QA is still needed. Less than half the countries have international participants in the governance of QA agencies which is often a legal problem, thus in some cases international participants are invited to governance meetings simply as observers.

Table 4. International participation in QA

Aspects:	Countries (out of 48)
Governance of QA agency	23
Assessment of national QA agency	33
Review teams	38
Full membership of national QA agency in ENQA	22
Associate membership of national QA agency ENQA	11
Membership of national QA agency in other QA networks	33

It is striking that less than half of the national QA agencies are full members of the European Association for QA in Higher Education (ENQA). Criteria for full membership of ENQA require compliance of the national QA agency with the ESG so the above finding suggests that in quite a few national QA agencies ESG might not be completely implemented yet. In the future it is likely that inclusion of the national QA agency or agencies in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) will be an important indicator of the credibility of a QA agency. It was too early to analyse this aspect now as at the time of completing the 2009 national reports EQAR included only a small number of agencies.

Suggestions on less traditional areas to be covered by QA

The analysis of National Reports points at several areas in which the progress is hindered by a real or imaginary conflict between implementation of internationally agreed principles, the autonomy of HEIs and sometimes national legislation. Experience of some countries or some HEIs has shown that involvement of QA can be welcome and helpful to find solutions in the following areas:

- In the area of quality of institutional procedures used for recognition of degrees and study credit points the problem is that, while the Lisbon Recognition Convention sets clear principles for academic recognition, procedures and criteria used differ strongly between countries, HEIs of one country and indeed also between single departments within an HEI. Some countries have improved the situation by including

recognition of qualifications and credits into the scope of both internal and external QA which assesses whether the criteria and procedures used inside a HEI are in line with the principles of the legal framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

- Regarding the quality of Diploma Supplements (DS) all the Bologna reports: Stocktaking, Bologna with Student Eyes and EUA Trends reports show that while more and more HEIs issue DS, the quality of the supplements issued is diverse. There are cases where the Diploma Supplements do not follow the EU/ Council of Europe/UNESCO approved format, are used incorrectly and sometimes distorted completely. It should be remembered that the ESG also cover the information that HEIs send out – and DS is the most important information on the qualification for the graduates, employers, parents and others. Taking up the quality assessment of the DS at both internal and external assessments would help to improve the use of this important instrument.

- Lifelong learning has become one of the most important tasks of HEIs in recent years. At the same time, National Reports demonstrate that there are just a handful of countries where the issues of flexible learning paths and the recognition of prior learning, especially informal and non-formal learning, have become a matter of course. Issues in internal and external quality assessments could stimulate action, improve quality locally but also help exchange experiences and share good practice nationally and internationally and just help fulfil ESG guidelines for internal QA.

- Joint degrees (JD) currently are explicitly mentioned in legislation of thirty-seven countries so far, thus improving the legal situation of JDs. However, to fulfil the main criterion for recognition of a joint degree – ensuring that all parts of the joint programme are quality assessed requires joint action between the QA agencies of the participating countries.

- Internationalisation of HEIs is increasing in importance due to strengthening of the global dimension of the Bologna Process. Internationalisation of a HEI becomes the prerequisite of its sustainability. Thus, QA and the ensuing enhancement of the internationalisation process within a HEI should become an important component of the overall QA.

Summary of findings

1. When assessing the national QA systems against ESG, the main focus is on external QA while internal QA (Part I of the ESG) in a number of countries has been overlooked.

2. Compared to the implementation of external QA, the development of internal QA systems at HEIs is progressing more slowly.

3. While internal approval of programmes and assuring staff quality have been established in most countries, linking programmes with learning outcomes and designing assessment procedures to measure achievement of the intended learning outcomes will take longer to implement.

4. A number of countries state that they do not prescribe particular mechanisms for internal QA in HEIs but rather require that HEIs create them as they see fit.

5. All the 'Bologna' countries have introduced external QA systems including self-assessment and external review; most publish assessment results and carry out follow-up measures.

6. Many countries are slow in organising assessment of their QA agency and less than half of the national QA agencies are full ENQA members which suggests that there is a long way to go before there is clear evidence that quality assurance throughout the EHEA operates according to ESG.

7. Student participation in QA has progressed. However, in a number of countries students do not participate in decision making, they are not always involved in preparing self-assessment reports and they are seldom involved in follow-up measures.

8. International involvement in external review teams and membership of ENQA or other international QA networks has grown but both should be further increased.

Acknowledgements

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External quality assurance in the EHEA: Quo Vadis? Reflections on functions, legitimacy and limitations

By Jon Haakstad[1]

By 2010 the Bologna process will have reached a new stage, with many of the structural goals fully or partly achieved. In the field of quality assurance (QA), the *European Standards and Guidelines* (ESG) and the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) are two of the milestones.

The Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) has been given a major role in monitoring the reform process and its effects. While expressing its general satisfaction with the effects of the ESG and the maturing practice of quality assurance agencies, the BFUG now recognises "new and developing areas affecting quality assurance in the EHEA" (BFUG, 2009). Among these:

- How to balance accountability and improvement.
- How to balance the shared responsibilities of higher education institutions (HEIs), QA agencies and policy-makers.
- How to handle the increasing diversity across higher education (diversity of pedagogies, institutions, subject areas, students, expectations, missions, etc.).
- How to prevent the bureaucracy and cost of quality assurance from growing.

With the structural framework more or less in place, it may be time to take a more inward look at our practice again, discussing the fitness of mechanisms in relation to this variety of purposes. How should external quality assurance now proceed to help fulfil these expectations? The short answer is, I think, by doing several things; by *not* burdening a single mechanism with all the tasks and challenges.

External Quality Assurance: Purposes and expectations

The instruments of external quality assurance have almost exclusively been *evaluations* of some kind or other. Let us therefore start by taking a look at some of the different purposes that such evaluations can have. To mention the most obvious:

1. To check that educational quality and quality management comply with set standards.
2. To provide transparency through public exposure, thus indirectly moving institutions to improve, in case 'all is not well'.
3. To contribute towards improvements by engaging in an informed dialogue with the institutions, offering recommendations and kindling inspiration.
4. To pronounce judgements on how good or weak an institution or a programme is in relation to other institutions and programmes.

Indeed, other and more detailed purposes could be mentioned. But more interesting is the fact that these purposes, different as they are, often appear in combinations. Typically, QA agencies rely heavily on one 'basic' mechanism and the danger is then that the operation gets a double, or blurred, focus, or that a method that is designed specifically for one purpose tries to do other things – and does it less well. In an introductory speech to a quality assurance conference in Vienna in 2008 the former President of ENQA, Peter Williams stated:

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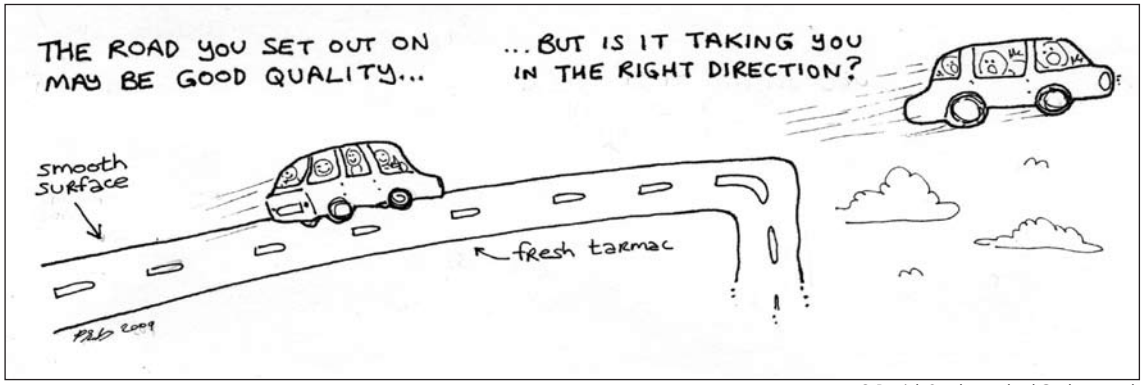
> We ought to be very clear about what external quality assurance is trying to achieve. And that is not quite as obvious as it sounds, because very often I talk to people about quality assurance and they can't tell me what the purpose is, they tell me about how they are doing it, but they can't tell me why they are doing it (AQA, 2008).



Control *vs.* Enhancement: The never-ending dilemma

Purposes 1, 2 and 3 above take us right into the question of control versus enhancement orientation. Where should the emphasis now lie and what are the general tendencies? In a plenary session at the 2nd European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF) in Rome, in 2007, François Le Poultier painted a picture of 'maturing' external quality assurance in Europe: moving *away from* control and 'reductionism' and in the direction of complexity and enhancement:

From:	Towards
Quality is absolute	Quality is relative
One quality feature dominates	Many aspects are considered
Product is central	Service is vital
End product is inspected	Attempts to optimise process
Fixed standard	Changing standards

But how true is this? In my view there is a discrepancy to be observed between the rhetoric and the actual practice. Whereas a dynamic and developmental approach is almost unanimously promoted as 'politically correct', more hard-line control practices are stubbornly resistant, and in many countries even on the rise, usually in the form of *accreditation schemes*.

In most Central and Eastern European countries accreditation-based systems dominate. But more interesting, perhaps, is the tendency for many countries in Western Europe to move in the same direction, where formerly – and ideologically – there was always a tradition for trust and enhancement orientation. Two cases in point are Denmark and Sweden. Admittedly, in Germany, the Netherlands and Flanders comprehensive systems of programme accreditation have quite recently been replaced by simpler schemes, but mainly for reasons of cost and burden, while still remaining solidly accreditation-based. Accreditation or accreditation-like methods have also found their way into the external assessment regimes of Norway, Spain, Austria, France, Switzerland, Italy and Finland[2].

The other main tendency has been for several countries to adopt an *institutional audit* method. This is now the core method in for example, the United Kingdom, Norway, Finland and Switzerland. In other countries it co-exists with accreditation in hybrid models (e.g. Spain, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Flemish-speaking Belgium). The audit method has been profiled as a more enhancement-oriented approach, but even audit is essentially a *control* method, although it controls at an institutional level and is therefore less intrusive.

[2] Sources include *Accreditation: in International Perspective* (The Inspectorate of Education in the Netherlands, 2006) and *Quality Procedures in the European Higher Education Area and Beyond* (ENQA, 2008).

Control, enhancement and multi-purpose mechanisms

Accreditation

Accreditation is now perhaps the most widely used instrument of external quality assurance in the EHEA. However, it takes on so many different forms that it is now more a name than a method, which makes it difficult to discuss accreditation *practice* from a methodological angle. Still, the most *specific* feature of accreditation[3] is the yes/no decision in relation to a defined threshold level – and the serious consequences that a 'no' will have (the *recognition* function).

Accreditation, understood as a formal system of official recognition, carried out on strictly academic grounds by an independent and authoritative agency, is a very sensible idea. As higher education increases in volume and becomes more of a market-related business there is probably a growing need to protect degrees (and students) from inadequate provision and 'rogue providers'. But must one therefore burden institutions repeatedly with full-scale evaluations in order to perform this task? Could not accreditation be streamlined to a format that is fit for its core purpose of providing quality control at a *reasonable level*?

When accreditation moves beyond this core function to become the *national QA approach*, purposes tend to get blurred. The separate functions of 'recognition' and 'evaluation' are rolled into one procedure, mixing a narrow function with a much wider one. The recognition function, the one with *consequences*, is most likely to influence the broader process, moving the focus towards control. Of course, most accreditations will reflect a 'complex' concept of quality, and usually there will be valuable observations and recommendations from the evaluating panel, but I would argue that the danger of reductionism is great. Concern with yes/no entails a particular concern with consistency and fairness, which in turn means that one needs clear and unambiguous assessments. This gives priority to a bundle of key standards, preferably supported by performance indicators. Accreditation – as an evaluation type – is therefore not ideally positioned when it comes to actually evaluating in depth in order to assist the institution, or a specific programme, to enhance the overall educational quality.

Quality audit

Like accreditation, quality audit is a method with a very specific purpose. Quality audit directs itself towards the institution's internal quality management. As such, it is a 'meta' approach in relation to educational quality, always one move away from the actual educational practice. The method's influence on quality is therefore also indirect: it relies on its ability to see how the institution's internal quality management system secures and promotes educational quality and improvement. It is a very useful method indeed, and one that allocates responsibility for quality assurance where it first and foremost belongs: with the autonomous institution itself. The external accreditation or audit, as basically single-purpose mechanisms, can make a contribution through a limited repertory of stimuli – some of them punitive, others encouraging, but their influence as quality enhancers should not be exaggerated.

Maybe we have to accept that the main purpose of external quality assurance is – and should be – one of control. How can we then orient our external QA activities in order to increase their contribution to enhancement at the same time? I think this can best happen when evaluators get sufficiently close to the actual teaching and learning process, approaching their object as 'critical friends' in an open and trusting discourse, addressing the provider's learning-directed *performance* and the many interrelated aspects of educational quality that come into play. It demands a process that would sit uncomfortably with a control purpose.

The question of legitimacy and acceptance

For all their ubiquitous presence now in the form of national systems, the status of HE evaluations is

[3] I am speaking here of the national, or 'official recognition' type of accreditation.

still precarious. It is quite interesting to observe the way in which attitudes to evaluation outcomes seem to be divided along predictable lines, determined by position and ideology. To oversimplify somewhat, many politicians, external stakeholders and students, who 'need' the evaluations to underpin their policies and agendas, tend to express their trust in evaluation outcomes as valid information. Conclusions are taken at face value, to be used as a legitimate foundation for refusals, demands, 'repairs', improvement measures – or even wholesale reforms and regulations. On the other hand, there is usually an opposing side who will doubt the knowledge that evaluations produce. These are the research-trained academics, the ones who typically find themselves at the sharp end of evaluations as well as policies and reforms. Seen from their point of view, there is something amateurish about most evaluations, both in terms of how themes are not sharply enough defined, how the body of empirical data is random and incomplete, and how the process is insufficient in terms of validation and analysis of the data. Squeezed between these two positions we often find the institutional leadership. Their gut feeling may be one of 'academic scepticism', but as responsible leaders they must honour the process and they can take support from its outcomes in their own internal steering.

'Quality in a deeper sense': Limitations and realistic aims

The various arguments that 'warn against' the legitimacy of evaluation results are well known. They were all heavily discussed in what now seems like the early days of external quality assurance (about ten years ago!), but the fact that they are less prominent in today's discussions does not mean that they are outdated. Perhaps there is a particular need today – in this age of convergence, legalism, quality indexes and system building – to remind ourselves again of these arguments, 'lest we forget'. So here is a quick reminder:

- Even institutions have identities and 'egos'! And they have much to defend: first of all their resources and reputations. Evaluations that carry with them the danger of tangible consequences will be met with counter-strategies. Hence we have evaluation games with less reliable outcomes.

- Higher education institutions and even programmes are very complex entities. Evaluators only get to see a small fraction of the numerous processes and components that make up an institution's educational practice – and quality.

- With an indefinite number of aspects included in any 'quality concept' and a variety of legitimate 'quality aims', most of them formulated in not too precise prose terms, how can such a complex frame of reference be 'operationalised'?

- Evaluations use *peer review*, a practice that has not changed significantly since the early days of quality assurance. Panels of 'peers', new ones from one case to the next, who do this on top of their ordinary busy jobs, pronounce their assessments and recommendations on these complex matters, often with limited specific training for the task. Frequently, conclusions come about as the result of discussions where individual peers 'defend' diverging views. Evaluation outcomes are typically *negotiated statements* rather than objective 'truths'.

- Finally, there are the circumstances of the exercise. An abundance of relevant information is normally collected, but how well can this information, such as it is, be systematised, analysed and weighed under the merciless pressure of limited time?

'The whole truth'?

Because of their epistemological limitations, external peer reviews with 'broad' targets, i.e. the *'total' quality* of institutions, discipline communities or programmes, must be executed with appropriate caution and reserve when it comes to pronouncing definite conclusions. This is all the more important when the review is mandatory, and as such represents a use of power by society. The panels' verdicts easily become 'authoritative' in the sense of 'official truth'.

Set against this background, the most obviously overambitious task for external evaluation regimes to undertake is to try to make comprehensive 'measurements' of institutional or programme quality in such a way that individual 'scores' can be read and compared directly. Needless to say, this makes very ambitious knowledge claims. Such a procedure implies by necessity a reductionist use of indicators and other information, it belies the circumstantial limitations of the exercise and it disregards the many options that exist in the interpretation of quality and the choice of aims. Finally, it will have a tough task 'correcting' for cultural and other contextual factors. It was, therefore, a surprise to find an official statement recently issued by ECA that points in this direction:

> Data collection and development of performance indicators should strictly adhere to the principles of transparency, readability and accountability of European higher education, thus allowing for measuring and comparing the strengths of institutions [...]Measuring the strengths of diverse institutions across borders will pose an entirely new challenge. To this end compatible instruments for both external institutional assessments and internal quality assurance systems will have to be developed (ECA, *s.d.*).

How can external QA be an impartial and omniscient judge when institutions compete in relation to a universal benchmark – without grossly reducing and simplifying the concept of quality?

The use of External Quality Assurance

After this exercise in limitation and denial, what remains as useful functions for external QA? Quite a lot, actually. External QA has an essential contribution to make, provided that it does what it does best. I will sum this up in four points:

a. The obvious

1. External QA may accredit – or recognise – higher education institutions or provision as meeting the basic criteria for being, or delivering, just that: higher education of satisfactory quality. This alone is an extremely important function and probably the main reason why external quality assurance regimes were set up in the first place. But it may be a rather simple and specialised process.

