

CIMQUSEF'2012

Institutional Quality Evaluation

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Institutional Quality Evaluation-

Outline of presentation

- Where did we come from
- The basic model – where we are
- Emerging trends- where we (or some of us) are going.
- A longer term view – where we might go
- And why are we bothering

History 1

The 13th century

- The University of Paris

The 19th century

- The UK- the external examiner system
- The US- establishment of accreditation agencies but not much concerned with quality assurance

The first half of the 20th century

- Not much

1950 to 1989

- Some progress, US finally introduced a comprehensive system of accreditation
- UK and some other countries, quality assurance encouraged by introduction of binary (HE taking place outside universities) systems of higher education

1990 to date

- The explosion

History 2

When INQAAHE was set up in 1991 there were less than ten countries that had comprehensive systems of external QA in HE. INQAAHE now has over 200 full members (this includes specialist programme accreditors)

Factors contributing to the growth of EQA

- The recognition in many countries of the need for greater accountability for the use of scarce national resources
- The growth in higher education that has occurred in many countries
- The increased diversity in HE provision including the establishment of binary systems (HE outside the universities), and the growth in distance learning.
- In some countries there was a trade off between the reduction of direct governmental control of higher educational institutions and the introduction of EQAA arrangements.
- The increase in some countries in the number of private, including “for profit”, providers.
- The ever increasing internationalisation of higher education including the growth in Trans-border providers and the need for the mutual recognition of qualifications and higher education credits.

Or to put it more simply

Governments, and the wider community no longer believed that the “Professor was King in his own class room

Notions of quality (1)

There are many different understandings of the term, quality, often reflecting the interests of different constituencies or stakeholders in higher education. Thus, quality is a multidimensional and often a subjective concept....

- Quality as [excellence](#). This definition is considered to be the traditional academic view that holds as its goal to be the best.
- Quality as “[zero errors](#)”. The idea of “zero errors” is defined most easily in mass industry in which product specifications can be established in detail, and standardized measurements of uniform products can show conformity to them. As the “products” of higher education, the graduates, are not expected to be identical, this view is not always considered to be applicable to higher education.

Notions of quality (2)

- Quality as “[fitness for purpose](#)”. This view requires that the product or service meet a customer’s needs, requirements, or desires. Learners (students) and prospective learners, those who fund higher education, the academic community, government, and society at large are to a greater or lesser extent all clients or users of higher education but may have very different views of both “purpose” and “fitness”
- Quality as [threshold](#). Defining a threshold for quality means setting certain norms and criteria. Any programme, department, or institution, which reaches these norms and criteria, is deemed to be of quality....

Notions of quality (3)

- Quality as [value for money](#). The notion of accountability is central to this definition of quality ...
- Quality as [enhancement](#) or [improvement](#). This concept emphasizes the pursuit of continuous improvement and is predicated on the notion that achieving quality is central to the academic ethos and that it is academics themselves who know best what quality is at any point in time. Disadvantages of this concept are that it is difficult to “measure” improvement and that the evidence of improvement may not be easily discernible to the outside world.

(Campbell, C. & Rozsnyai, C., 2002, *Quality Assurance and the Development of Course Programmes*. Papers on Higher Education Regional University Network on Governance and Management of Higher Education in South East Europe Bucharest, UNESCO.)

or to put it more simply

Are you doing the right thing and are you doing
it right?

Who decides what is right?

How can you prove that you are doing it right?

The basic model

Within the context of national laws, QA agency regulations and guidelines

The institution produces a self evaluation report (sometimes called self-assessment).

This is reviewed by a group of academic peers (not generally inspectors) and by the staff of the agency.

The review almost always includes a site visit.

A report is produced which may be published; even if the report is not published the consequences of the report is almost often published

Although the basic model is almost universal the
are very many variations.

The focus of the review

Agencies may be concerned with

- Institutional review only
- Programme review only
- Both institution and programme

Some agencies allow selected institutions to conduct their own programme review or accreditation.

Ownership of agencies

In many countries, particularly in Europe and the US, the agencies were set up and owned by HEIs but governments almost always exercise considerable influence on matters of policy but not necessarily “academic decisions”.

Institutional/programme licensing

The withdrawal of approval/accreditation from an existing programme or institution can have a devastating effect on existing students and graduates so it is very important to get the initial approval right.

In some countries institutions have to some form of licensing before they can commence operations.

Another aspect is that institutions may be forced to make arrangements for their students to transfer credits already earned to other institutions.

The Hard/Soft Divide

While the phrase “peer review” is widely used some systems (or possibly some individuals) take a more inspectorial approach.

