



Transparency through quality and standards?

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The five main drivers in European quality assurance

- Massification of higher education
 - how can quality be secured?
- Academic drift/hollow collegiality
 - how to maintain an interest in teaching/learning?
- New governance schemes/NPM
 - how to use quality in governance?
- Globalization/Internationalization/Bologna
 - how to demonstrate quality?
- Universities and the knowledge society
 - how can quality become a production factor?

What is the impact of two decades of QA?

- Power – centralisation, formalisation
- Professionalisation – enhancing the organizational responsibility for quality
- Public relations – institutional profiling and marketing
- Permeability – improvements in the knowledge base (but is this knowledge used, and by whom?)

Where are we today?

- Complex and diverse effects a result of a process characterised more by “add ons” than “elimination”
- The in-built (constant) paradox: the current two contradictory agendas:
 - accreditation (the control/accountability agenda)
 - “quality culture” (the improvement/enhancement agenda)
- Increasingly, external quality assurance is being questioned as driving bureaucracy, not responding to the needs of students and employers, and as an activity more related to history and traditions than future-oriented needs and challenges. QA also challenged by rankings and other information sources on “quality”

Future needs...can QA handle diverse expectations?

- 1) The Policy Challenge - Coherence between system level approaches and institutional systems
 - QA-systems must support important national policy processes (inst.autonomy, "knowledge triangle", etc.)
- 2) The Institutional Challenge - QA-systems need to be more flexible to cater for diverse needs
 - employability, student satisfaction, innovation, accountability
- 3) The Societal Challenge - QA must answer the challenge from rankings and the "indicator movement"
 - QA need to develop ways to "answer" questions about performance (Feed the Beast/Fight the Beast)

Some scenarios for the future

- "Downscaling" of QA – return to basics
 - possible implications: more specialised intermediate agencies, more accreditation, more focus on standards with QA as a control of learning outcomes, QA only one of many transparency tools
- "QA as strategising" – from an instrument of control to a strategic instrument
 - possible implications: QA closely linked to institutional missions and visions, agencies will be closer linked to MoE's policy implementation
- "QA anarchy" – further expansion of QA purposes and aims
 - possible implications: information overload, paving the way for even more emphasis on reputation

Closing reflections on transparency, quality and standards

- Trust is a hybrid phenomenon: combination of rational-instrumental and cultural-cognitive elements
- The current QA-scheme has created trust (transparency) at macro-level, but not at the micro-level
- An emphasis on academic standards will not in itself create trust at micro-level – because stakeholders have diverse interest and diverse understandings of what “quality” is – and academic standards is only a part of the information required.
- To stimulate trust one has to invest not only in more rational-instrumental measures, but also in the cultural-cognitive ones...