2. External QA may oversee the internal QA of HEIs. The EHEA consists of autonomous institutions that are themselves responsible for the quality of their provision and who must have internal mechanisms in place in order to honour this responsibility. External QA should represent 'the public eye' into these matters. By offering expertise in quality assurance – and not in every aspect of educational quality – external QA may bring professionalism and added value to the total chain of quality work.

3. External quality assurance may undertake 'broad quality' evaluations of institutions and provision with a development and improvement perspective, although in general this is actually the institutions' own task. Such an evaluation may take its point of departure in the institution's own perception of its situation and evolve as a discussion between the panel and the institution inside a SWOT-like framework. This is peer review in its proper sense, and conducive to actually achieving improvement.

b. – and beyond…

4. The argument so far has tried to show that adherence to the principle of fitness for purpose will not be reconcilable with achieving all ends with one methodology. Hence, specific methodologies are needed in order to make substantial advances along the road towards increased enhancement effects.

Through the last decade attention has focused on national systems, mainly one-mechanism regimes. Debate has raged about whether accreditation or audit is the best way forward, with the result that some nations have created hybrid systems that combine the two. But if external QA is going to yield more than control effects its fitness for purpose must be considered more seriously. Evaluations that aim

at enhancement must become more focused and 'narrow' in the sense that they scrutinise more specific objects, with methodologies that are more specifically tailor-made for the purpose at hand. For instance, one may look at things like 'programme coherence', or 'internationalisation', or 'quality of teaching', across a number of institutions and disciplines, identifying different approaches and practices and discussing useful aims and ways to improve. Another idea would be to examine the relationships between learning aims, teaching and learning processes, student assessment and actual learning outcomes, with a view to either fine-tuning learning aims, optimalising course design or improving student assessment. A third approach might be to evaluate a specific type of programme nation-wide, not in order to benchmark or establish a ranking list of programmes, but rather to get a view of the national 'state of affairs', to sample good and less good practices, make international comparisons and discuss general improvements from that platform.

And indeed: why not carry out more of these types of evaluations *across* national boundaries in order to improve internationalisation and to discuss quality phenomena in a truly EHEA context. A next step now, as national systems are more or less in place, might be for national agencies, given the necessary resources, to take their cooperation beyond 'mutual recognition' and into truly transnational evaluation projects. Such projects would be enhancement-oriented, as they would inspire participating institutions to fresh thinking through the description, comparison and discussion of different practices in heterogeneous educational systems. Further added value might follow from the effective dissemination of findings and analyses to the wider HE community.

Conclusion: External QA and enhancement

One needs to be aware that there are limitations to what contributions to enhancement external quality assurance can bring, beyond what 'repairs' are achieved through control measures. The general rhetoric overplays the capacities here. The contribution of external QA must be secondary and supportive, while the basic drive towards better quality must come from the institutions themselves. From their quality systems and their quality cultures.

In order to make further contributions to enhancement, QA agencies must (also) conduct evaluations that are more specific, with a more demanding interrelationship between purpose and methodologies. However, as resources are not endless, it probably means that some of the available resources will have to be re-allocated *from* control systems and *to* evaluations with a defined developmental purpose. In turn, that would require smart and less resource-demanding methods for quality control. For example, would it not suffice to accredit *institutions*, extending trust to programmes delivered by proper – and properly managed – institutions?

Governments and the general public have a right to know something about the quality of higher education. Naturally, they want this information to be as extensive, clear and unequivocal as possible. Therefore, governments tend to 'beef up' their national (external) QA system... but agencies cannot deliver any kind of answers and they must themselves, as professional agents, define the premises and limitations of their activities. If they take on functions and powers that go beyond the information value of their products we shall have to add a fifth function to our list: the function of a *legitimising, symbolic mechanism of convenience* for providing just those answers that 'society' is asking for. A function we should *not* embrace!

Indicators we live by? On the quantity-quality dilemma

By Johan Falk[1]

Opening words

The use of indicators is spreading like wildfire through the realm of higher education (HE) and quality assurance (QA). This is of course not a new phenomenon but it has become a more and more pervasive instrument for allocating resources and establishing rankings of higher education institutions (HEIs), of their faculties and departments. That is why indicators deserve to be scrutinised and reflected upon. My intention is twofold: in the first place I would like to raise some aspects on the use of indicators and for what purposes, in the second place, I will give a glimpse of the system of indicators used in the goal-oriented strategic planning that is currently in use at Stockholm University. Quality indicators used by HEIs nowadays tend to incorporate more openly qualitative aspects. As indicators are basically quantitative, this tendency brings the quantity-quality dilemma to a head. I will exemplify this tendency from Swedish HE, especially Stockholm University.

What is an indicator and what does it measure? This is a seemingly trivial question since performance indicators are of common use in all sorts of processes, in industry, in business and in education. As a matter of fact, we are constantly guided by indicators in our daily life and, even more, our judgement of others is built up on indicators. If you see a person giving money to a charity organisation, you will conclude that this is a generous and unselfish person. The act of giving money is an indicator of something else, something broader than the act you have witnessed.

Essential aspects of indicators

An indicator of some sort of performance - in research, teaching and learning - is something observable that represents something that is more general than itself. It is taken for granted that checking a complex activity can only be done by means of symptoms that stand for something qualitative, for example, some aspects of the finish of a car stand for the quality of the whole car, the number of refereed scientific articles stand for the scientific quality performed by an institution. This is in short the validity problem: do indicators really measure what they are meant to measure? This leads to other important aspects of indicators:

1. To what purpose(s) and from which perspective are indicators chosen?
2. How are indicators selected and by which processes?
3. How should we judge the representativity and validity of indicators?
4. Are indicators reliable in the sense that the same value shows the same state of things?
5. What are the causes of an increase or decrease in the outcome of the indicators? To what extent is it due to measures taken earlier?

Each of these five questions could be the subject of a lengthy discussion. Anyway, the questions point to important and problematic issues. For example, if the number of published doctoral theses is chosen as an indicator of the success of a research programme and is made a criterion for assigning resources, at least three things should be kept in mind:

(a) if it is a good measure both of performance and quality
(b) that all side-effects and bias that may arise from this specific indicator must be analysed
(c) that the way the departments will react to this situation must be addressed

What will an adaptive behaviour on the part of departments lead to in the long run? Will the university benefit from departments that try to get round the indicator in order to get short-term benefits or mere survival motives? This might seem to be an excessively pessimistic and critical stand on indicators. It must be stressed, on the other hand, that indicators are indispensible tools because nothing can be assessed or monitored without them.

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Success and fallacies of indicators

In the following I will comment on some of the issues referred to, bringing into focus some of the problems and fallacies that indicators may give rise to.

The validity problem

The central issue is that of representativity and validity. To what extent does the indicator measure what it is meant to measure? Is citation index – to take one of the most common indicators used in the international rankings – a good criterion for the "larger" issue that is performance and quality of research? Firstly, domains where the indicator is applied is not homogeneous (it is generally so) and that actors have very different opportunities. Take internationalisation, a complex matter indeed: is the number of incoming and outgoing students a good measure of internationalisation? I doubt it, but it brings us back to the question of which components of internationalisation are representative and measurable. Student exchange is just one aspect. In order to raise the validity several parameters should be taken into account. Otherwise, the magic of numbers could lead us to confuse quantity with quality, to generalise from token to type.

The following example also illustrates the problem of validity. Is the number of students successfully passing a course or an exam a good measure of educational quality? Yes, to some extent, and such figures are needed to get an idea of the throughput. But in reality it says little about the quality as such. High-level authorities tend to equate efficiency (output rate) with performance, extending it to quality. Getting back to the example, it is more likely that the rate of students achieving a paper for a bachelor degree (the ratio between these and those who started the course) is a better performance indicator, but still we do not know anything about the quality of the papers. My conviction is that a reliable perception of the quality in HE cannot be attained unless you go to the bottom line. All sorts of statistics are needed but it is difficult to draw conclusions about quality from quantity. The endeavour must then be to find operational cues that subsume various qualitative aspects of the case in question.

Things are moving in this direction in Sweden. In the next round of quality audits, the Swedish National Agency of Higher Education is planning to include a revision of degree papers. This is certainly a new step in order to measure more directly the quality of the learning outcomes, and there is a consensus on the fact that degree papers, combining quantitative and qualitative outcome, are a powerful indicator of performance and quality. But, admittedly, this procedure is loaded with practical complications, which are now being discussed at the Agency. Several questions presents themselves: do the benefits gained by an evaluation along these lines compensate for the costs involved in undertaking an objective revision of all this material? Would it be sufficient to make a random control? What use should be made of a survey along these lines?

Summarising, a basic claim on an indicator is that it reflects something essential about processes and outcomes that HE involves. Quantitative operators may be misleading in a quality assurance system if they are not clearly rooted in qualitative aspects of the outcome. As quantification is operable and "cheaper", there will be a risk that quantity overshadows quality to the detriment of validity.

Purpose of indicators

Indicators are selected for different purposes. They must give the leadership relevant information on different aspects of the strategic planning, in order to adjust measures to the internal goals and the demands that society put on the HEIs. Reality is more likely to move in the right direction if the strategic planning and its indicators are reproduced at different levels of the institution. The top management should therefore strive to set up the same or similar indicators at macro and micro levels. Central level, faculty level and departmental levels must be united in this work in order to achieve the goals.

The validity of indicators is intertwined with the purpose to which the outcome is meant to serve. If the purpose is to get a picture of the quality of learning outcomes, it would not be appropriate not to measure the number of examinees that year. If the purpose of the indicator is to climb up the ranking

ladder, of course the relevant aspects of the ranking system should be carefully followed up, for example citation index, student exchange, gender and social balance, number and spread of master's programmes. A discussion of the purpose of the indicators will be an essential step in the selection process, and dependent on the goals that are set up.

Indicators for macro planning

The relation between indicator, purpose and the assessed phenomenon is often evident and unproblematic, but not always. Since the big computerised data systems came into use in the eighties, HE is haunted by quantification and data collecting, as elsewhere in Western societies. Quantitative terms like 'production of credits', 'percentages of BA graduates', 'average time for master degree', and so on. Certainly, it is important to know about the performance, and we know much more than before. Society justly makes demands on HEIs, but quantification became more or less pervasive in the last decades of the 20th century. When gross figures of throughput (number of credits) are used as the principal instrument for planning and budget dimensioning, the relation to quality becomes problematic. In Sweden, and elsewhere, there have been two indicators for controlling the distribution of resources and budget processes at different levels going from the Ministry down to the departmental level. That is number of enrolled students and number of credits taken. This, of course, concerns only education, not research.

This is not a bad system in itself (it is formally equitable); it is just quantitative by nature. Of course, it is "corrected" throughout the planning process: rectors prioritise and indicate new directions; faculties may reallocate funding, start up new courses and programmes. Still, quantification tends to favour what is big according to normal market principles. Quantitative performance becomes a survival principle for departments and focus will be centred on the fulfilment of the assigned production of credits. This does not mean that quality assurance policy is absent, it has been developed and integrated in the planning process during the last 20 years, particularly due to the Bologna Process. But, it is still treated as secondary. My point is that when quantitative criteria prevail, there is a disassociation between sheer performance and quality of outcome. The links must be secured in a more organic way.

A new system for evaluation of performance and quality is being discussed in Sweden for the purpose of assigning resources. This debate originates from a report published in 2007 (*Resources for Quality*) where the need of a qualitative-based funding system was put forward. The proposals presented in the report bear both upon the graduate cycles and the postgraduate. The idea behind the recommendations is to let one part of the appropriations to HEIs depend on quality indicators and be open to competition between the HEIs, and the other part be determined by the current norm based on number of students and production of credits.

As to the third cycle (postgraduate studies and research), resources would be partially based on citations drawn from *ISI Web of Science*. The indicator brought up is the ratio between number of normal-cited articles (according to the world average) and the resources disposed of by the HEI for a specific area of research. An average index would have to be calculated for different research areas. Statistical data from economic funding during a previous period of three years and data from citation index would make up this indicator. In the discussion about this system several objections have been raised. In the first place, *ISI Web of Science* almost exclusively covers natural sciences, whereas humanities and social sciences have a tiny share. In the second place, it is clearly biased towards the Anglo-Saxon world. These shortcomings are evident to everyone and have led to the decision to build up a national base – SwePub – that should cover all scientific publications and constitute a reliable basis.

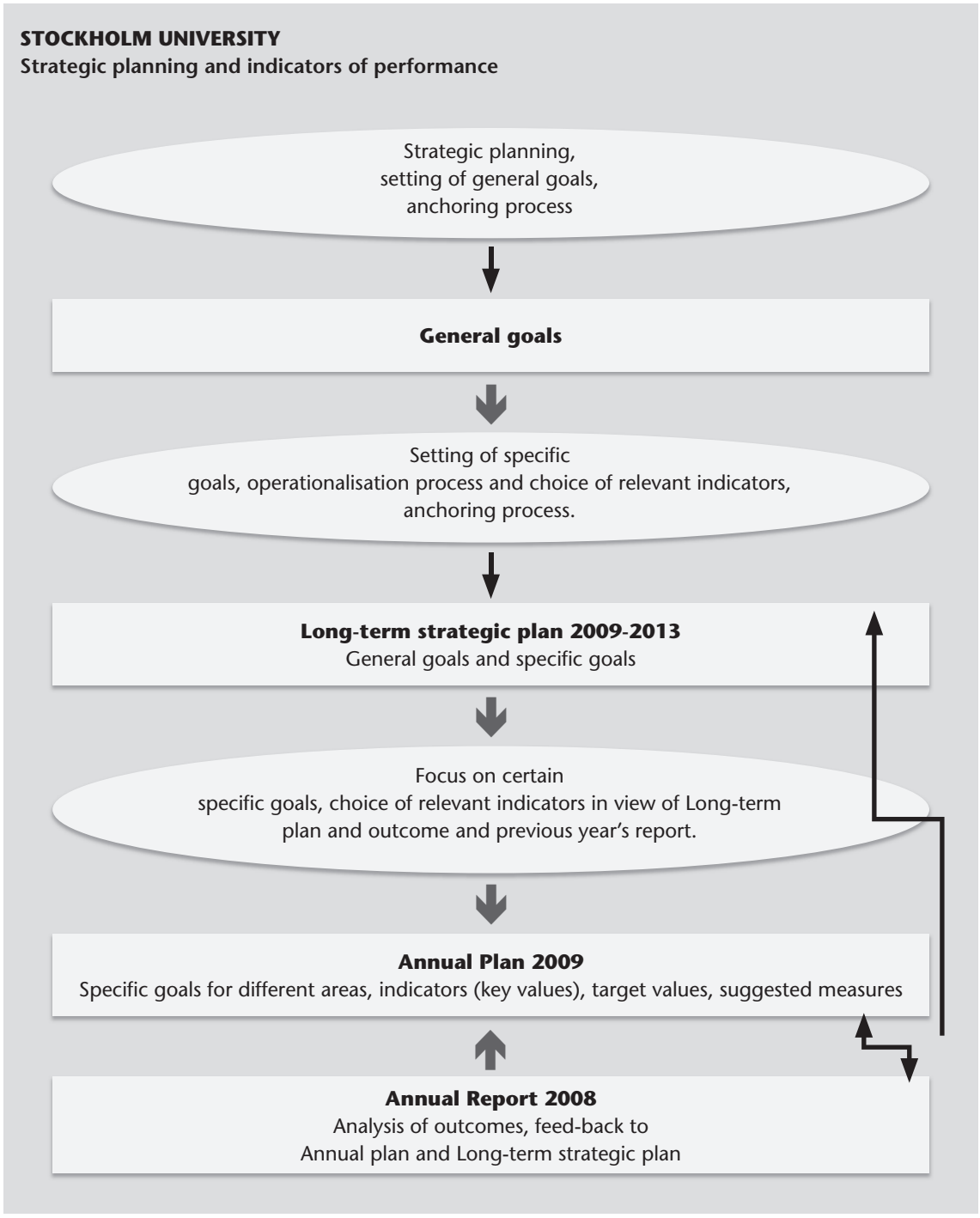
As to graduate level, a similar system has been proposed. Annual funding would be scrapped and assigned partially on the basis of different quality-based criteria. For example, it is has been proposed that a certain amount of money would be allotted to strengthen the research-supporting elements in undergraduate courses and programmes, another part will directly depend on the audits (including evaluation of exam papers and formulation of learning outcomes) and a subsequent classification of departments and subjects.

To sum up this discussion about the purpose of indicators and the quantity-quality dilemma, I think that there is a growing consciousness that indicators should take into account qualitative criteria and that

these should be used in the management of resources. My impression is that assessing and measuring the quality of outcome - not only the quality of processes, output and infrastructure - will be a more important steering instrument in the future. This would be valid for Sweden as well as for other European countries.

Strategic planning – the case of Stockholm University

Stockholm University, with nearly 50,000 students, more than 2,000 different courses and programmes, is a typical capital university. The university has as clearly decentralised organisation, transferring huge responsibilities concerning economy, course development, exchange and personnel to faculties and departments. That is one important prerequisite for the strategic planning that the University is carrying out. The following graph shows the structure of the planning system:



The Strategic Planning System used at Stockholm University is driven by goal setting and feedback of outcome. As such, this system for monitoring strategic development is not original, but it is implemented in a consistent way. Its core part is the Annual Plan. In this plan a number of specific goals are picked out, others that have been fulfilled are removed. For each specific goal an indicator is stated as well as its target value for a specified period, for example 2011. Examples of measures to be taken in order to attain the target within a specific area complete the picture. The planning is pushed from behind (and corrected) by the previous outcome and pulled forward by the goals set up for the three-year-period to come.

