CIMQUSEF'2012

Internal Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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The main elements of IQA - 1

Main strands

- Review of Management Practices in the light of institutional purpose
- Initial Approval of programmes
- Annual Review of programmes
- Thematic Reviews of such things as library provision, IT or student services

Inputs

- The views of students
- The views of employers and other stakeholders

The main elements of IQA - 2

- Regular reviews of programmes
- The evaluation of teachers
- Monitoring the setting and grading of examination papers and scripts and other instruments of assessment
- A regular systematic self-evaluation that draws heavily on the above elements

Review of management practices

Main elements

- Identification of those aspects of the institutional mission that impact on its operations – "what should we be doing"

- The governance structure of the institution –" how do we seek to make it happen"

- Identification of institutional strengths and weaknesses, ability to plan and make adjustments "how are we doing but should we be doing it in a different way or should we be doing something else?"

Approval of programmes (1)

- Definition:

  Approval is the outcome of accreditation or validation and is the formal confirmation that a programme of study has been judged to meet the institution's requirements

Approval of programmes (2)

- Information requirements:

- The context of the programme in terms of the institutional mission

- Specifications and regulations

- Syllabus and teaching, learning and assessment methods

- Curriculum organisation and staffing

- Resources requirements (and possibly where they are to come from)

Monitoring of programmes (1)

■ Definition:

Monitoring is the regular, normally annual, internal process by which the institution critically appraises the operation of the programme between reviews and ensures that appropriate standards are maintained

Monitoring of programmes (2)

Should not be too heavy – should not be a case of pulling up the roots

Should be an opportunity to check that nothing is going seriously adrift and that the normal routine ongoing monitoring process (including sample double marking of examination scripts) are being properly carried out.

An opportunity to look at the key performance indicators such as retention and employment rates

The outputs of annual reviews should be considered within the institution (see discussion of the internal management of QA) and will be an input to the regular more fundamental programme reviews

Possible content of an annual monitoring report (1)

- Basic statistical information about enrolment, retention rates, graduation rates (and time to graduate) and employment rates.

- A comment on the significance of the data

- A progress report on the required actions identified in the previous annual report.

- A report on the feedback from students

- A report on the feedback from employers or other significant other stakeholders.

Possible content of an annual monitoring report (2)

- Any changes that have been made to the curriculum during the year

- Information on the situation of students: admission, pass/fail rates for the different courses, retention, graduation

- Information on the status and use of student services, learning resources or other aspects of the institution that impact the students' experience.

- Changes in academic staff associated with the programme including the CVs of new staff

Outcome of annual monitoring

- If the monitoring process identifies changes that need to be made then a set of actions should be identified.

- The monitoring of programmes should be the responsibility of the Head of the Programme who should share the work with other members of the programme team.

Thematic Reviews (1)

- Some institutions carry out thematic reviews on a regular basis of cross institutional activities that are relevant to the teaching and learning experience such as IT provision, career guidance, or other significant institutional issues, while others might focus on the teaching and learning of a discipline over a number of programmes.

Thematic Reviews (2)

- At the same time, any of the contents of the monitoring of programmes could become the subject of a thematic review. Some possible examples, taken from the list of possible contents for annual monitoring of programmes in a previous power point show how an institution might decide on a thematic review:

Thematic Reviews (3)

- Focus on the progression of students across programmes
- Focus on the implementation of improvement actions across programmes, to see how effective the programme management is.
- Focus on feedback from students
- Focus on feedback from employers

Thematic Reviews (4)

- Focus on the curriculum, to determine whether there are common areas (such as general competencies, or transferrable skills) that should be taught across programmes; or if these competencies are part of the curriculum, how effective are the different programmes in helping students achieve them.

Regular programme reviews - 1

Typically carried out at five yearly intervals

An opportunity to examine the aims and objectives of the programme – time to pull up the roots

Even if internally organised should include participants from outside the department and outside the institution

Review of programmes (2)

- Definition:

  Review is the process whereby the progress of a programme is critically appraised at intervals (eg five-yearly) by a group including external peers, and any plans for change are considered. This is in order to confirm that the programme remains valid and continues to meet the conditions for the awards of the institution.