An example of the hard/soft divide is the nature of the self assessment report. In soft systems the institution is given a lot of freedom so long as it addresses the basic requirements of the agency in harder systems the institution would be required to answer more closed questions and tick a lot of boxes.

New England Commission (USA) –standards to be covered in an institutional SED

- Standard 1: Mission and Purposes
- Standard 2: Planning and Evaluation
- Standard 3: Organization and Governance
- Standard 4: The Academic Program
- Standard 5: Faculty
- Standard 6: Students
- Standard 7: Library and Other Information Resources
- Standard 8: Physical and Technological Resources
- Standard 9: Financial Resources
- Standard 10: Public Disclosure
- Standard 11: Integrity

Publication of reports – contrasting policies

Europe

“Reports should be published and should be written in a way which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership”

(ENQA 2005)

The United States

“In most cases, the Commission will not make reports public without the permission of the college or university.”

(HEC 2003)

Grading/reporting unsatisfactory outcomes

A small but increasing number of agencies grade institutions as part of the review, eg the NAAC India uses a four point scale to denote judgement about academic performance while others judge on the basis of the adequacy of the QA arrangements.

Some agencies may report that have no or limited confidence in one or more aspects of the institution's arrangements.

In some cases a less than satisfactory review may result in a shorter than usual period of accreditation.

Frequency of Review

Five to six years is the norm with increased frequency if there are causes of concern.

Some countries eg the USA may review every ten years.

Some practical Issues

- Independence of Reviewers
- Training of Reviewers
- Conduct of site visits
- Role and voice of the student
- QA of Transnational HE

Independence of Reviewers

Even in quite large countries there is often a conflict between academic competence and authority and independence – in other words most of the leading academics in a discipline know each other.

Two risks

- They will be reviewing their friends and be too easy
- They will be reviewing their competitors and be too hard.

Possible solutions

- Minimise judgement as opposed to objective measures – but it is impossible (and possibly undesirable) to eliminate judgement
- Use international reviewers but this can be an expensive solution.

Training of Reviewers

Most agencies organise some sort of training for reviewers.

Help them understand the regulations and process; distinguish between fundamental and “manageable” problems; avoid “this is the way we do it” approach and, as they are mostly academics, to minimise the risk that they talk too much!

Training, including academic courses, are available for the staff of agencies.

Role of students – members of review teams

In a number of countries students (but not from the institution) are, as a matter of policy, members of review teams. The students are often post-graduates associated with national student organisations.

Student voice in Internal Quality Assurance - 1

Much use made of questionnaires but care needs to be taken re

- Frequency
- Content
- Feedback to students
- Should not be the only way of obtaining the views of students, particularly on the quality of their teachers

Student voice in Internal Quality Assurance

- 2

Also review use, if any, made of

- Student staff committees
- Focus groups
- Student Guilds etc
- Possibility of informal contacts between students and teaching staff eg can students email their teachers
- Personal tutorial systems

Student involvement during site visits

Meetings with students is probably a universal practice.

Issues

- Who selects the students
- The number of students at each meeting
- Whether separate meetings are held with ordinary students and officers of the Student Guilds.

In my experience “ordinary” students are “usually” very supportive of their institution.

A few agencies have open meetings at which any student or staff member may attend.

Other issues relating to site visits

How much time should be devoted

- to observing teaching and inspecting the students' work?
- to reviewing student support activities such as careers advice
- to reviewing such matters as athletic and social facilities

QA of Cross-Border HE

QA agencies' policies vary

	Exported CBHE	Imported CBHE
Same as domestic provision		
Modified procedures		
No action		

Emerging Trends that are impacting on both external and internal QA

- Change in focus from inputs to outputs
- A move away from intuitive judgement to examining adherence to explicit statements of requirements.
- Demand to know more about the competences of graduates.
- Switch in emphasis from QA for accountability to QA for enhancement.
- Increasing co-operation between external quality assurance agencies.

From Inputs to Outputs (via Process)

In the “early days”

Much reliance was placed on

- The quality and quantity of the inputs eg the qualifications and numbers of teachers, the number of books in the library and the adequacy of the laboratory equipment
- The intuitive judgement of the reviewers as few, if any, explicit statements of expectations were produced

Warning - Don't focus exclusively on what can be measured

- Not all the “outputs” of higher education, such as intellectual honesty or rigour or the recognition of the need for continuing life long learning, can be measured directly.
- In such cases an assessment of the learning experience might provide an acceptable proxy measure. We may believe that some learning processes may be more conducive to the development of these attributes than others and hence the programme review should include an assessment of the suitability and effectiveness of the actual learning process.
- So perhaps process should not be entirely ignored!!!