In the 2009 Plan there are five focus areas, and nine general goals have been singled out, for instance: *quality in education, quality in research* and *postgraduate studies, profiling, competence supply and competence rising, funding*. Each of these goals is deconstructed and made operable by specification of indicators, but they are to be complemented by other kinds of goal-oriented actions. Within research and postgraduate studies two specific goals are in focus in 2009:

Specific goals

- Increase of number/ratio of publications in leading scientific journals
- Improvement of social and economic conditions of the PhD-students

Indicators/ratio

- The number/ratio of publications in leading scientific journals shall increase
- The ratio of students that finish their PhD-studies in four years shall increase

Target values

- Increased values 2011 compared to 2008

The mentioned indicators are markedly quantitative, and their relevance to quality in a narrow sense could be questioned. Even so, the choice of indicators is always a compromise between operability and relevance. Without a doubt these indicators point to one facet of an overall quality of an institution.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a planning system based on indicators must meet the following requirements:

(a) It must be goal and quality-driven
(b) It must have relevant indicators
(c) It must have clear target values
(d) It must be feedback-based
(e) It must enable change of focus according to environmental changes
(f) It must be flexible without losing the long-term track

In the endeavour to improve quality it is easy to subscribe to what Scott L. Elton once said: "Quality assessment must move from its stress on accountability for past performance to concerns about future performance and that way must be found to influence quality enhancement strategically" (Elton, 1994, p. 98). This challenge is also the challenge of how to grasp quality by means of quantitative parameters.

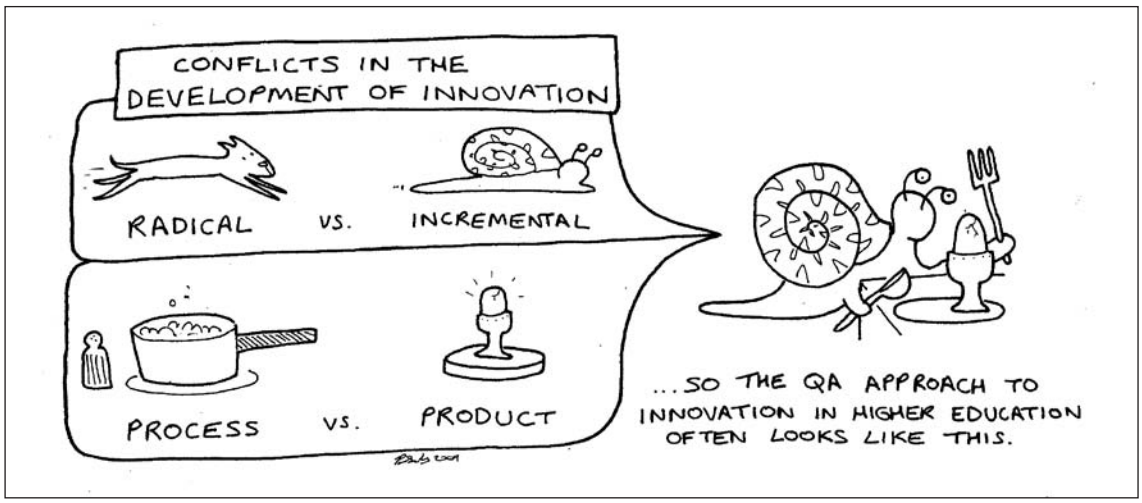
Innovation, learning and quality assurance: Mission impossible?

By Bjørn Stensaker[1]

While external quality assurance (EQA) can be seen as one of the most visible results of European integration through the Bologna Process during the last 10-15 years, there are an increasing number of voices pointing to some possible unwanted consequences of EQA. These voices acknowledge the importance of EQA in guarding quality when new providers enter higher education, the role of EQA in providing information about quality to different stakeholders in the sector, or across national borders, and the stimulus EQA offer to focus on education and training in general. Still, there are also questions raised as to the effectiveness and efficiency of current ways of organising EQA. Of course, the function EQA has in various European countries differs considerably with all the implications this might have for the relevance of the schemes established. In some regions and countries, EQA plays an important role as a regulative tool ensuring quality in deregulated and more marketised systems. In other regions and countries, perhaps where institutions have already have established their own systems of quality assurance, EQA could be expected to play a role more related to innovation and the development of these systems. However, this seems not to be the case. According to the European University Association (EUA):

> Many higher education systems are currently being held back from Bologna implementation – and thus from offering improved services to students and society – by national QA systems that are costly, offer no evidence of overall quality improvement, and stifle institutions' capacity to respond creatively to the demands of evolving European knowledge society (Crosier *et al.*, 2007, p. 59).

Hence, in higher education systems that can be characterised as 'mature' with respect to their experience in quality assurance, there seems to be a need for EQA to foster creativity and innovation – not by attempting to measure it, but to stimulate it through EQA processes. The big challenge in this respect is undoubtedly that EQA was originally designed as a counter-force to educational offers that perhaps can be said to have been so unique, creative and innovative that assessment of the quality of the offers was difficult to make. What EQA has contributed to is a more professional and systematic approach to quality – both at the system and the institutional level (Stensaker, 2003). The processes leading to this result can be characterised as incremental and product-oriented. Incremental due to the emphasis on long-term improvement, and the acknowledgement that change in higher education takes time to implement. Product-oriented due to the fact that in Europe accreditation is the dominant method associated with EQA, and that to achieve accreditation is, for many higher education institutions, far more important than any evidence of improvement without this quality-label attached.



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The Bologna Process and the existence of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), the increasing networking within quality assurance, and the growing collaboration across national borders have in addition established much consensus, norms and 'tacit' agreement as to how quality assurance should be conducted and organised. On the one hand, this is a much welcomed development paving the way for a more collective approach in improving higher education throughout Europe. On the other, there is also a risk that too much consensus in the field of EQA could hinder creativity and innovation.

Hence, what we are talking about is a need to find the delicate balance between standardisation and innovation acknowledging the benefits of professionalisation and standards in the area of quality assurance, but where we also should open up for more experimentation and creativity in how we conduct our business. The purpose of this short article is first, to demonstrate that – in theoretical terms – it is indeed possible to achieve this balance, and second, to suggest areas where experimentation is possible and perhaps even needed.

Innovation and standardisation – two theoretical intertwined concepts

The dilemma and interconnectedness between innovation and standardisation can be illustrated in theoretical terms. Even if both the concepts of innovation and standardisation point to the need to adapt, the concepts are linked with two rather different conceptualisations of adaptation. In most modern societies standardisation is considered as a necessity and vital for economic and societal development. Aspects of standardisation are a basic condition for both effectiveness and efficiency in health, transport, industry, and a number of other areas. This standardisation may occur for a number of reasons, and may be both a voluntary and forced process. A theory addressing this issue is the sociological version of neo-institutionalism, where a central thesis is that, due to external political pressure, increased professionalisation within a societal sector, or organisational uncertainty, organisations within a given sector will become increasingly similar. In other words, organisational adaptation is a change towards standardisation within a given organisational sector, e.g. higher education. Di Maggio and Powell (1983, p. 150) refer to this standardisation as a form of isomorphism, or structural homogeneity.

However, also innovation can be seen as a sort of adaptation process building on a view that organisations must find their environmental niche in order to compete successfully for customers, students or markets shares, improve financial support or relations with society at large (e.g., Selznick, 1957; Clark, 1998; Sporn, 1999). In this perspective innovation rather than standardisation is seen as the necessary condition for achieving effectiveness and efficiency.

The aim here is not to give a detailed review of these perspectives, but to point to some theoretical possibilities to integrate them and to relate them to EQA. Can we find theoretical arguments supporting how pressure for innovation and standardisation could be handled simultaneously?

There are several ways in which the perspectives could be integrated. Meyer and Rowan (1977) claim that a response is to develop 'double-standards' to handle such mixed expectations. However, with respect to EQA, a counter argument would be that due to increased external evaluation activity and various forms of external reporting, such symbolic actions are difficult to maintain in the long run, and something that would not benefit either those evaluating or those being evaluated.

However, due to the characteristics of higher education, where one in general can identify low innovation resistance (Levine, 1980, p. 173), and where innovation is almost a constant activity (Clark, 1983, p. 234), one could argue that the problem in higher education is not to innovate *per se*, but to 'make innovations stick' when facing pressure for standardisation. Levine (1980, pp. 14-15) has suggested that a cultural 'match' between the innovation and existing values in the organisation is important in such situations (compatibility). The alternative explanation is that an innovation may also 'stick' if it satisfies the adopters´ needs better than existing solutions (profitability) (see also van Vught, 1989, p. 66).

The implication of these combined insights is that standardisation and innovation is possible to combine (Czarniavska-Joerges and Sevón, 1996; Brunsson and Olsen, 1997), but that too radical innovations will be difficult to achieve – both because they cannot be seen as too 'alternative' in relation to the emerging

standards, and because they need to match the cultural characteristics (tacit knowledge, norms and values) of a given field (see also Stensaker, 1998). Innovation is then strongly limited by the norms and processes of standardisation, although it is possible to find some space for creative solutions. If we relate this to the field of EQA we should take as point of departure that attempts to innovate must be dealt with by attaching new meaning to existing concepts, routines and processes through a process of translation (Czarniavska-Joerges and Sevón, 1996; Stensaker and Norgård, 2001). In practise, this means that to achieve more innovation we need to be more creative in our understanding of some of the basic (standardised) concepts and understandings of current EQA; the 'general method', peer review, self-assessment, stakeholder involvement, participation and ownership – just to mention a few.

Possibilities for innovation in quality assurance

As EQA has developed over the years at the European level, we have started to develop some basic beliefs about how this activity should be organised and conducted. Hence, the need for an independent agency and a combination of self-assessment and a peer review process are among the key ingredients. These beliefs paved the way for the European Standards and Guidelines through which increased formalisation and the spread of these beliefs took place. While there is much evidence supporting these processes and ways of organising EQA, we could still find arguments for re-thinking the ways we organise this activity.

First, at the European level, we need to consider the purpose and functioning of our meta-review of the different agencies involved in EQA. Currently, all agencies need to go through an evaluation process as part of their membership and acceptance by ENQA and EQAR respectively. While such an evaluation should be considered as a positive aspect, we should be careful that these processes are not turned into purely symbolic or superficial processes. The way some of these evaluations are organised and conducted today suggest that there is little added value of them for other stakeholders than the agency under review, and that we perhaps should reconsider what sort of evidence that should be collected, what the purpose of the process should be, and the stakeholders involved. Given the fact that all higher education systems have special features and unique characteristics, one could argue that there is a need to develop more creativity as to how these features may be adhered to within broader standards.

Second, we could also have a look into why accreditation and programme evaluation dominates so many European EQA schemes. While there are certainly a number of good reasons for an emphasis on accreditation and programme evaluation in certain situations, one could wonder whether the spread of these methods also means that all higher education systems are facing the same challenges. Given the diversity of the European higher education landscape, an observer might be sceptical as to whether this indeed is the case. The so-called stakeholder involvement in these EQA schemes is also becoming quite ritualistic, so much so that we could question whether such participation adds anything other than a presumed legitimacy of the whole process. Again, there is a need to underline that the involvement of students, labour market and industry representatives in principle should be considered as an asset to EQA. The point is that we sometimes do not select the most relevant people, and do not organise the whole evaluation process in such a way that their views and perspectives make an impact on the process.

This brings us to methodological issues, and how we usually tend to organise EQA. For example, while there is much evidence related to the value of self-assessment as part of an EQA process, we could also argue that this process may steer the whole evaluation in a particular direction, or that it may limit some possibilities for the peer review panel that usually follows the self-assessment. In addition, one could also question the information collected as part of an EQA process. In general we still place of a lot of emphasis on input-variables while neglecting or sometimes missing out on opportunities to collect and analyse output variables.

Hence, within the existing standards of EQA, there is much room for experimentation and creativity. Having several peer review committees working side-by-side in an evaluation is one example of a design that might trigger more discussions and bring forward more divergent knowledge in an EQA process. Combining EQA for teaching and learning, and EQA for research is another possibility through which higher education institutions could be assessed in a more comprehensive and integrated way than today. Student involvement and engagement could be stimulated by giving students much more responsibility and power in EQA than they currently have. Undoubtedly, more examples could be added.

Conclusion

The main argument launched in this article is that there are many possibilities to develop EQA further despite emergent standards such as the European Standards and Guidelines or particular national rules and regulations of this activity. However, to move forward, national authorities, the agencies, and also higher education institutions all have a responsibility for taking action. At the national level, authorities need to develop a more nuanced view on the use of EQA. The European Standards and Guidelines should not be seen as an obstacle to national policy-making, although one can suspect that this is the case in some countries. At the agency level, there is a need for more experimentation in methods, organisation and design of EQA processes – experimentation that eventually should be included in the ordinary processes, and not as a side-show for increasing the legitimacy of the agencies. At the institutional level, EQA should not be viewed as a structure to be replicated internally in the quality assurance systems developed. On the contrary, there are a number of arguments supporting the link between institutional quality assurance systems and the overall strategies of the individual institution. There are still too many higher education institutions that consider quality assurance schemes as an internal control system, and not as a tool for strategic change. This is not necessarily the fault of the institutions alone, but should rather be seen as a form of emerging ´system failure´. While standardisation indeed has brought European EQA forward in many respects, we now need some innovation to take us to the next level.

Part 2. In the crossroads of internal and external quality assurance: What becomes of diversity and creativity?

External quality assurance and accreditation: Is there still room to think outside the box?

By Evelyn Knoors, with contributions of Ilse Verachtert and Ian Segal[1]

Flanders has a rather long-standing tradition of external quality assurance through peer review, introduced by the Flemish Interuniversity Council in 1991. It still functions today. However, when the Bologna ideas found their way into Flemish legislation, an accreditation system was added. Although the peer review system itself changed only slightly, the addition of a judgement about accreditation turned the peer review from a rather friendly and fruitful exchange of opinions about quality into a high stakes assessment.

At the introduction of the accreditation system in 2005 many feared that this transition would ruin the improvement oriented atmosphere of the peer reviews. Now, after four years of accreditation experiences, we are beginning to get an idea of the implications of the accreditation process. Were these fears justified and did accreditation limit the freedom of speech of programme directors and peer reviewers? Or did accreditation have an unexpected positive effect in enhancing the readiness of quality assurance officers and programme directors to find creative solutions to diagnosed problems?

In this paper the University of Antwerp reflects on these questions and presents a few cases of the experience of the accreditation process.

Have inspiring guidelines become impeding regulations?

In the early nineties, a huge part of the positive effect of the first round of peer reviews was due to the novelty of this external quality assurance system. Programme directors and staff were informed that a peer review would take place and put a great deal of effort into their preparation. Although quality of education has naturally always been of concern to all involved, this was the first time that programme staff had to reflect systematically on the quality of their programmes on the basis of guidelines and standards. While some standards were obvious for all – for instance, sufficiency and quality of academic staff – others caused a bit of a commotion, such as the presence of an evaluation system for the quality of education. Also, the review standards drew attention to the philosophy behind an educational programme, its goals and the translations of these goals into the programme and its course units. Much of this was present, but only implicitly. Often there was a general understanding among staff of these assumptions, but for most programmes these were not written down nor made explicit.

The effect of all this was that programme directors and staff and also the university management prepared themselves very thoroughly, evaluated their own functioning and anticipated on strengths and weaknesses the peer review panel might detect. The explicit guidelines and standards of the peer review inspired them to view quality with a new perspective. It widened their box of quality thinking in education, so to speak.

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Now, almost twenty years, two rounds of peer reviews and the addition of a formal accreditation later, has the novelty effect been replaced with something else? In an ideal world programme directors and staff, and the institutions as a whole would have internalised this new perspective on quality, adopted the guidelines into their quality culture and reflected on them. Our experience is that – in quite a few cases – the opposite is closer to the truth.

The initial guidelines and standards for quality assurance have, over time, been turned into far more detailed listings of criteria. This was not initiated by external quality assurance institutions responsible for the guidelines and standards, but requested by quality assurance officers, review panel members and programme directors and staff. All those involved in implementing, evaluating and assessing the quality assurance guidelines and standards frequently asked for specifications. Was this out of uncertainty about meanings, eagerness to do things strictly by the book, or sheer lack of creativity to elaborate on and interpret the guidelines and standards? In any case, this resulted in 50 additional criteria and more than 100 points of attention being added to the original 21 aspects of the formal accreditation framework. The consequence is that, in many cases, when writing up a self-evaluation report, programme directors and staff meticulously follow the guidelines and use them as a checklist to see if all criteria are either met, described or concealed. Writing up a self-evaluation report thus becomes an unimaginative process that threatens to evolve into a formalistic system smothering all creativity to give unique interpretations to educational quality[2].