Review of programmes (3)

- Whether internally or externally organised, a programme review will usually start with a self-study.

- If the institution is subject to an external quality assurance agency the format of the self-study will have to take into account the requirements of that agency.   The agency will itself be involved in the programme review, or will assess the way in which programmes are reviewed as part of its institutional review

Review of programmes (4)

- The review might well be regarded as initial approval plus. It should include most of the features of the initial approval process with the addition that the performance of the programme since initial approval or its last regular review can be assessed. In this context the reports of the annual monitoring exercises is an important input to the review.

The Evaluation of Teachers

The evaluation of teachers

Two main inputs to the evaluation of teachers

- Observation of teaching
- Student input – usually through the use of questionnaires

But might also add – review of students' results

Observation of Teaching - 1

- Observation of teaching comes in different ways: the evaluation or managerial model, the developmental model and the peer review model.

- With peer group observation the class room visitor is a colleague of the teacher and the observer's comments will go only to the teacher being observed. Its purpose is mainly to provide an opportunity for discussing teaching and for mutual learning.

Observation of Teaching - 2

- Managerial observation or evaluation is undertaken by someone who is in superior position to the teacher, typically his or her Head of Department. In such cases the results of the observation will play a part in the overall assessment of the teacher especially if the teacher is being considered for promotion or for tenure.

- In the developmental model, the observer is normally an expert teacher, who observes others in the department, and can assess the quality of the teaching observed and help the teacher improve.

Observation of Teaching - 3

But just because someone can be a good teacher does not mean that they are always a good teacher – hence the importance of student questionnaires

Who sees the results?

Considerable variation across the world depending on national and institutional cultures.

But may include

- The teacher (who may also be given the average scores)
- The teacher and chair of department
- The appraiser for staff still on probation
- Promotions committee, may be compulsory or at the discretion of the teacher

BUT Not the students.

Monitoring the setting and grading of examinations

It is good practice to ensure that the fate of students in the assessment process does not lie entirely in the hands of a single academic. This means that the examination papers or other assessment instruments should be agreed by a group of academics and not by a single individual and that there should be some checks of the marking by staff members; in an ideal world all examination papers etc should be double marked but at the very least a sample of the scripts marked by a member of staff should be double marked.

Responsibilities for Internal QA - 1

- The initial approval and regular reviews of programmes would be undertaken at institutional level. The annual process of programme monitoring is usually best undertaken at departmental level and the process should have very close links with the day to day management of the programme. Summaries of the annual monitoring should be produced for consideration at institutional level.

Responsibilities for Internal QA - 2

It is helpful to identify leadership roles that may be divided into three elements

- Individual
- Institutional Governance
- Administrative Support

At the individual level it is important that a senior member of staff, normally at vice-principal level, takes responsibility for the oversight of the quality assurance system.

Responsibilities for Internal QA - 3

- It is desirable to establish quality assurance committees at both departmental and institutional levels, and in the case of larger institutions, at faculty level.   Departmental committees should be responsible for the day to day and annual procedures and in producing annual reports for consideration by institution wide committees.

- The institutional level quality assurance committee would in most circumstances take responsibility for the work necessary to approve and review programmes and prepare institutional internal self-assessment reports

- I will return to these subject when discussing a quality culture.

Responsibilities for Internal QA - 4

- In many countries the setting up of "quality units" or "quality assurance units" which provides the specialist administrative support for the quality assurance procedures is increasingly common. It is important to emphasise that the prime responsibility of such units is to provide administrative support and every effort should be made to ensure that the impression is not given that the unit is itself responsible for the assurance of quality as this would absolve the wider academic community from their responsibilities in this area

Student Involvement in IQA

Ways of gathering student feedback

- Questionnaires
- The appointment or election of student representatives
- Establishment of staff/student liaison committees
- Immediate feedback in lectures and classes and other informal means
- Student representatives on programme related and on institution-wide committees and boards
- The establishment of Student Councils.