Albert Einstein

Not everything that counts can be counted
and not everything that can be counted
counts

Outcome Measures

There seem to be two fairly distinct groups of outcome measures: one relating to student performance, often referred to as learning outcomes, and the other comprising indirect measures that may be related to institutional performance, which are often measured by performance indicators.

The student learning assessment movement has gained considerable strength within the United States accreditation community in recent years while there are pressures from others, especially the former Federal Secretary of Education, to go further and faster in that direction.

CHEA requirements- CHEA one of the two bodies who recognise accrediting agencies

“Accrediting agencies should place upon institutions the following expectation that they should:

- Regularly gather and report concrete evidence about what students know and can do as a result of their respective courses of study, framed in terms of established learning outcomes
- Supplement this evidence with information about other dimensions of effective institutional or program performance with respect to student outcomes (e.g. graduation, retention, transfer, job placement, or admission to graduate school) that do not constitute direct evidence of student learning.
- Prominently feature relevant evidence of student learning outcomes in demonstrating institutional or program effectiveness”

The debate about learning outcomes took a sharp turn with the publication in 2006 of *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education* – the report of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education appointed by Margaret Spellings, the then US Secretary of Education.

- To quote from the report, “unacceptable numbers of college graduates enter the workforce without the skills employers say they need in an economy in which, as the truism holds correctly, knowledge matters more than ever” (Department of Education 2006).
- This view led to the recommendation that higher education institutions should measure student learning by using quality assessment data from instruments such as the Collegiate Learning Assessment, which measures the growth of student learning taking place in colleges, and the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress, which is designed to assess general education outcomes for undergraduates.

It was reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (28.09.07) that “hundreds of US colleges are using standardized student-achievement tests, allowing comparisons between institutions, while investigating options for creating more such tests.”

Key Performance Indicators

An indicator is only a number if one does not have something to compare it with. An institution can of course compare its current to its past performance through time series analysis but it is also very useful to be able to make comparisons with the performance of others. A quite common practice is for institutions to select a group of others institutions which they believe are similar to themselves and then compare their performance against that of the “peer group”. The comparison may be confined to publicly available data or the institutions may agree to exchange confidential data for their mutual benefit.

Adjusted Sector Benchmarks - 1

- In the UK the Higher Education Funding Councils publish a set of performance indicators covering, as far as teaching is concerned, access (which mainly measures the social mix of the student intake), non-completion rates, efficiency (a measure based on the average time it takes a student to graduate), and employment indicators. The report also has a section on research performance. An interesting feature of the publication is the use of adjusted sector benchmarks. These make allowance for various factors which affect the indicators. The main factors used are the subject mix of an institution, and the entry qualifications of its students and the proportions of young (under 21) and mature students entering the institution.

Adjusted Sector Benchmarks - 2

Take as an example the University of East London and the London School of Economics, and as the measures the non-continuation rate for entrants to first degree courses in 2009/10, that is the percentage of entrants who did not return to the institution or transfer to another institution in 2010/11

Results for non-continuation rates 2010/11

	Actual	Benchmark
East London	12.1%	14.6%
LSE	4.0%	3.0%

What should a student learn – what should a graduate demonstrate – explicit statements of requirements

While in some countries the government exercised close control over what was taught in universities in many other countries universities had complete freedom of action. This is now changing and EQA procedures must take this into account.

National Qualification Frameworks

- Many countries, and regions, have established “National Qualification Frameworks” setting out the attributes required to be demonstrated in order to be granted a degree at the various levels. Since 2002, a multinational initiative, known as the Dublin descriptors, has been developed by quality assurance and accreditation agencies from a number of European countries. The Dublin descriptors set out the generic attributes that should be demonstrated in order to be granted a degree at one of three levels; bachelors, masters or doctoral.

Example UK Bachelors (Honours) -1

Honours degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- i a systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline;
- ii an ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline;
- iii conceptual understanding that enables the student:
 - to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline; and
 - to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in the discipline;
- iv an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge;
- v the ability to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (e.g. refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).

Example UK Bachelors (Honours) -2

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- a apply the methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding, and to initiate and carry out projects;
- b critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete), to make judgements, and to frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution - or identify a range of solutions - to a problem;
- c communicate information, ideas, problems, and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;

and will have:

- d qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
 - the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility;
 - decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts; and
 - the learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further training of a professional or equivalent nature.