And this is what happened recently in one of the arts programmes at the University of Antwerp. The programme staff was very far off from thinking outside the box. In editorial meetings about the self-evaluation report there was no room for discussion whatsoever. When presented with an uncertainty in the interpretation of a criterion or with differences of opinion among the editors, the chair immediately directed the group towards a decision. And when confronted with weaknesses in the programme one was more likely to look for a quick and superficial solution or cover-up than to dig deeper into the cause of the problem. There was an apparent fear to have a fundamental debate about a common understanding of the programme's basic principles. In this case, the lack of shared views on the programme makes the formal accreditation system far too threatening to think outside the box. With only a year to go before the visit of the review panel, there is not enough time for such a diverse group of opinions to develop a coherent mission and point all their noses in the same direction. Had there been no formal accreditation but only a peer review, this team of staff might have grasped this opportunity of a self-evaluation to rethink their mission thoroughly.

Or have impeding regulations become inspiring guidelines?

Not all is sorrow in quality assurance however. At the University of Antwerp there are a fair number of examples where the prospect of gaining or losing a formal accreditation has urged programme directors and staff to take immediate and radical actions to solve problems. In the right circumstances, this necessity often appears to boost creativity.

In one of the University's medical programmes, success rates of first year bachelor students – already low for a few years – dropped dramatically to 11% one year prior to the peer review. Although this programme has always had an enormous intake of freshmen and necessarily makes a selection in the first year, this success rate was surely going to raise the eyebrows of the peer review panel members and was a serious threat to gaining accreditation. Immediate action was to be taken.

First, all staff involved in the programme had to be convinced of the severity of the problem. Academic staff sometimes tends to blame a poor intake for low success rates and feel the university is better off filtering these students out. However, in this case, a closer analysis of success rates proved that even students with appropriate previous qualifications often did not manage to succeed. This urged staff to think outside the box and consequently the programme director issued various immediate actions: (1) consultation of students to gain insight into the causes of the problem, (2) introduction of more student-centred education, (3) creation of a committee for each learning continuity path in order to improve the coherence among course units and (4) creation of an examination policy in order to conform education and examinations formats with learning goals.

[2] Another implication of the specification of guidelines and standards is that review panels find it difficult to handle this jumble of aspects, criteria and points of attention consistently when reviewing programmes (Flemish Interuniversity Council, 2009).

These resolute and appropriate actions and the attitude of staff regarding this issue pleased the review panel members, convinced them that the solutions outweighed the original problem and resulted in a positive evaluation of the programme.

Even if the self-evaluation and the peer evaluation in general is positive and there is no threat to lose formal accreditation, the prospect of gaining a formal accreditation has urged programme directors and staff to find creative solutions and take immediate action with respect to the (anticipated) recommendations of the peer review team. Prior to the introduction of formal accreditation, the self-evaluation and peer review reports were often put in the drawer until the preparations for the next review started. Nowadays programme staff want to prove to the peer review team and to the accreditation agency that they take their self-evaluation and the peer review's recommendations to heart.

Between the start of the self-evaluation and the application for accreditation there is a period of at least two years. In a growing number of programmes we see that this phase is a very productive one for programme directors and staff to improve their education.

In one programme in humane sciences, for instance, the self-evaluation revealed a good yet very classically constructed programme. Programme staff decided it was time for change. They did not want to implement a few innovations to liven up the programme, but aimed to build a new programme aligned with current didactic and educational insights. So they requested and received a two-day training on the job, focusing on the position of the teacher in students' learning processes, on ways to enhance activity learning and on alternative ways of assessing students. The programme staff as well as the peer review panel was very pleased with the actions taken and the resulting new curriculum.

These two examples show that an important prerequisite for a self-evaluation process to be fruitful seems to be the extent to which individual academic staff members are able to work together to a common purpose and encourage one another to share opinions, problems and solutions. If such is the case, the process of self-evaluation – with the survival (that is, accreditation) of the programme in mind – can generate group dynamics among staff, which is an excellent breeding ground for innovative ideas.

Promoting inspiration and creativity

The examples mentioned above might give the impression that all innovations and creation of ideas occur at the level of the programmes. It is true that this is where the heart of the action is. Nevertheless, the University of Antwerp has been provoked by the implementation of a formal accreditation system to improve its quality management system at the institutional level too. In doing so the University of Antwerp wants to create a framework for quality assurance that, on the one hand, forces faculties and programme directors to engage in quality assurance, and on the other hand, leaves enough room for creativity and to accentuate their own priorities.

Establishing Centres for the Innovation and Quality Assurance of Education

Shortly before the implementation of a formal accreditation system, the University of Antwerp set up a new quality assurance system[3]. The most important organisational element in this new system was the establishment of a Centre for the Innovation and Quality Assurance of Education (CIKO) in each faculty. At the institutional level three staff members are charged with quality assurance, and at the study programme level the academic staff is responsible for the day-to-day quality management of the programme. In addition to this, the Education Council considered it necessary to enhance the intermediate, faculty level's capacity for quality assurance and innovation in education in general and more specifically for the preparation of and follow up on peer reviews.

A leading principle in defining the mission and tasks of the CIKOs was to leave room for each faculty's priorities regarding quality assurance and innovation, and not to stipulate detailed listings of duties.

[3] The reason for this was the merger of three universities in Antwerp. These three had been working together for decades and had formed a confederation since 1995. In 2003 they officially merged into the University of Antwerp.

Moreover, the CIKOs themselves played a major role in the drawing up of their collective mission. This in contrast to the aforementioned abundance of criteria and points of attention in the accreditation framework that – if meticulously followed up – leave little room for creative interpretations to educational quality. The Education Council intended to put its trust in the faculties and the CIKOs to do things right and with a sense of creativity.

Standardising evaluations while respecting diversity

Lecturer and course unit evaluations provide one necessary element of information for the self-evaluation process in preparation of a peer review. Furthermore, the results of these evaluations are used for personnel management. In 2003 the University of Antwerp opted for one standardised questionnaire to evaluate all lecturers and course units. A standardised questionnaire is fast and effective to process, everyone is judged by the same standards and it is possible to aggregate the results on different levels. But diversity is a challenge when using only one evaluation instrument. Every lecturer has his own preferences, teaching method and communication style. Also faculties and departments tend to have their own corporate culture. The University of Antwerp designed a questionnaire that is able to deal with these diverse characteristics (Mortelmans and Spooren, 2005), while it is still possible to process large amounts of questionnaires and benefit from the advantages of one questionnaire that is used institution-wide.

Not only the questionnaire, but also – and maybe more importantly – the procedure to follow up on the results of lecturer and course unit evaluations was designed in a way to (1) leave room for an individual lecturer to put results into perspective, (2) tailor the way the results are processed by the CIKO according to the customs of the faculty and (3) adopt a golden mean between discretion concerning individual lecturer's performances and sufficient openness to discuss necessary improvements of teaching and the programme.

Closing the quality cycle

After a good many years of experience with internal and external quality assurance, it was felt that the gap between receiving a peer review report and starting a self-evaluation for the next peer review was far too wide. The responsibility to follow up on the recommendations of the peer review team was left completely to the programme director and staff. They were never officially urged by central management to act upon the recommendations.

When the formal accreditation system was introduced, the Education Council of the University of Antwerp decided to ask programme directors for a follow-up report on the peer review, in order to close the quality cycle. This report on (planned) actions, their timing and indicators to check improvements is drawn up approximately one year after publication of the peer review report. It forces programme directors and staff to continuously work on the quality of their programme, provides necessary information for university management and can serve as extra information for the accreditation organisation if needed. These follow up reports are read by a so-called reading committee: the chair of the Education Council, two members of academic staff from other faculties and one central quality assurance officer. They in turn provide feedback to the programme director.

Providing educational support

In some cases programme directors and staff need educational support to implement recommendations of the peer review. They can get help from the Centre of Excellence in Higher Education of the University of Antwerp for in-service training or individual support. Also, the Education Council can initiate training. In 2007 an analysis of all peer review reports revealed that comments about the formulation of learning goals and their alignment with curriculum and examinations were common to many programmes. That is when the Department of Education, together with the Centre of Excellence in Higher Education provided four custom-made training sessions for the quality assurance officers and programme directors of faculties.

Trialling review discussions

Since the peer reviews have turned into a high stakes assessment at the introduction of the formal accreditation system, university management, programme directors and staff feel the need for an even better preparation. Not only in writing (more careful drawing up of the self-evaluation report) but also in speech. In order to reveal suspected weaknesses peer review panel members can pose relevant and to-the-point questions that make staff members think on their feet. University staff needs to be prepared to answer such questions.

A trial for the discussions with the review panel was first organised in 2008 for the abovementioned medical programme with the low student success rates. One month prior to the review panel visit, the chair of the Education Council, the head of the Department of Education and two academic staff members from other faculties acted as a review panel and put the programme director and staff on the spot with difficult questions. Although discussions were firm at some points, all involved found this a very useful experience and an excellent preparation for meetings with the peer review team. Almost all programme directors currently preparing a peer review, have requested such a trial.

Final reflection

Returning to the starting point of this paper, does external quality assurance and accreditation leave room to think outside the box?

Yes, I think it does. Programme directors and staff are being creative and do think outside the box while looking for appropriate solutions to perceived problems, anticipating comments from the peer review team and implementing recommendations. But they can only do so if they form their own ideas of what quality means in their programme. They must let guidelines and standards inspire them to make their own interpretations. If programme director and staff form a true team in which everyone feels safe to ventilate ideas (positive or negative), circumstances are right for creative 'quality assurance thinking'.

If, on the contrary, programme directors and staff immediately seek refuge in the quality assurance guidelines and standards – with all their supplementary criteria and points of attention – to know what is expected of them, there is a great risk of falling into formalism and smothering creativity.

Acronym soup: Institutional diversity and the development of quality assurance in Ireland

By Bartley Rock[1]

HETAC, FETAC, IUQB and NQAI. These letters more than likely do not mean very much to anyone who is not directly involved with quality assurance (QA) in the Irish context. Indeed, in a few years, they will not mean anything at all, as shall be explained shortly. These acronyms represent the names of the various quality assurance agencies in Ireland. For information, they are: Higher Education Training and Awards Council (HETAC), Further Education Training and Awards Council (FETAC), Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI). The reason they will soon not mean anything is that these bodies are due to be amalgamated into a single quality assurance agency, tentatively titled 'Qualifications and Quality Assurance Ireland (QI)' (DES, 2009, p. 16). Has the Irish Government decided that 'institutional diversity', one of the main driving factors behind the establishment of the four agencies, is no longer important or that it can equally be served by a single agency?

At first glance, the upcoming radical restructuring of the Irish QA system would suggest that the four-agency model has not worked. However, this paper will illustrate that, while the decision to amalgamate the four agencies at this point was indeed the correct one, it only made sense as a result of the work of the four agencies in their respective sectors to develop quality assurance while protecting and promoting institutional diversity.

To illustrate and reflect upon this, this paper will discuss the topic from a number of angles as follows:

- The multi-faceted nature of the Irish tertiary system and institutional diversity.

- The four agency model
    i. History and development
    ii. Strengths and weaknesses of the system
    iii. International context and comparison

These will be examined in a self-reflective and critical fashion. It is hoped that this reflection will stimulate a discussion on the interaction between quality assurance agencies and institutions, autonomy, the meaning of creativity and the evolution of QA systems and the need for change.

"Differences challenge assumptions"[2]: Institutional diversity and the Irish tertiary sector

If we are to examine QA in Ireland in the context of institutional diversity, we must first look at the Irish tertiary education system. What do we mean by institutional diversity? As John Brennan and Tarla Shah put it so well in 2000, "diversity of institutions poses questions for public understanding. Diversity of function gets mixed up with hierarchy of status" (Brennan and Shah, 2000, p.21). This instantly causes us problems with institutions that are not seen as universities and are somehow viewed as 'lesser' or universities seen as 'ivory towers' and 'cold'. At the same time, polytechnics/Institutes of Technology (IOTs)[3] are traditionally seen as more market focused despite evidence that the earliest European universities sought to prepare graduates for certain professions (Duff *et al.*, 2000, p.7).

The Irish tertiary sector is divided in a number of ways. The most significant division is between what is known as the 'higher' and 'further' educations sectors. To understand this in a modern context, we

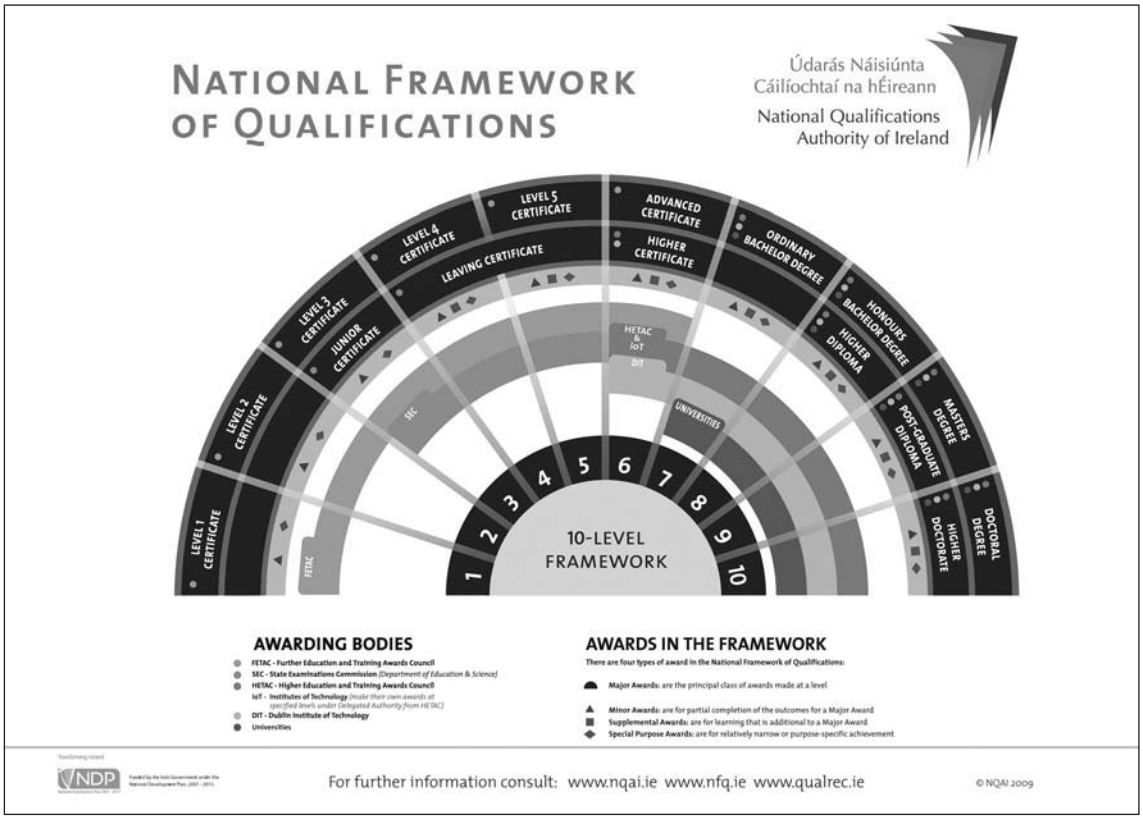
[1] European Students' Union
[2] Attributed to Anne Wilson Schaef
[3] The term 'Institute of Technology' is used in Ireland instead of 'Polytechnic Institute'. For the sake of fluidity, constancy and context, the term 'Institute of Technology' to denote an institute focused on technical and/or vocational education will be used unless otherwise stated.

must refer to the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), which created a formalised progression of qualifications, and is the only way to understand the different sectors.

The NFQ was established by the *Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999* as "a framework for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in the State (referred to as a "framework of qualifications"), based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners"[4]. Further to this, the NQAI defines the NFQ as "the single, nationally and internationally accepted entity, through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between all education and training awards" (NQAI, 2003a, p.3). The NFQ is a ten-level Framework with awards grouped from Levels 1-10, with each level consisting of four award types: Major, Minor, Special Purpose and Supplemental (NQAI, 2003a, p.7).

Levels in the NFQ are defined, as "a series of sequential steps. Each level sets out a range of standards of knowledge, skill and competence acquired by learners. Levels are not in themselves standards but indicators of a range of standards and can be described in an ordered sequence" (NQAI, 2003b, p.26). As can be seen from this, the levels in the NFQ represent progression. This is where the various sectors come in. "Further Education" (FE) represents Levels 1-6 (inclusive) while "Higher Education" (HE) represents Levels 6-10 (inclusive). Figure 1 below illustrates the NFQ and its award types using the 'fan diagram' produced by the NQAI.[5]

Figure 1. The National Framework of Qualifications



The FE and HE sectors are then further divided according to the type of providers in each sector[6]. In the FE sector, providers tend to be small 'centres' with a total 737 providers operating just over 1,300 centres in 2008 (FETAC, 2009, p.2). FE is provided by a diverse set of providers including Vocational Educational Committees (VECs), secondary schools, comprehensive schools and community schools/colleges, and a variety of adult learning and community education centres (FETAC, 2005, p.9). FE courses typically have a

[4] Oireachtas Eireann, 1999, http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1999/en/act/pub/0026/sec0007.html #partii-sec7
[5] A copy of the 'fan diagram' can be downloaded from the following link: http://www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/about_NFQ/documents/NQAIFANENGLISH.pdf
[6] In Ireland there are providers whose qualifications are accredited by bodies outside of the Irish State and do not fall under one of the four agencies. For the purposes of this paper we shall be concerned only with providers that do fall under one of the four agencies.

vocational focus and reflect national, regional or sectoral economic needs. Programmes also aim to develop personal skills (FETAC, 2005, p.7).