Questionnaires

- Important that they should be used but not in isolation, should be combined with other measures.

- Questionnaires might indicate that something is wrong but not why

Frequency and focus of questionnaires

Focus

Usually at the module (Economics 101), or unit, level but might cover non module related services such as the library.

Frequency

Great danger of over surveying students- some institutions only survey the students on a module every two or three years.

Others use quite short and simple surveys on an annual basis and a more detailed one every two or three years.

Questionnaire Design

Questions for consideration

- Are the purposes and the uses to which the information will be put and how results will be reported back clearly stated?

- Are the questions unambiguous?

- Are the questions answerable by the students? (a question as to whether the lecturer has a good knowledge of the subject may not be answerable by students)

- Are questions phrased in a way that is easily understood by the students?

- Are there some open ended questions?

- Are closed questions answerable on a ordinal scale (for example 5 very good, 1 very bad)

- How many questions are there?

Feedback to students

Is essential.

Students should be told the results of any feedback exercise and the resulting actions, if any. Although care must be taken to ensure that they are not provided with results that relate to individuals, this is especially important in the case of the evaluation of teachers.

Student representation on institution-wide committees etc

Provides a useful means of communication between staff and students but often not effective because

- Student members may not be representative of the student body (special problem with non-traditional students) and may not communicate with the student body.

- Lack of training for committee work.

- Short term duration of their membership, often on an annual basis.

Student representatives at course or class level

- Many institutions find it helpful for there to be course or class representatives to whom the staff can communicate with in ways in which it is not possible to do with the whole of the group.   In most instances the representatives are elected by their fellow students.

- When the student representative system works, it often works very well but when it does not work it is often a disaster because the elected or appointed students cannot do the job. The important point to make is that it is unwise to rely too heavily on one or two channels for obtaining student feedback and that it is important to maintain a healthy portfolio of activities.

Staff student liaison committees

- An extension of the student representation system is the establishment of staff-student liaison committees which are normally based at the programme level. These committees provide opportunities for formal discussions involving student representatives and relevant staff of views and issues that relate to the students' learning experience.

- Many observers regard these as more useful than student representation on institution wide committees.   The reason for this is that the liaison committees focus very much on the experience of the students who are represented on the committee and not with issues of institutional policy and politics that may of no concern to the student representative or require a greater degree of knowledge and understanding than is possessed by the student representatives.

Immediate feedback after classes and other informal means

- Potentially the most effective way of obtaining student feedback is to talk to them and to do so in such an atmosphere that they will do so in a frank and open manner.

- One way of doing this is to talk to students just after a lecture or other teaching session while other means include talking to students when meeting them on campus. Some institutions operate an "office hours" system whereby staff are available in their offices to talk to students and while a good portion of the time will be probably be devoted to pedagogic issues the occasions can be used by staff to obtain feedback from students on their overall experience.

Student representation on programme and institutional –wide committees

- It is increasingly the case that students are represented on virtually all committees both at programme level and institution-wide. The general experience is that sometimes it works, in that the student representatives make valuable contributions to the work of the committee, and sometimes it does not work –much depends on the attitude and abilities of the student. Another issue is that student representatives are almost universally appointed for a year and so might find themselves involved in ongoing issues with little knowledge of the background.

- One way of minimising the problems discussed above is to provide some training for student representatives and an increasing number of institutions are adopting this practice.

Employer involvement

The involvement of employers in both planning and quality assurance is important. Some institutions rely on informal means but it is good practice to establish permanent liaison committees that can operate at programme or departmental level.

Graduate (Alumni) Involvement

While it is important to obtain the views of students it is even more important to obtain their views after they have graduated as to the appropriateness of their institutional experience to their careers, especially in the case of directly professionally related programmes.

In addition data relating to the destination of graduates in terms of employment of further study is universally regarded as a key performance indicator.

Conclusion

- While the views of graduates, employers and other stakeholders are very important and need to be taken into account, it is the institution that is ultimately responsible for the quality of its provision.