(QAA 2008A)

Qualification Specific Requirements

- Both regionally and nationally discipline related statements of expections have been produced
- In 2000 a group of universities started a pilot project called “Tuning educational structures in Europe”. Subsequently in co-operation with the European University Association (EUA) the group has widened.
- The project aims at identifying points of reference for generic and subject-specific competences of graduates in a series of subject areas. Competences are based on learning outcomes: what a learner knows or is able to demonstrate after the completion of a learning process. This covers both discipline-specific competences and generic competences like communication skills and leadership.
- There are now Tuning projects in a number of other parts of the world including the USA, South America and Russia.

In the UK the Quality Assurance Agency has produced subject benchmarks for a wide range of disciplines. The stated aim is not to produce a national curriculum but their existence will strongly influence the design of degree programmes.

Subject Benchmark Statements- to quote the QAA

- **Subject benchmark statements** set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They describe what gives a discipline its coherence and identity, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding or competence in the subject.
- Working closely with the higher education sector, we (QAA) have published subject benchmark statements for a range of disciplines. Some statements combine or make reference to professional standards required by external professional or regulatory bodies in the discipline.
- Subject benchmark statements do not represent a national curriculum in a subject area. Rather, they allow for flexibility and innovation in programme design within an overall conceptual framework established by an academic subject community. They are intended to assist those involved in programme design, delivery and review and may also be of interest to prospective students and employers, seeking information about the nature and standards of awards in a subject area.

How to assess competences?

In general – difficult.

Particular problem – generic versus discipline specific.

Academic tradition – learnt and assessed together .

But

- Complaints from employers and others about lack of soft skills are common.
- Increasing use in US, for example, of externally produced non-institutionally specific tests of generic competences.

Reporting Graduates' Performance

Increasingly recognised that reporting the results of three or four years of study by a single Grade Point Average or a single degree classification (out 4) is not enough.

Thus, for example, the European Diploma Supplement and, long overdue, efforts to reform the UK system.

QA for Accountability to QA for Enhancement

- Accountability is concerned with the institution or programme being able to demonstrate that it is operating at or above the basic minimum standard to justify its right to receive public funding or other rights (in most instances this would involve an accreditation decision), while quality enhancement is concerned with the continuous process of quality improvement.
- While it can be argued that quality assurance systems should, as they mature, place greater emphasis on enhancement, it should be remembered that the most important imperative placed on a quality assurance body is to ensure that the worst programme offered by an institution that comes under its purview is of an acceptable standard.

The dangers of a compliance culture

The danger is that institutions will engage in what has been termed a “compliance culture” when the all the effort is put into attempting to obtain a positive accreditation decision, or a good score from the external quality assurance body, rather than actually improve the quality of what is being done.

The attitude underlying a compliance culture can be expressed in the question

- “Tell us QA agency what you need in evidence that this programme is healthy and we shall provide it”.

In such a situation institutions are encouraged to hide weaknesses rather than to demonstrate that they have identified them and are taking steps to overcome them.

The maturation of a QA system

Newly established agency, especially if HE system not previously controlled	QA for accountability, closure of institutions and programmes not infrequent
System becomes more established	QA for accountability but moving to enhancement – closures of existing provision infrequent but new programmes and institutions quite often not approved
Most institutions clearly above the threshold level	QA for enhancement for most– closures only in rare cases virtually all new programmes approved albeit with conditions
Well established system	QA for enhancement for most – in some countries move to institutional audit. But still need accountability for new types of institutions and provision.

The maturation of a QA system - 2

And when we arrive at Phase 4 there is the question of whether there is a need to maintain a system of external quality assurance for the well-established institutions, a question that might be more dramatically rephrased by asking: Is there any point in accrediting or otherwise quality assure Harvard or Oxford?

International Market of EQA

Specialist (professional) accrediting bodies have been operating internationally for some time – especially US in the Middle East.

More slowly happening with academic QA bodies generally in areas with a common language – e.g. Germany and Austria.

European Parliament recommended in 2006 that institutions should be able to select any agency that is on the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies.

The recent past

In recent years there has been a narrowing of the gap between the degree of freedom enjoyed by HEIs in different countries. In the more restrictive countries the growth of EQA has encouraged governments to relax controls. In those countries where traditionally there was a great deal of institutional autonomy the introduction of EQA arrangements, accompanied by such things as Qualification Frameworks, has resulted in a reduction of institutional autonomy.

The medium term future – the likely changes

- Increased student numbers in many countries
- New forms of higher education in virtually all countries including a higher proportion of higher education taking place outside the conventional universities.

With the result (unless Higher Education does something about it)

Higher Education will less likely to be regarded as a “special activity”.

HEIs will continue to experience a reduction in institutional autonomy.

Quality Assurance will be replaced by Quality Control.

My thanks for your attention.

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