Higher education in Ireland exists along more traditional, binary lines. The definition of binary that will be used here, with some modifications, is that of the former UK Secretary of State for Education and Science, Anthony Crosland. In 1965 he identified on the one hand an autonomous sector comprising universities and on the other the public sector, comprising the leading technical colleges[7], colleges of art and colleges of technology (White, 2001, p. 117). The Irish HE sector currently comprises seven Universities, fourteen Institutes of Technology (IOTs), three 'Designated Institutions'[8] and four teacher-training colleges[9].

Universities and Institutes of Technology have different purposes under Irish legislation. The legislation that governs the universities, the *Universities Act 1997*, determines that universities have 'objects' and 'functions' while the *Institutes of Technology Act 1992-2006*[10] lists IOTs as having merely 'functions'.

To list the entire range of 'objects' and 'functions' of universities and IOTs is not necessary here. However, it is possible to discern a number of over-arching principles in each that is listed below in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Summary of Objects of Irish Universities

Universities
Objects of a University
i. To advance knowledge and promote research through teaching and research
ii. To contribute to national social and economic development
iii. To facilitate the highest standards of learning and lifelong learning

Table 2. Summary of Functions of Irish Institutes of Technology

Institutes of Technology
Functions of an IOT
i. To provide vocational and technical education and training
ii. To engage in research, consultancy and development work
iii. To institute and award scholarships, prizes and awards

As can be seen from all of the above, the Irish tertiary education system is, if not fragmented, then certainly differentiated. This has led to significant institutional diversity with providers ranging from local schools and employment centres to the University of Dublin, Trinity College (TCD), established in 1592. There are moves towards consolidation in certain areas[11] and cross-institutional alliances such as the Dublin Region Higher Education Alliance[12]. In general however, these moves, while encouraging closer co-operation, still preserve institutional autonomy and mission.

So, it is clear that there is a lot of diversity in the Irish tertiary education system. It has different sectors with different types of institutions who each have different missions and strengths and weaknesses. It is now

[7] Until the *Institutes of Technology Act 2006* what are now known as Institutes of Technology were called 'Regional Technical Colleges'.
[8] These are Royal Colleges of Surgeons Ireland, Royal Irish Academy and the National College of Art & Design.
[9] These are Mater Dei Institute of Education, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra and St. Angela's College of Education, Sligo. See HEA, http://www.hea.ie/en/AboutHEA
[10] This is the collective name given to the *Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992* and the *Institutes of Technology Act 2006*. Much of the latter act is amendments to sections of the former. For clarity, this paper will refer to provisions in the specific acts rather than the collected form.
[11] The Irish Government's *Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes* has recommended the amalgamation of Institute of Technology, Tallaght and Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown into Dublin Institute of Technology and the merger of the National College of Art and Design and the Institute of Art & Design Technology, Dun Laoghaire. The Report was asked to identify possible Exchequer savings in the context of the Government's budgetary difficulties.
[12] DRHEA, 2009, http://www.drhea.ie/about.php#

time to turn to the examination of the four-agency model for QA in Ireland and its strengths and weaknesses since its inception.

"Diversity…For the learning society"[13]: The development of the four-agency model for QA

The *Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999* established the three agencies of FETAC, HETAC and NQAI. In the case of FETAC and HETAC, they replaced existing agencies and assumed certain new powers. FETAC absorbed the further education and training role of the previous National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) as well as taking over award-making powers from certain state operated training agencies[14]. HETAC received the same powers from the same authorities as FETAC except in relation to HE and training and it also absorbed the function of the National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA)[15]. HETAC was also empowered to grant 'delegated authority' to 'recognised institutions' (Institutes of Technology) to make awards with procedures laid down in the Act[16]. NQAI was empowered to establish and maintain the NFQ, promote and oversee the maintenance and improvement of standards and to facilitate access, transfer and progression for learners[17]. This did not cover universities as Section 35 of the *Universities Act 1997* dealt with QA. In 2002 the Irish universities, in agreement with the Higher Education Authority, established the Irish Universities Quality Board to manage external QA of the universities. Table 3 below illustrates the reporting lines of quality assurance in the Irish system. It is now time to look at how this system has functioned and its strengths and weaknesses.

Table 3. Illustration of External QA System in Ireland

Institution	External review handled by	External Agency overseen by
Further Education Providers	FETAC	NQAI
Institutes of Technology	HETAC	NQAI
Dublin Institute of Technology	NQAI	Dept. Education and Science
Universities	IUQB	HEA and NQAI

"The response had to be built on the organisational traditions already in place"[18]: Strengths of the four-agency model

As has been outlined in detail in previous sections, there is a great level of institutional diversity in the Irish tertiary education system. As Ronald Barnett and Svava Bjarnason point out, "A modern system of higher education requires diversity: it has so many tasks to perform and some of those tasks are, in any case, likely to generate more value through a policy of selectivity" (Barnett and Bjanarson, 1999, p. 104). Unlike the British policy of "diversity within commonality" (Barnett and Bjanarson, 1999, p. 104), Ireland was "driven by a conviction that higher education and industrial needs required closer alignment and that this task could not be left to the universities" (White, 2001, p. 192). Institutional diversity and difference is hard-wired into the system.

The four-agency model took account of this and worked with each of its sectors to develop a quality culture in a way that respected the traditions of each sector. Institutes of Technology, which traditionally have been closely tied to semi-State bodies, are required to agree their Quality Assurance Procedures with HETAC (HETAC, 2002, p. 11). FE providers are required to do the same in respect of FETAC. Universities, traditionally

[13] Dr. Michael Woods, 'Woods sets up National Qualifications Authority of Ireland', 16th February 2001, http://www.education.ie/robots/view.jsp?pcategory=10861&language=EN&ecategory=40240&link=link001&doc=10610
[14] Oireachtas Eireann, 1999, http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1999/en/act/pub/0026/sec0012.html# partiii-chapi-sec12
[15] Oireachtas Eireann, 1999, http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1999/en/act/pub/0026/sec0021.html# partiv-chapi-sec21
[16] Oireachtas Eireann, 1999, http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1999/en/act/pub/0026/sec0029.html# partiv-chapii-sec29
[17] Oireachtas Eireann, 1999, http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1999/en/act/pub/0026/sec0007.html# partii-sec7
[18] Department of Education and Science, '*Amalgamation of Qualifications and Quality Assurance Bodies: Consultation Paper on Implementation*', (Dublin, 2009), p. 12.

more autonomous, are governed by Section 35 of the *Universities Act 1997*, which states that a university shall "establish procedures for quality assurance aimed at improving the quality of education and related services provided by the university"[19]. The IUQB publishes 'Good Practice Guidelines' for universities.

The strength of this multi-agency approach is that, to a certain degree, institutions have felt 'part of the process' rather than QA being seen as an imposition. In the case of IOTs, there are three IOT representatives on HETAC Council[20], ensuring that when HETAC began to develop its policies; its providers were an essential part of the process. While the *Universities Act 1997* requires universities to engage in QA and to have their procedures reviewed, they are given the latitude to develop them internally.

Developed as a positive, this has led to institutions experimenting with various differing approaches to QA. One salient example is the National Academy for Research, Teaching and Learning (NAIRTL) that was established by University College Cork (lead partner), Cork Institute of Technology, National University of Ireland Galway, Trinity College Dublin and Waterford Institute of Technology and funded by the Irish Government's Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF). NAIRTL has developed as a result of Government encouragement and has thrived as a result of its diversity and the autonomy of its institutions.

The key strength of the four-agency model is that it has managed to take Ireland's tertiary education system and implement a relatively standardised QA system, modified in certain ways for certain sectors. However, this targeted approach has also given rise to significant weaknesses, which this paper will now address.

"The centre cannot hold"[21]: Weaknesses of the four-agency model

An opposing view of the four-agency model as cited above is that the creation of the three agencies, and later the IUQB, was merely an "honourable outcome of a long-standing turf war between the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment" (White, 2001, p. 238). There would appear to be some weight to this as ten years after their inception, the three agencies are in the process of dissolution and amalgamation.

While the four-agency model has strengths, they have also developed into its greatest weaknesses. First among them is the very nature of the sector. A country the size of Ireland does not need four quality assurance agencies when the concept of QA has become accepted and enshrined in law. Indeed, the proliferation of agencies has sometimes led to patchy implementation and policies. While HETAC-accredited institutions abide by the rigours of the *Guidelines and Criteria for Quality Assurance Procedures in Higher Education and Training*, universities operate autonomously, merely asked to keep 'best practice' in mind. The strenuous effort to cater to institutional diversity poses its own problems as HETAC concedes, "the Council will adopt a flexible approach to the interpretation of the criteria and guidelines" (HETAC, 2002, p.2).

There is a risk that this approach, coupled with the 'light touch' regulation of universities will mean certain derogations from the guidelines will be granted. This is particularly true in the area of student involvement in QA. The 2005 EUA Sectoral Report of Ireland found that "students have almost no formal input into monitoring or evaluating the quality of teaching and learning" (EUA, 2005, p. 23). While there has been increased effort to improve this from HETAC and the IUQB, neither have the power to compel their sectors to comply[22]. It is not being suggested here that either the agencies or the institutions are wilfully ignoring QA, but progress has been slower in some institutions, overwhelmingly in the university sector, where there is no power to compel at all.

The four-agency approach has also, it can be asserted, led to a certain degree of 'mission drift' in that a national vision for QA has been hard to ascertain. Until the amalgamation announcement, the Department of Education and Science had not indicated how QA compliance would be handled for an IOT that was re-designated as a university.

[19] Oireachtas Eireann, 1997, http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1997/en/act/pub/0024/sec0035.html# zza24y1997s35
[20] Oireachtas Eireann, 1999, http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1999/en/act/pub/0026/sec0021.html# partiv-chapi-sec21
[21] White, *Investing in People, Higher Education in Ireland From 1960 to 2000*, (Dublin, 2001), p. 211
[22] For IOTs with 'delegated authority', HETAC's policies are guidelines and the IUQB is a limited company that is wholly owned by the universities themselves.

The four-agency model was designed for a system with many sectors and where one of these sectors was binary. While this approach has merits, it has become clear over-time that this has served to draw further barriers between the institutions in terms of QA. It has also prevented greater collaboration than may have been possible under one defining standard and agency. NAIRTL is a great example of collaboration, but it is one of the few that stand out.

"An Irish solution to an Irish problem"[23]: The four-agency model in an international context

The European dimension of QA has become ever more central since the publication of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). Each of Ireland's agencies uses the ESG but has adapted certain elements for its particular sector. Yet, other countries with a binary system have but one agency. Finland has twenty universities and twenty-eight polytechnics, all overseen by the Finnish Higher Education Council (FINHEEC) (Ursin *et al.*, 2008, pp. 110-111). Italy, which has 77 universities and non-university sector academies for music and the arts, also has a single national agency, the National Centre for the Evaluation of University Performance (CNVSU) (Ursin *et al.*, 2008, pp. 110-111). Even where there is a binary system and devolved government (i.e. the UK), it seems QA is handled by the one body. A high degree of autonomy is also common, which is a sign that institutional diversity is respected.

"An Irish solution to an Irish problem" is an analogy in Ireland that refers to a solution to a problem caused by two intractable opinions. Institutions wanted autonomy and special attention paid to them while the Irish government wanted to standardise QA provision. Enter four national agencies with powers of compulsion that also had the power to grant autonomy to their providers. In an international context it is unusual and rather counter-intuitive, but allowed a circle to be squared for a number of years.

Conclusion

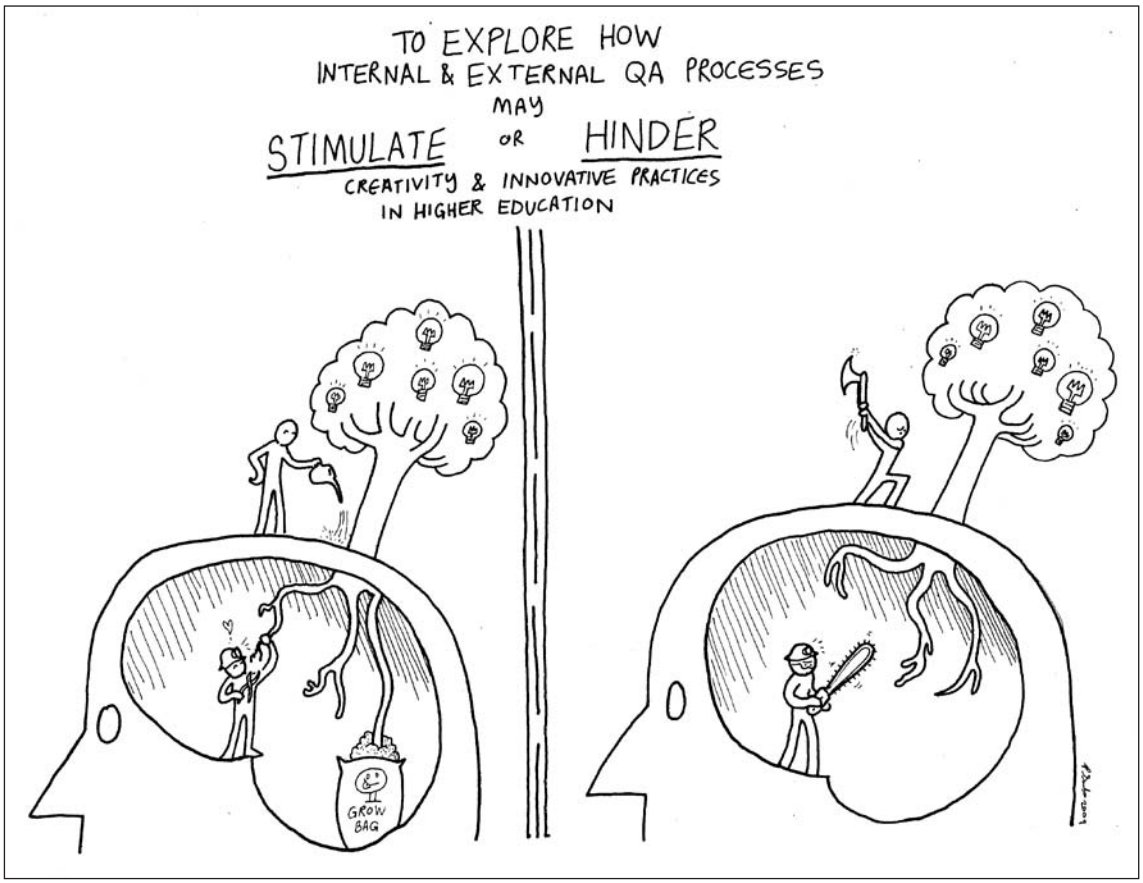
It has been shown that the Irish tertiary education system is very internally different. This paper has illustrated that while the decision to establish four agencies was appropriate at the time, amalgamation is now the correct move.

What lessons can be learned from the Irish approach? It is posited here that when building QA from the ground up, a multi-agency QA model that embraces institutional diversity and autonomy is an advantage in mainstreaming QA. This is especially true when starting with HEIs that are in different sectors and under different legislation.

However, as can be seen from the Irish experience, several QA agencies can lead to differing speeds of implementation. Wide-ranging autonomy within this system can lead to occasional resistance from HEIs. Several agencies allow the HEIs to form a majority within one in a way that a single agency would not. Of course, a single agency would require considerable latitude of operation, as simply having one agency does not in and of itself resolve tensions in a QA system.

Does this not mean that a single agency inherently reduces autonomy and diversity? The central lesson, from the Irish experience, is that once institutional diversity and autonomy in QA is nurtured, removing it is neither easy nor desirable. However, a single agency that incorporates institutional diversity and autonomy while putting quality first is possible.

[23] Attributed to then Irish Minister for External Affairs, Patrick Hillery, in 1971.



Why respecting diversity and creativity is essential in quality assurance and accreditation processes: Observations and experiences from the field of music

By Linda Messas[1] and Martin Prchal[2]

Setting the stage

The main goal of the European Quality Assurance Forum 2009 (EQAF 2009) has been to address questions on how current internal and external quality assurance approaches take account of institutional diversity and support creativity in higher education. The forum's focus on diversity and creativity was in line with other current initiatives at the European level that also address these issues. For example, the European University Association (EUA) project 'Quality Assurance for the Higher Education Change Agenda (QAHECA)'[3] has made several important recommendations in this respect, while the 'U-Map' project[4] has shown the vast diversity in European higher education through its efforts to create a classification of higher education institutions in Europe.

Music is one of those academic disciplines that exemplify the diversity of the European higher education landscape: most Conservatoires, Musikhochschulen, Music Universities and Music Academies are independent institutions, which, although being firmly embedded in the higher education systems, are set up differently to other higher education institutions. The features that distinguish music from other academic and indeed artistic disciplines are clearly described in the document *Higher Music Education – Summary of Tuning Findings* (Messas and Prchal, 2009), which has recently been published by the 'Tuning' Project. As can be seen below, music is also a discipline that has taken a pro-active approach towards quality assurance and accreditation through its *Institutional and Programme Review Scheme*[5] and its close collaboration with various national quality assurance and accreditation agencies, the leading European organisation representative of the sector, the European Association of Conservatoires (AEC)[6], has developed substantial expertise in the field.

This paper will take this process a step further by sharing observations based on the experiences gained in the field of music over the past few years. These observations will clearly underline the need for quality assurance and accreditation procedures to be sensitive to diversity and creativity in higher education, and can undoubtedly be extended to other academic disciplines.

Quality assurance and accreditation in the field of music

The AEC started to address quality assurance and accreditation in music in 2002 within the framework of the project 'Music Study, Mobility and Accountability'[7] undertaken in co-operation with the National Association of Schools of Music (a formal accrediting body in higher music education in the US)[8] with support of the EU/USA programme. This project gave the Association the unique possibility to gain insight into issues of specialised accreditation in music. This was followed by the project 'Accreditation in European Professional Music Training'[9] initiated in 2006 with support from the European Commission, which aimed at the development of a European and music-specific approach to quality assurance and accreditation. The project produced a comprehensive framework document entitled *Quality Assurance and Accreditation*

[1] Quality Assurance Expert, European Association of Conservatoires (AEC)
[2] Chief Executive, European Association of Conservatoires (AEC)
[3] See for more information about this project http://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area/quality-assurance/projects/qaheca/
[4] See for more information about this project http://www.u-map.eu/
[5] See for more information about this scheme http://www.bologna-and-music.org/reviewscheme
[6] For more information about the European Association of Conservatoires (AEC), see http://www.aecinfo.org
[7] See for more information about this project http://msma.arts-accredit.org/
[8] For more information about NASM, see http://nasm.arts-accredit.org/
[9] See for more information about this project www.bologna-and-music.org/accreditation

in Higher Music Education: Characteristics, Criteria and Procedures[10] with characteristics, reference points, criteria[11], procedures, and a register of experts for external quality assurance and accreditation procedures in higher music education. Since 2007, the Accreditation Working Group, created within the Erasmus Network for Music 'Polifonia'[12] is in charge of monitoring and further developing the use of the AEC Framework Document in the newly established *AEC Institutional and Programme Review Scheme.*

The *AEC Institutional and Programme Review Scheme* is designed as a European subject-specific peer review system in the field of music and consists of review visits performed by panels of experts with the aim of providing assistance to higher music education institutions in their quality enhancement activities. The scheme was tested through test review visits in institutions in Weimar, Oslo, Prague and Trieste during the spring of 2007. During the autumn of 2007, the AEC reviewed five music academies in Bosnia-and-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia in the framework of a project financed by the Swedish international development cooperation agency Sida[13]. This was followed by two review visits in the Netherlands and Spain during the spring of 2008 in the framework of the 'Polifonia' Network. The institutions visited provided positive feedback about the reviews and in particular regarding the competence of the experts in the fields of music, the relevance of the AEC criteria, the experts' questions, remarks and suggestions to the institution, as well as the supportive atmosphere created by the critical but friendly panels. Reviews of one institution in the United Kingdom, four in Poland, one in Portugal, one in Singapore and one in Cyprus are scheduled for 2010.

In addition to the informal procedures of this scheme, the AEC framework is increasingly being used by national quality assurance or accreditation authorities in the execution of formal quality assurance or accreditation procedures in higher music education at the national level. The AEC has established several types of bilateral cooperation with national quality assurance and accreditation agencies in Europe:

- For certain procedures, the criteria of both the AEC and the national agency are compared and merged, and the AEC advises on international experts. The agency then uses these criteria and experts in its procedures. Such cooperation is currently in place with the Swiss Accreditation Agency OAQ, the Romanian Accreditation Agency ARACIS and the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education in Lithuania for formal accreditation procedures in 2009 and 2010.

- In other procedures, the criteria are firstly merged, after which the AEC assembles a committee of international experts, undertakes the review visit and produces the final report of the visit to be submitted to the national agency for the accreditation decision. Such cooperation is in place with the German accreditation agencies ACQUIN and ZEVA, and was implemented for the first time for a review of a joint European programme in Germany in April 2009.

Apart from these activities initiated and implemented by the AEC, various members of the AEC community are being involved as peer experts in national quality assurance procedures in higher music education in various European countries. The experiences gained in these procedures are reported back to the Accreditation Working Group[14], which has the task to monitor quality assurance or accreditation procedures both within and outside the AEC. Thus, a wealth of information on national developments is collected, compared and analysed, helping the AEC to oversee the European quality assurance or accreditation landscape.

What have we learned and how can other fields learn from our experiences?

Based on these activities and experiences, a set of observations can be formulated that clearly indicate the existence of a high level of diversity in higher education and underline the need to take this diversity into consideration in quality assurance processes.

[10] This document can be found at www.bologna-and-music.org/reviewscheme
[11] Please note that criteria for both institutional and programme reviews have been developed and included in the AEC Framework Document.
[12] See for more information about the 'Polifonia' project http://www.polifonia-tn.org
[13] See for more information about this project www.aecinfo.org/sida
[14] See for more information about the 'Polifonia' Accreditation Working Group: http://www.polifonia-tn.org/accreditation

Defining the term ´quality´

A certain distinction of the various types of and approaches to quality in higher education can be identified under the term "quality":

1. The quality of *products*, in which the main focus seems to be on the quality of the academic and artistic achievements of students and teachers

2. The quality of *processes*, e.g. the educational processes that are aimed at producing high quality products as mentioned in the previous point

3. The quality of *structures*, e.g. the organisational structures and resources that are meant to support the educational processes.

In music, the main focus has traditionally been on the first type of quality, which is the type visible to music professionals both inside and outside the institution, and to the public as well. For this purpose, music has developed a unique expertise for talking about and judging the quality of musical achievements through years of experience in audition panels, competitions committees and selection procedures. In order to achieve this first type of quality, institutions must also be effective in addressing the second and third types and, although this has been done successfully in institutions in different ways over the years, less time and attention has been given to preparing written formulations regarding the second and third types, especially those that justify institutional systems against an externally derived set of organisational and reporting expectations. Institutional time has been mainly focused on having procedural and structural systems serve students and field, rather than students and field being the instruments for validating procedural and structural systems. As some quality assurance systems (especially those operating at the institutional level) mainly seem to focus on the second and third types of quality, a danger of a misunderstanding between existing traditions and cultures on the one hand, and new approaches and systems on the other can emerge.

Being sensitive to disciplinary, cultural and contextual diversity

Various initiatives have made reference to the need for taking disciplinary, cultural and contextual diversity into account in quality assurance and accreditation processes. Already in 2005, an *AEC-NASM statement on the characteristics of an effective evaluation system for music schools and conservatoires* was produced as one of the outcomes of the 'Music Study, Mobility and Accountability' project. This statement mentioned that, in order to be effective in reviewing conservatoires with respect to music content and institutional mission, a review entity must "respect the natures, achievements, aspirations, and structures of individual institutions" (European Association of Conservatoires and National Association of Schools of Music, 2004).

More recently, EUA's QAHECA project formulated the following statement as its first recommendation based on the findings of the project:

> First and foremost, quality assurance must always be context sensitive and thus individualised. When developing quality assurance processes HEIs and QA agencies need to take into account disciplinary characteristics, various organisational cultures, the historical position of the institution as well as the national context (EUA, 2009, p. 7).

Taking a view from a disciplinary perspective and based on the reality that there are still many hundreds if not thousands of specialist higher education institutions in Europe that focus on one or only a few disciplines, it is clear that an understanding of diversity in relation to discipline, culture and context is essential in quality assurance processes. Systems that are generic and use the same procedure for small specialised institutions as for large multidisciplinary higher education institutions with non-specialist experts (as recently observed in an institutional review in the UK), should therefore not be seen as examples of good practice. Such an approach forces small specialised institutions to invest a disproportionate part of their budget to set up a form of 'total quality management' with heavy quality control structures that will only slow down institutional development and be alien to their highly specific internal quality culture.

A good example of how misunderstandings can occur when generic non-specialist procedures review music institutions revolves around the issue of student involvement and feedback. The individual approach of the training used in music institutions is intense and essential, with one-to-one teaching still one of the most effective methods of teaching in higher music education. When asked about their learning experience, music students are usually very positive because of this highly individual approach. Typically, they also express their satisfaction of having sufficient ways to provide feedback on their learning experience, which usually is given to teachers and programme leaders in an informal way. At the same time, because of the highly individual focus of their studies, music students are rarely interested in becoming involved in formal internal management and quality structures. In generic review procedures with non-specialist experts that are insensitive to this reality, the institution may be criticised for not having much student involvement in the formal internal structures. The institution may then be advised to implement robust formal structures that are alien to the informal institutional culture and may have a negative impact on the existing creative atmosphere. This does not mean that formal procedures are not important, but the role of informal feedback mechanisms, which in small institutions can sometimes be very effective, should be taken into account.

Endangering institutional creativity

In this context, it is also interesting to point out that the QAHECA project of EUA raised the question of how to avoid quality assurance and accreditation procedures endangering creative processes in institutions. One may dismiss this issue as being too abstract, but it was observed during the abovementioned institutional review procedure in the UK, in which the institution was going through a very exciting and creative process of reflection and change, putting its otherwise well structured internal review procedures temporarily on hold. This was severely questioned by the review panel and by doing so the review actually damaged the institution in its development. In the QAHECA project final report, it is rightly remarked that "The danger of trying to appease the agencies at the expense of institutional-based creativity does exist and HEIs and QA agencies should work together to diminish its likelihood" (EUA, 2009).

Separating content and process

Some quality assurance systems (especially those operating at the institutional level) claim they are only concerned with quality processes and not with the quality of the content. This leads to a superficial separation of process and content, which for subject-specific institutions is unhelpful, in their context the content defines the process. Therefore, the presence of subject-specific expertise on the review panel is essential in any procedure in such schools. In addition, even institutional reviews that claim to check process only will need to address content issues that are developed by the institution as a whole. Examples of such issues are the place of research in all cycles, or the coherence of the educational content between cycles. Again, these are issues that should be judged by subject-specialists.

The separation of content and process can also have negative effects on the involvement of students and teaching staff. It is evident that the expertise in quality assurance is constantly developing further: more and more quality assurance experts emerge, panel and student experts are being trained, and interviewees are being prepared, briefed and debriefed. As a consequence, a specialised jargon is developing that is increasingly not understood by 'ordinary' staff or students. Ideally, a good internal quality assurance system works well when questions can be asked of random individuals in the institution. If this is not the case and information is only gathered from documents and individuals that are prepared, trained and briefed, there is a danger of the quality process separating itself from everyday reality and becoming an abstract superficial circus with a goal unto itself. Quality assurance agencies should make an effort to understand 'the language' of the institution being reviewed, instead of students and staff in institutions having to adapt to the highly specialised language developed and used by quality assurance experts.

Balance between assurance and enhancement

Another important issue is the balance between assurance and enhancement. Experiences with the Dutch accreditation system at the programme level show how quality assurance agencies are often

mainly focused on the compliance with existing criteria, a kind of 'ticking boxes' approach, without giving much attention to recommendations on how issues could be improved. Of course institutions have to be accountable, but they should also be encouraged to improve themselves according to what the expert panel has found. Otherwise institutions may be happy to pass the quality assurance and accreditation processes at a 'minimum level' and then carry on as before. We believe this is an opportunity missed and therefore always formulate a substantial set of recommendations for improvement.

Understanding the need for a stronger European dimension

Much has been said about the need for strict objectivity in any quality assurance or accreditation procedure. Not only in small countries, but also in small disciplines it can sometimes be a challenge to find truly objective peers without preset opinions. Seen from the perspective of a European organisation, this issue can easily be resolved by involving peers from abroad. Apart from heightened objectivity, involving foreign peers can bring fresh and new insights based on different perspectives, which can assist institutions in their further development. However, as has been noticed in the *AEC Institutional and Programme Review Scheme* that mainly uses international experts, some information about the national higher education system needs to be provided. Nevertheless, it is a strange paradox that while higher education institutions are being asked within the framework of the Bologna Process to increase their European dimension and students and staff are encouraged to do European exchanges and mobility, the quality assurance or accreditation procedures are still mainly nationally based. Should there not be much more interaction between the agencies, e.g. on criteria or suggestions on peer experts? Or how about a European exchange programme for quality assurance officials?

Quality assurance alignment

By Pedro Lourtie[1]

The paper addresses the issue of evaluation criteria and procedures, as part of a quality assurance system, and the associated reward system, and how they may contribute to fulfil institutional missions with quality. It is assumed that institutions are to be creative, developing knowledge and finding new ways and approaches to complex issues and problems. If quality assurance systems are to promote creative Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), then the evaluation process has to be aligned with the institutional missions and reward creativity and diversity.

John Biggs (Biggs, 2003) has coined the term Constructive Alignment, applied to the teaching and learning process. The analogy between this process and quality assurance is explored, in terms of the characteristics of the evaluation process and of HEIs' approach towards this process and its consequences. Rankings are a form of evaluation that disregards the fact that institutions have different missions and goals, implying that alignment between ranking criteria and institutional mission do not exist, unless HEIs adopt the goal of fulfilling those criteria, abdicating from the autonomous definition of their missions.

Creativity and diversity

The EUA report of the Creativity Project (EUA, 2007) reflects upon the difficulty of defining creativity. It opts to identify its dimensions and characteristics, using its limits, or what it is not, to clarify the concept. The importance of understanding creativity stems from the fact that progress depends on it being exercised and that it is an essential part of the mission of higher education.

There is a common understanding of the purposes of higher education in the Bologna Process, as expressed in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (BWGQF, 2005), somewhat reformulated in the London Communiqué (BPMC, 2007): preparing students for life as active citizens in a democratic society; preparing students for their future careers and enabling their personal development; creating and maintaining a broad, advanced knowledge base; and stimulating research and innovation. These purposes imply knowledge advancement and the development of new, better, solutions to new and old problems, including that of educating learners with diverse backgrounds and personal goals. This requires creativity and, as contexts and learners are diverse, diversity. As a consequence, quality, as adequate responses to the problems at hand, requires creativity and diversity.

Constructive alignment

John Biggs (Biggs, 2003) coined the term constructive alignment to designate the coherence among learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities and assessment of students. The starting point is that students learn as a result of their activities. And what each student does depends on his/her motivation. Students may have intrinsic motivation to learn, but are often driven by what they are required to do in order to pass or get a good mark and, in the end, the diploma.

A good mark is the result of performing well at assessment. If the assessment is not aligned with the learning outcomes, then it does not motivate the student to learn what is necessary to achieve the defined outcomes, but only those implicit in the assessment. In conclusion, learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and student assessment must be aligned if the outcomes are to be attained.

Not all forms of assessment are adequate to specific learning outcomes. Decontextualised forms of assessment, such as sitting in exams, may be adequate to assess declarative knowledge, but are inadequate to assess performance and the capacity to apply knowledge in the solution of problems involving complex contexts.

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Three ideas are to be retained for the analogy in the next section: good learning results require constructive alignment among learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and student assessment; students may have intrinsic motivation to learn, but in general plan their activities on the basis of the assessment; and decontextualised assessment is inadequate to assess student performance.

Quality assurance analogy

An analogy may be drawn between the education of students and quality assurance. The goal of the students' education is that they achieve the defined learning outcomes. In the quality assurance process, the goal is to ensure that institutions fulfil their missions and objectives. The analogy is, therefore, between missions, and their translation as objectives, and learning outcomes. These outcomes are diverse, depending on the programme attended by the student, as diverse are missions and objectives, depending on the institution type or context.

The teaching and learning activities are what have to take place for students to learn; just as organisation and procedures are what leads to institutional results. Both teaching and learning and institutional organisation and procedures may be more or less adequate to achieve the goal, the learning outcomes or the institutional missions.

Finally, evaluation is analogous to student assessment, the processes used to check the results of student learning or of institutional activity. As students may pass or fail, have better or worse marks, institutions may be accredited or not, or be the object of an evaluation report indicating strong and weak points, as well as recommendations. Two types of student assessment are usually considered: formative and summative. The first is used for learning, as an instrument to identify strong and weak points in student learning, and may be associated with evaluation processes leading to reports with recommendations, but no consequences in terms of accreditation, funding or other forms of reward. In both cases, these are important for the subject of the evaluation, the student or the institution. On the other hand, summative assessment implies a reward in the form of a mark, a pass/fail decision or an award, the analogy being an accreditation process or any type of evaluation associated with some form of reward.

The advantage of using analogies is that reasoning on some issues is easier in one domain than another and this induces a cross questioning that is enlightening, in spite of its limits, as some issues of one domain may not have correspondence in the other.

The motivation of students has an analogy in the institutions. Highly motivated students, those that want to learn rather than just get a diploma, would hardly need assessment, at least summative assessment, as they would only be satisfied whenever they have achieved the specified learning outcomes. These are students that usually obtain good marks. On the other hand, the nature of assessment is essential for those students whose prime aim is just to get a degree, and that are driven by the reward system, a pass or a mark. Their learning depends on the knowledge, competences and capacities required to perform well at assessment.

There is a clear analogy with quality assurance, be it of an institution or a programme. There are institutions, usually reference setting, that define their own goals and standards, and those that are concerned with what is required to have a positive evaluation report and benefit from its reward system, be it material or just recognition.

Missions, objectives and reward systems

As the student assessment has to be aligned with the learning outcomes to effectively ensure that students achieve these outcomes, the evaluation and reward system has to be aligned with whatever is the notion of quality of an HEI. This raises the issue of defining or identifying quality and, as several authors have concluded (Newton, 2007), the concept of quality is elusive or slippery. Newton (Newton, 2007, p.16) argues for ‚the relative nature of quality: relative to stakeholders, context, and to the particular quality assurance mechanisms [...]'. In any case, evaluation must be based on some sort of criteria, be it objective or subjective.

In the analogy, the learning outcomes were equated with institutional missions and objectives. If achieving them implies alignment with the evaluation criteria, the issue to be addressed is by whom or how missions and objectives are defined. They may not be defined just by institutions themselves, as it would lend to the definition of what is achievable and allow for institutions below acceptable standards. But they may not be defined only externally and be the same for all HEIs, as this would tend to hamper creativity and diversity, as well as the capacity to adapt to specific contexts and situations. If evaluation has to allow for each institution's specificities, then criteria cannot include just fixed and quantitative indicators. As decontextualised assessment is only adequate to assess declarative knowledge, not the performance in complex contexts, institution or programme evaluation must take into consideration the context, including socio-economic environment and the student population.

However important the evaluation may be for internal purposes, as self-improvement, it is also important for society in general, for candidates, for partners, etc., and it is usually associated with a reward system. The reward may be accreditation or a statement of quality by credible entities, contributing to public or peer recognition, or even prestige, but may also imply the capacity to get funds for its activities. This puts an obvious pressure on most institutions to comply and excel in those aspects that carry more weight on the results of the evaluation procedure, eventually sacrificing others.

If a balanced result is to be achieved and all missions of the institutions are to be valued, they must have correspondence in the evaluation and reward processes. As in the assessment of students, if part of the syllabus is not assessed or does not count for the final mark, it will be put aside by most students. This implies that not only the evaluation process, the criteria and procedures, are important, but also how its results are used.

Rankings

Rankings may be analysed in the light of the last section. They are based upon a limited number of criteria or indicators, as these must exist for a large number of institutions. Criteria are defined by some entity external to the HEIs. The process may be classified as an evaluation, but, due to the limited and fixed set of indicators, it supposes a schematic and caricatural type of HEI and does not have any room to consider the missions and objectives of each concrete HEI.

An official ranking, produced by a government agency or equivalent, may carry more weight than one produced by a private organisation. In this latter case, the reward is essentially related to the acceptance the ranking receives from public and peers. And this acceptance is associated both with who promotes the ranking and on producing plausible results. That is, a ranking that relegates reference setting universities to low places and puts in the first places little known HEIs would certainly not be recognised as credible. In short, it has to be correlated with prestige to be accepted and reinforces that prestige, producing a positive feedback loop.

To rise in the rankings, an institution has to improve on those criteria that have contributed to placing prestigious HEIs in the first places. At first reading, this suggests emulating good HEIs (in the sense that they have wide prestige) and seems to be positive. There are, however, two snags: the indicators are limited and one would be emulating a caricature that does not ensure that all aspects would be to the same standard as the reference institutions; and it tends to produce similar HEIs, and higher education systems require diverse institutions in order to respond to diverse publics and contexts.

Conclusion

The final report of the Quality Assurance for Higher Education Change Agenda (QAHECA) Project puts forward, as a first recommendation, that 'quality assurance must be context sensitive', taking 'into account disciplinary characteristics, various organisational cultures, the historical position of the institution as well as the national context' (EUA, 2009, p. 7). The second one is that 'quality assurance processes [...] should aim at enhancing the institutions' capacity to change in order to reach the strategic goals of each institution better'. This implies taking into consideration the diversity of contexts in which institutions operate and value the adequacy and creativity of the responses that institutions give.

On the other hand, rankings, as are based upon limited, widely available criteria and indicators, tend to define, as a reference, a standardised and caricatural type of HEI. Furthermore, to be widely accepted, they must produce results that are consistent with a preconceived ordering of HEIs quality. As a consequence, they tend to hamper creativity and diversity.

Institutional missions and objectives must be diverse to respond to higher education purposes and to accommodate diverse publics and contexts. If creativity of HEIs is to be fostered, the evaluation process and the associated rewards must value creative processes and adapt to diversity. For each HEI to pursue its own specific missions and objectives, its organisation and procedures, and the evaluation and reward systems should both be aligned with them.

Quality assurance and internal institutional diversity

By Heinz Lechleiter[1]

The Forum title speaks of creativity and diversity. I will confine my thoughts to *diversity*, thereby gaining brevity for the price of width and depth of the discussion.

Diversity and quality assurance (QA) are challenges for each other which invite different responses to them. The Forum title poses diversity as a challenge for quality assurance, while one of ten basic principles underpinning the European Standards and Guidelines admonishes that quality assurance "should not stifle diversity". By way of response, the session to which this paper is presented specifies that a creative quality culture has to *respect* institutional and educational diversity, and in the invitation I was asked to talk on "how to handle disciplinary and educational diversity within institutions through quality assurance systems"; (the Italian word for to *handle* is *maneggiare*). One could concentrate these various angles into a two-part question: Is quality assurance a help or a hindrance for institutional diversity and is quality assurance part of the problem, or is it part of the solution?

These notes are offered from the point of view of a practitioner, they are a personal view on the theme at hand, underpinned by five years of local Irish experience in Dublin City University, a young, medium-sized, focused and research intensive institution.

Diversity is a natural and important feature of universities. Like quality itself, diversity is a multi-dimensional concept for which a simple definition is hard to find and to give. There are many diversities within a higher education environment. One of the most obvious, and therefore often overlooked, is that of the individuality of each member of the institution, be they staff or students. Universities have probably been the workplaces with the highest concentration of eccentrics; they should be well able to deal with idiosyncrasies of its staff members and students and quality assurance should certainly not hinder them in doing this. However, in a blog written by the President of my university, the following story is told about an unnamed university:

> There is a lecturer who does not find it emotionally right to face his students, and so he lectures with his back to them. It's really rather a striking image, a kind of pre-Vatican 2 approach to teaching. [...] students have never complained (though it is a matter of some humorous comment), [...] but a visiting quality assurance team found it unacceptable.

While not too much should be made of one singular incidence, the underlying problem ought to be taken seriously: there has to be room for individuals and their oddities as long as they do no harm to others, and QA must be careful not to stand in their way.

Other diversities include, in the student body, undergraduate and postgraduate students, national and international students, mature students, students with a disability, and students from various backgrounds with different aims and goals. Within the academic staff, there are different grades and contract situations, there are those who see their main interest in teaching, or doing research, and both have to devote some time to administrative tasks, as do technicians and laboratory assistants. All of these, and many more, need to be taken into consideration when thinking and talking about institutional diversity.

In the following, I will focus on the diversity of QA procedures, and the academic aspects of disciplinary and educational diversity.

Diversity of QA procedures and definitions

The way in which quality is defined and in which quality assurance procedures are set up, in which quality improvement and enhancement measures are put into place is highly variable within the European Higher Education Area. In their recent publication on *Improving Quality, Enhancing Creativity* (EUA, 2009, p. 13) the authors chose a broad definition of quality assurance, and I am going to follow their example. Internal QA, in their view:

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> should not be understood merely as specific quality monitoring (such as process descriptions, data collection and analysis) or evaluation processes often carried out by a specific quality unit, but including all activities related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality of an HEI from strategic planning to staff and curriculum development. [...] Monitoring and evaluation processes alone, with no link to the curriculum development process, do not guarantee the quality of higher education.

I endorse this view and argue that quality processes are situated in many different areas of a university and that this is not, as one might think, an unnecessary duplication of effort, but a necessary condition for successfully coping with diversity within an institution. In the same report (EUA, 2009, p. 12 – Table 1), an appropriate QA framework is seen as an *enabler* of creativity, based on respect of diversity and driven by incentives. I agree with this and add that one *conditio sine qua non* is the readiness of the driver of quality, be it an external or internal agency, to develop the capacity for critical self-reflection. This is not easy, as Crozier, Curvale and Hénard (2007, p. 27) observe:

> …agencies are not used to questioning their own activities. They do not tend to challenge the frameworks that form the basis of their raison d'être and to question the political decisions that impact their work. They resolutely see themselves as operators of a set of procedures and defend themselves against encroaching on the territory of those that they see as political decision makers or the academic world.

The professionalisation of quality assurance has its advantages. However, there are also dangers inherent in the progressive professionalisation. It has the potential to *increase* the distance between people on the ground and those looking after quality assurance in an institution and it can create a "them" versus "us" divide. This, in turn, can impede the feeling of trust which is, in my opinion, one of the central conditions for successful quality assurance and enhancement measures and for anchoring a quality culture in a university. Trust in no way takes away from the rigorousness of quality assurance measures, quite the opposite: criticism by somebody one trusts is much more readily accepted than the same criticism by a mistrusted person or agency.

There are a number of measures that have been taken in many of the Irish universities including Dublin City University (DCU) in order to enhance mutual trust.

One of the measures relates to the office holder with responsibility for quality assurance in the institution. In the case of DCU, an academic member of staff is seconded from his or her academic post to act as Director of Quality for a fixed term of five years. The benefit of this is that the academic knows the institution from the point of view of the reviewed (and is not in his or her position long enough to forget). No doubt, relatively short appointments *decrease* professionalism, but they *increase* trust, and I think it works.

Another way of creating trust and confidence in quality assurance is to have a *Quality Committee* with membership from around the university so that as many diverse parts of the university as practicable are involved in decision-making about quality-related issues such as the institutional cycle of quality reviews or the allocation of money from the (modest) quality improvement fund. By having a broadly based membership of a quality committee, information about quality processes, procedures and policies is spread outwards and downwards to the greatest possible extent.

A further way of anchoring QA in the institution is to achieve the greatest possible *transparency* about quality assurance processes. In Ireland, most quality reviews are departmentally based, and internal and (a majority of) external reviewers are involved in these reviews. In DCU an effort is made to invite the departments that will be involved in the next round of reviews to participate in the round of reviews preceding their own. For example, if the School of Mathematics is going to be reviewed next year, a senior academic from the School is invited to act as one of the reviewers for a School from a different Faculty. (That School, by the way, has a veto in relation to internal reviewers). In this way, those who will undergo a review in the near future have the opportunity to see the process at work in great detail and know exactly what is ahead of them when their turn comes. They also know how to adapt the processes to their own needs, and templates and procedures contain the flexibility to allow such adaptation, within reason.

Disciplinary diversity

Within universities, diversity is, in the first place, perceived as *disciplinary diversity*. It is probably safe to say that a theoretical physicist from Institution A will usually have more in common with a theoretical physicist from Institution B than with, say, a lecturer in Mechanical Engineering or a professor in Machine Translation from his or her own institution.

Although, according to Gibbons *et al.* (1994), the relevance and the role of disciplinary differences may be changing as a new trans-disciplinary mode of knowledge production is emerging, Kekäle (2002, p. 67) maintains that the discipline-based division of work still seems to be the dominant mode in the academic world. The landscape of disciplines changes rapidly, but, starting from CP Snow's famous speech in 1959 on the two-culture divide, the basic division between the cognitive and social dimensions of academic disciplines has been well documented, e.g. by Becher and Huber (1990, p. 235).

This is what makes the selection of the peers extremely significant because it is of paramount importance, in making an assessment, to judge people by their own criteria and not to impose criteria they cannot accept. This is nicely illustrated by a well-known anecdote, in this case borrowed from Christie and Stehlik (2006), about a company's Quality Assurance Manager who was given a ticket to Schubert's unfinished symphony and came back with the following report:

> For considerable periods of time the four oboe players had nothing to do. The number should be reduced and spread over the whole orchestra thus eliminating peaks of activity. All of the twelve violin players were playing identical notes. This seemed unnecessary duplication and the staff of this section should be cut drastically. No useful purpose is served by repeating with horns the passage that was already played by the strings. If all the redundant passages were eliminated the concert could be reduced by half. Had Schubert attended to these matters he would probably have been able to finish his symphony after all.

The message of this anecdote is, in a nutshell: assess people and departments by their own criteria, and the best way of achieving this is through the selection of trusted peers.

An added benefit of using trusted peers for quality reviews is the principle of *mutuality* in the use of peers. It was obvious, in all reviews that we have conducted in DCU, that the reviewers themselves go through important learning processes. In most cases, peer reviewers will take with them examples of good practice they have noted in the course of their review. It is important to acknowledge such mutual learning processes and to build in this way a community of good practice.

Educational diversity

Educational diversity is quite distinct from disciplinary diversity. For brevity's sake, the educational theories shall be framed as the dichotomy between *education* and *training* with the adherent characteristics of *critical thinking* vs. *competence and skills, involvement in civil society* vs. *involvement in market competition, individual potential* vs. *labour market utility* etc. (Barnett, 1997). In terms of quality assurance, the consequence of tending towards one or the other of these schools of thought is the way in which educational success is defined and measured. Depending on which side of the debate one is on, different questions are asked of a different set of people. Those who see education as the main aim of the university will go to the students and their teachers to determine success, while those who see training as the main purpose of university studies will gain the employers' and professional associations' views. It is my conviction that we need a bit of both, but there is still a lot of room for debate on the ratio in which the two aspects should be mixed.

This is where the discussion veers towards the issues of *values* and of *identity*. Institutional diversity is diversity within the framework of a community of people who are different but who also share a core of values and by doing that also share a sense of identity and of identification with their institution, bringing about corollary sentiments and behaviours such as pride or loyalty.

Quality assurance has a dual task in relation to values and identity. It has to make sure that an institution has a unique set of values and an identity, known to those outside and inside the university, against which its actions can be measured. But it also has to question and put to critical testing the values espoused by the institution, in order to help it to keep a watchful eye on its own position and orientation in and towards the world.

In order to explore the issue of values connected to quality assurance and diversity a bit further, a few of the characteristics of quality assurance and diversity will be discussed in the following. To start with, some key characteristics are shown in the table below. At first glance, they seem to be in direct opposition to each other and creating paradoxes.

Table 1. Contradictory traits of quality and diversity

Quality	Diversity
Standard	Deviation
Comparison	Uniqueness
Assessment (= judgement)	Acceptance
Cosmopolitan	Local, parochial
Cross-disciplinary	Disciplinary
Universal values	Anything-goes attitude

While quality assurance can only work when there are agreed standards in place, diversity is defined by being different from something else. Standardisation works best in the realm of quantification, while it is an important characteristic of diversity that quantification is difficult, and that standards are elusive.

While diversity is based on uniqueness, quality assurance will always look for comparison; benchmarking is the decisive keyword in this respect. The forms of comparison we have become most familiar with are rankings and league tables. There is no need, here, to rehearse the pros and cons of such rankings. However, it is remarkable that from rank two downwards each university finds a large number of flaws with the methodology, criteria and presentation of the respective ranking table.

Quality is about assessing and applying criteria; it is about making a judgement which will in one way or the other, no matter how carefully it is presented and formulated, be interpreted as being somewhere on the scale between *good* and *bad*. Where diversity is concerned, judgement does not really come into the picture. Whatever it is that is different is stated to be different, but no corrective action is required, while standardisation requires adaptation of, and adaptation to different standards.

All of this presents quality assessment in a potentially negative light, as being overly egalitarian, judgemental, and intent on simplifying the complexities of the world.

However, while diversity brings colour to life, a mixture of all colours, as is well known from art, turns into a muck-tainted dullness. If diversity is taken to its extreme, there is only individuality and no mutual influencing of various stances. It can easily take the form of extreme parochialism paired with an attitude of potentially extreme inflexibility. The result of this is staleness and lack of movement, avoidance of renewal and an inward-looking stance. Applied to the academic disciplines, this attitude is a hindrance to interdisciplinary approaches. In contrast, the comparison with others, required in a quality-led approach has the potential to create a cosmopolitan outlook in which other practices are seen for what they are, they are subjected to a comparison, and – if found better – adopted.

The greatest danger, in my view, of a parochial, inward looking approach in Higher Education (as well as anywhere else) is that it denies the existence, as critical social theorists (e.g. Cooke, 2006, p. 189) would formulate it, of "context-transcending", "cross-cultural" and "transhistorical" values. If this were the case, quality, along with many other concepts, would lose its meaning, as there would not be any common

ground that gives a transcending core to what we call *quality* across space and time. I do believe that there are values that can be discussed and agreed upon, although context will always have to be taken into consideration and, again in the words of critical social theorists, quality assurance will have to be guided by "situated rationality".

In summarising the core message of the above, I would like to emphasise the following points:

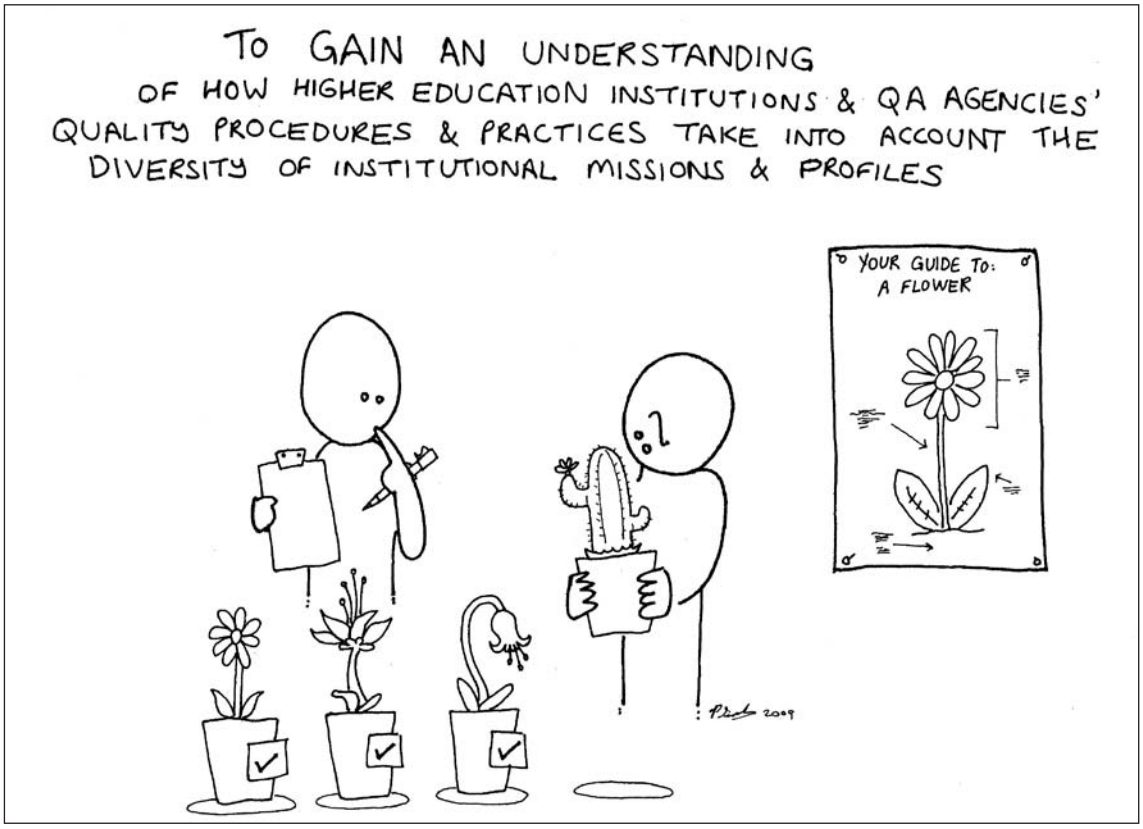
Quality assurance should be aware that diversity is a condition for change, as without seeing the 'other', it would not become visible that things can be different. Therefore, diversity cannot and should not be managed by quality assurance. Diversity should be seen as a given, a starting point, and should not only be respected but cherished, in a critical and reflective way. A lot could be learnt from intercultural studies.

Quality assessment measures should be based on mutuality and reciprocity of learning and respect, underlined by measures to build trust. This implies an appreciation of difference and of doing things differently, but it also implies a culture of talking to each other, in an open-minded and open-ended discussion. Imposed quality assurance measures will not gain the participants' trust, nor should they.

Quality assurance should rely not on one method and one approach but should be based on a multiplicity of methods and perspectives, thus making sure that the diversity within institutions is catered for. Those involved in quality assurance should be self-critical and self-reflective in order to learn through their own experience and through perspectives induced by others.

In quality assurance within an institution, the diversity of departmental missions and disciplinary cultures requires flexibility by those who look after quality processes within the institution. They should focus on the effectiveness of disciplinary and departmental systems and adapt developmental approaches in furthering quality within the institution. Ideally, quality review and evaluation processes are quality improvement measures in themselves.

Under these conditions, it is my conviction that quality assurance helps institutional diversity, and institutional diversity supports quality assurance.



Quality assurance: A Departmental Administrator's view

By Anne K. Craven[1]

This paper has been written from the viewpoint of a University Administrator working within the British university system. It discusses the quality of learning opportunities at UK universities.

Quality seems to be required everywhere; yet how do we define 'quality'? It cannot mean 'the best possible ever for everybody', because people have diverse needs and regard different things as 'best' for them. In the case of food, people have different conceptions as to what 'quality food' means for them. Nevertheless, 'Quality' requires that some minimum standards have to be reached, and 'quality' is generally considered valuable and worth pursuing. When talking about food, the standards in ingredients and the preparation process play an important role. Moreover, there must be consistency: we want to get what we have been promised each time we buy food of particular type. And, the taste … well, there are as many preferences as there are people, but food should still taste at least adequate not to be left on the plate.

In the case of higher education (HE), achieving good quality means far more than just standardising the ingredients or the end products. 'Academic quality' refers to the learning opportunities that are provided to the learners so that they can, through active study, achieve the qualifications they are aiming for (Dishman, 2010, p. 208). Although often cherishing common values, universities are individual, unique institutions, and totally manageable uniformity is not necessarily what universities' quality management is about[2]. Despite the differences between the food industries and HE, perhaps we can talk about quality as 'fitness for purpose' – suitability for the diverse needs of a university's diverse student population.

Quality at universities is traditionally paired with accountability, and it has also to do with responsibility, service, good practice and equitable treatment. It is measured with the help of evidence such as self-evaluation documents, reports and interviews, and regularly arranged audits (Ball, 1985; Barnett, 1992, p. 30, and Patrick and Lines, 2005, p. 32). However, in a world of change, we are wise also to note the transformational powers of quality assessment and control, especially when individuals and institutions continuously make creative incremental improvements: that is, 'doing things right, not just doing the right things' (Patrick and Lines, 2005, pp. 32-33).

Questions of quality and standards today touch on an ever-increasing range of academic and administrative activities. In HE, there are many stakeholders for whom quality is of key importance. The students are the most obvious group of university 'customers' – who can also be described as clients, partners or collaborators – and for them academic quality is crucial. Universities must take care that their teaching provision, assessment systems and support programmes help students to progress in their studies and achieve in an equitable manner. In this process, the students must also be able to communicate their views on their learning experience, for instance through feedback questionnaires and committee representation so that the quality of provision can constantly be enhanced. It is the function of a Quality Management System to ensure that this provision is maintained, developed and properly documented. Each academic year the students should be in an equitable position to study and learn, to enjoy their student experience and to complete their studies to the stipulated standards.

Quality, standards and the Quality Assurance Agency (UK)

It is important to be clear about the difference between 'quality' and 'standards'. Standards provide a reference against which institutional or student performance can be measured, for instance the level of

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[2] Cf. the quest for Total Quality Management (TQM), reported by Robert Birnbaum (Birnbaum, 2000, pp. 92-108). TQM moved from industry to the public sector and universities in the 1980s and 1990s. Although rousing considerable interest, TQM could sometimes be seen to emphasise conformance to requirements, predictable outputs, and management (powered by measurement and data) as a method of control, rather than as an enabler of high quality amongst the diversity germane to HE systems.

achievement students have to attain to obtain an academic award of a particular kind. One aspect of quality control concerns observing whether the actual performance matches the expected or communicated, advertised standard. Although it is often considered that within one educational system, such as a national university network, all the qualifications of the same level should require the achievement of roughly similar academic standards; different institutions may for instance target different student markets and thus in practice advertise or endorse somewhat different standards. This may happen to allow for other concerns such as widening participation: not all institutions focus on becoming 'world class players' but want, for instance, to be local shining stars, regenerators of their own regions. Lower advertised standard does not necessarily mean lower quality, provided the advertised standard is actually achieved and appropriate learning opportunities provided.

In the UK, academic standards and quality are monitored jointly by the universities and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), established in 1997. The QAA has defined academic quality as "… a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities are provided for them". In order to establish academic standards, the QAA has created an 'Academic Infrastructure' that "…provides a set of common reference points that enables comparable academic standards to be established in different higher education institutions, without jeopardising their autonomy and diversity". Explicit use of the Academic Infrastructure enables awarding institutions, their students, employers and the general public to have confidence that an award or qualification is of a standard recognised and acceptable within the UK.[3]

Although there are no official minimum standards set for teaching in UK higher education, the UK Government has indicated strong support for high-quality teaching. The QAA and the Higher Education Academy have been just two of the national agencies and organisations involved in the assurance and improvement of teaching quality in UK universities (Smith, 2005, pp. 27-8).

Departmental Administrator and quality

Many universities have dedicated Quality Offices within central administration to ensure that the enhancement of quality takes place throughout the institution rather than within isolated, disparate 'pockets of good practice'. However, the students' learning needs are mostly at stake on a departmental level. I describe here how a Departmental Administrator, or the DA, can work creatively with central Quality Office staff and external institutions to ensure that the students receive an enhanced quality learning experience throughout their studies. In the British university system, the DA of an academic department is its highest administrative manager, and his/her tasks are manifold: they include overview of administration, staff management, financial management, timetabling and workload issues, advertising and PR, committee servicing, external relations, contracts and remuneration of visiting tutors, and – notably – quality assurance functions, since most departments do not employ a dedicated departmental Quality Officer.

I draw attention to the special contribution to departmental quality assurance that a Departmental Administrator can make. The DA's quality assurance duties include making sure that the departmental programme and course specifications are complete, up-to-date and fit for purpose. The tasks encompass collaborating with academic staff and central administration staff on individual student cases, for instance on complaints, appeals and matters of academic misconduct. The responsibilities also include ensuring that all students re-taking examinations get equitable opportunities. Furthermore, the department must operate according to the law and to all relevant regulations. The DA should communicate with other departments to share best practice in quality assurance, and must also liaise with external bodies related to quality assurance, validation and accreditation.

A quality-conscious DA can support and enhance the quality assurance policies agreed on central university or college level and can ensure that quality assurance issues can be dealt with speedily and creatively, close to the student-customer. Through the work of the DA, the needs of the department and the diverse requirements of students can be taken into account proactively whilst adhering to overall university-wide and nation-wide guidelines. Importantly, the DA can easily be in touch with the students and involve them in decision-making, for instance through committee or focus group work[4].

[3] http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeofpractice/section2/default.asp accessed 17/08/09.

In short, the DA can take the role of an efficient 'lynchpin' – a creative coordinator, actively facilitating discussion between the department, the institution and external quality assurance agencies or accreditation bodies. In fact, I urge all those departments who do not have such a managerial role – who rely on just a secretary or two to take care of lower-level administration, whilst the responsibility for major administrative processes lies on the shoulders of central university administration and perhaps also departmental academic staff – to consider creating a DA's post. I maintain that it is better to have a professional overseeing administrative management matters such as quality issues on departmental level, supporting and enhancing the work of central university quality assurance specialists.

Widening participation

In recent years, diversity within the UK student cohort has increased considerably – partly as a result of the Government's promotion of programmes of increased participation where the target has been to have 50 per cent of 18-30 year olds enter HE by 2010, completing at least a first degree (see e.g. Mienczakowski *et al.*, 2010, p. 139 and *The Future of Higher Education*, UK Government White Paper, p. 59[5]). This cohort includes so-called 'non-traditional' university students with diverse backgrounds, for instance as regards social class, ethnicity and family history of education. Some of the learners also have special needs and thus need additional support. To achieve institutional widening participation goals, Departmental Administrators usually work with Widening Participation Offices to find the best ways to attract talented potential students who would perhaps not have come to the university otherwise. These non-traditional students may then require additional support so that the academic standards of the university, agreed both within the university itself and through its implicit and explicit contracts with the national and international (especially European) university sectors, can be upheld. The universities should not lower their standards in order to admit or accommodate non-traditional students – but nor should they need to (Furlong and Cartmel, 2009, pp. 109-10). When the university sector works on providing good-quality learning opportunities and appropriate student support rather than resorts to tampering with any agreed or benchmarked standards, all stakeholders, including employers, benefit.

A diverse student body may have differing preferences regarding various aspects of their study environments and learning styles, and perhaps it is not always possible to cater for all tastes. Nevertheless, through the management and enhancement of quality via the input of many staff members, institutions can take significant steps to ensure that each year, everyone within this diverse student body has equitable possibilities to achieve; that the student retention rate stays high and the drop-out rate low; and that the university does not deviate from the standards set for teaching and learning. The measures may include the provision of appropriate teaching spaces, inspiring study materials and relevant resources, and of effective student support systems that enhance student experience.

Once again, the DAs are a lynchpin, campaigning to ensure the successful department-level implementation of decisions taken centrally, and promoting quality at every step. They work together with academic staff to ensure that the diverse study-related needs of the learners can be met by the department as completely as possible. To support the students directly, the DAs can also open their offices to students during designated hours, work with student representatives, and organise student/staff forum meetings where feedback is given and received.

In order to identify potential gaps concerning quality, diversity and equal opportunities within departmental resources and training provision, the DA must regularly go through the department's specifications, handbooks and committee paperwork. The DA must promptly present any issues breaching current departmental or institutional standards to the relevant departmental committees and ensure that high-quality solutions are put in place.

[4] On involving students in quality review and improvement processes – something actively encouraged by e.g. Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in the UK – see Watson and Maddison, 2005, pp. 89-91.
[5] Also available at http://www.dius.gov.uk/higher_education/~/media/publications/F/future_of_he accessed 24/01/10.

Departmental policies, procedures and specifications

The departmental quality-related policies and procedures may focus on issues such as the creative use of Virtual Learning Environments. There may be a departmental peer review policy; committee guidelines; an external examiner policy; and standards to which the departmental office staff need to adhere as they assist students with study-related enquiries. Quality management procedures (such as the office procedures related to the anonymous submission and processing of coursework) can also aid the impartial assessment of students by academic staff. These measures help to promote a smooth path for the students to obtain the best degree results possible.

Today's reality also includes various surveys, ranking lists and league tables of higher education institutions made by organisations ranging from national agencies to newspapers, and documentary evidence of an institution's quality procedures and standards may be crucial for its success in those types of assessment. At present, external examiner policies are probably amongst the most topical quality related policies in the UK, but even such matters as the opening hours of the Departmental Office may have a crucial significance for the quality of the students' learning experience[6].

Furthermore, quality management tasks undertaken by the DA can help the Department's self-reflection and self-evaluation, audits, accreditation processes and the ongoing effective development of the study programmes in general. A Departmental Administrator who notices, say, that peer reviews are not being carried out should certainly bring the matter to the attention of the Head of Department.

Academics and administrators also need other clear documentation dealing with standards, quality and the students' academic well-being. The systematic management of academic quality enables, and requires, full documentation of study aims, learning outcomes, materials, methods and assessment criteria. Programme and course specifications containing this information are usually prepared by academic staff with input from administrative staff. When all such documentation has been devised, programmes and modules can function effectively on a yearly basis, thus releasing the creativity of the planners. Equally, when basic guidelines are in place and need no immediate rethinking, it is easier to redirect all energy to dealing with any contingencies when necessary, preserving the quality already achieved.

Although the Head of Department has ultimate overall responsibility for his or her unit, the DA has several delegated responsibilities in the area of academic programmes' quality assurance. Ensuring academic quality requires constant vigilance as well as excellent communication and influencing skills, sometimes even diplomacy, tact, and academic credibility from the part of the DA. It is often up to the DA to make sure that particular course specifications or quality policies are promptly updated, and that they are also adhered to by all members of staff, even though all parties concerned are busy. Information on departmental policies and news on specification changes can be published in the academic staff handbook and newsletters of the department, which can be edited by the DA.

Quality cycle

As universities adapt to changing external circumstances within the 'knowledge society' (Wolf, 2002, pp. 46-47 and Hargreaves, [2003] 2004, p. xvi), it may not be best to determine quality simply by using 'objective' external measures such as those provided by national quality assurance agencies or newspaper league tables. Admittedly, it is perhaps impossible for universities totally to eschew rankings and comparisons. But to achieve lasting results that are useful for the institution in question, it is important that the university adopt a tailor-made developmental approach to its quality control, assurance and enhancement processes. Such internal quality management processes focus on planning and programme delivery as well as on the quality of learning and student experience.

The tailor-made, non-comparative internal quality processes recognise the individual, diverse goals of the institution and its departments. They also assist the institution in paying attention to its strengths and in improving the quality of learning through a continuous cycle of reflection, self-correction, advancement and achievement. The processes can include the analysis of feedback sheets and staff-student committee minutes; organisation of focus group meetings involving students; conduct of peer reviews; and joint

[6] On league tables and Teaching Quality Assessment scores in the UK, see Shattock, [2003] 2008, pp. 7-9.

examination board meetings involving more than one programme, with external examiners present, sharing good practice across programmes and courses.

The Department Administrators can facilitate all of the above and should ensure that a self-reflective, constantly improving cycle of processes – a 'quality cycle'– is in place at departments (Watson and Maddison, 2005, pp. 71–94). This will enable incremental improvements on an annual, or even on a quarterly basis.

Personal standards, strategies and quality

Quality is not just for institutions. Students and those working at universities also have personal quality aspirations and standards regarding their own work. These aspirations and standards may be influenced by teachers or mentors, supervisors, managers, academic disciplines, university rules and regulations, the scholarly community, and professional bodies and associations. Reaching standards brings personal contentment. Moreover, supervisory recognition of the quality of their work or study is crucial for staff members' and students' satisfaction and pride, in turn encouraging them to strive for better and better quality.

University management can reinforce this positive 'flow' by providing staff with appropriate development opportunities, and DAs can take a proactive role here by mentoring their peers, coaching their direct reports such as departmental office secretaries, and encouraging all departmental administrative staff to participate in appropriate training activities. Here 'high quality' also equates to the members of the university moving towards the same strategic goals that encompass the university's values such as collegiality, discovery of new knowledge, dissemination of knowledge, and deep learning[7].

On the departmental level, Departmental Administrators should make sure that the department's strategic aims align with the overall quality strategy of the institution and its mission – what the university 'is for'. If the departmental and institutional goals and aims match and support each other, enhancement of quality in one field helps its development on other levels and in other areas: everyone's input counts.

Concluding Remarks

As I stated at the beginning, we want our consumables, such as our food, to be of good quality – and we also expect that of the food for the mind. There are many ways in which universities can offer this 'food' to their diverse learner cohorts, and ways in which the Departmental Administrator can help to ensure that it is provided effectively, creatively, to the agreed standards and in effective collaboration or partnership with the student-clients. What matters here is the quality of this study-meal, including that of its ingredients, preparation and serving. And, yes, also the taste; after all, we want our student-customers to enjoy their experience – and to finish their meals.

[7] On the management and development of university strategy, see e.g. Watson, 2000. On universities and values, see Watson, 2007.

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