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Quality in context – embedding improvement

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Paper abstracts

Inter-agency cooperation in the quality assurance of transnational education: challenges and opportunities

Fabrizio Trifiro' (QAA)

This paper presents the findings of a study undertaken by the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), with support from the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), aimed at investigating the challenges and limits to cross-border cooperation in the quality assurance of transnational education (TNE). The study builds on the outcomes of the recently concluded Erasmus Mundus project Quality Assurance of Cross-border Higher Education (QACHE), and in particular the QACHE Toolkit developed as part of the project to foster cooperation between quality assurance agencies in quality assuring TNE. Based on the responses to a survey sent to QAA's partner agencies in key sending and receiving countries of TNE, the study extracts recommendations to agencies to help them in developing viable strategies for inter-agency cooperation, identifying facilitating factors for enhanced cooperation across borders.

NVAO's Appreciative Approach, a new philosophy to strengthen internal and external quality assurance

Axel Aerden, Ann Verreth (NVAO), Roxanne Figueroa Arriagada (Ghent Student Union), Kristiaan Versluys (Ghent University)

When implementing a new quality assurance (QA) system in 2014, NVAO conceived the Appreciative Approach as the underpinning philosophy of its new QA methodology. Previous QA methodologies were primarily compliance-led, always starting from normative standards. The Appreciative Approach has shifted the focus from the standards towards the context of the assessment. It takes this context as the starting point and in this context works towards standards. Implementing the Appreciative Approach has had several consequences for all aspects of QA procedures, e.g. for the role of institutions, for the mindset of all involved, for the organisation of the site visits, for the training of panel members, for the involvement of students, and for the format of the assessment reports.

The new QA system cultivates institutional autonomy while also engaging institutions more. Their new responsibilities have direct consequences on QA within higher education institutions and for the way students are engaged.

Balancing autonomy and control in education policy and quality assurance at Ghent University, Belgium: applying the Self-Determination Theory

Ilse De Bourdeaudhuij, Emmelien Merchie, Kristiaan Versluys, Hilde Van Keer, Freddy Mortier (Ghent University)

In light of the changing context of quality assurance and the new accreditation regime in Flanders (Belgium), a new Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) system was developed at Ghent University, Belgium. This paper outlines how existing quality assurance processes and structures were complemented with new innovative centrally-driven elements. The major challenge was to keep the balance between control and autonomy to maximise autonomous motivation and to establish a culture of quality assurance. The Self-Determination Theory provided a valuable framework to realise this balance by trying to meet the three basic needs, autonomy, competence and relatedness within the new IQA model. The IQA model is presented together with specific examples on how these needs are incorporated in the process and structure. Finally, strengths and challenges for the future are discussed.

The impact of internal quality assurance on teaching and learning in academics' perceptions

Orlanda Tavares, Alberto Amaral (A3ES), Cristina Sin, Pedro Videira (CIPES)

Internal quality assurance systems are expected to improve the institutions' core mission of teaching and learning. Using data gathered through an online survey, distributed in 2014/2015, to the teaching staff of all Portuguese private and public higher education institutions, this paper examines the impact of internal quality assurance systems on teaching and learning from the perspective of academics. Findings suggest that Portuguese academics feel that despite the positive contribution of internal quality assurance towards an increased awareness of teaching quality issues at their institutions, the practical effects of these systems have been more related to increasing bureaucracy than to substantive improvements in teaching and learning. The use of information with a view to improvement and the involvement of teaching staff in the development of quality assurance were found to induce positive changes in teaching and learning, in academics' perceptions. Based on the findings, the paper makes recommendations for institutional practice.

The 'soft' side of quality: positive effects of policy change in the Netherlands, a case study

Esther Jonker (Leiden University of Applied Sciences)

In recent years the tone of voice in higher education policy in the Netherlands has changed from advocating tight control and accountability to giving more room to the 'soft' side of quality. In trying to address this change, the management of a department at Leiden University of Applied Sciences decided to find out what academic staff and students think about quality in education and how this can contribute to a shared vision on teaching. A study conducted to that end revealed that (still existing) governmental frameworks for quality control do not fit the ideas that staff and students hold on what should be central to teaching and education. These frameworks sometimes even actively discourage staff and students from giving attention to what they think is most valuable. Giving room to the 'soft' side of quality, by contrast, turns out to stimulate ownership of and involvement in quality in education by academic staff, students and management.

A research and evaluation framework to monitor impacts of curriculum reform in Maynooth University

James Walsh (Maynooth University)

Many higher education institutions are revising, and in some cases reforming, their undergraduate curricula with an objective of providing a higher quality education experience to students. The literature on tertiary level curriculum change has tended to focus strongly on how change processes are initiated, the design of alternatives, and the resources required for implementation. Much attention has also been given to the importance of leadership and the engagement of staff, students and other stakeholders. There has been much less attention to monitoring, review and evaluation. This paper draws upon recent experience in Maynooth University to develop a research and evaluation framework for monitoring the impacts of a comprehensive university-wide reform of the curriculum. The focus is on the purpose of an evaluation in this context, what should be evaluated and how? who should be included? and at what stages in the project should the research and evaluation occur?

Embedding improvement through student engagement

Maeve O'Riordan (Maynooth University), David O'Sullivan (National University of Ireland Galway), Tom Collins (Dublin Institute of Technology), Karina McGuire (QQI)

Student satisfaction is important not only for improving learning outcomes but also for improving retention, progression and completion rates. Raising student satisfaction is strongly correlated to high student engagement in the evaluation and development of pedagogy and in the governance and management of learning institutions. Learning is enhanced when students become active *partners,* as opposed to *consumers*, within a continuously evolving learning environment. This research presents a study of student engagement for enhancing student satisfaction and learning outcomes. A collaborative research team comprising academic and student leaders, a national quality assurance and qualifications agency and a national funding authority, conducted the research. Research included site visits to a number of higher education institutions (HEIs) that included focus groups and consultations with key stakeholders. The research led to the development of key *principles* and sample *practices* that all HEIs can use for strengthening their student engagement policies and for embedding improvement at the heart of the institution.

Developing engaging quality assurance policies – a practice-based case study

Anniina Wikman (University College London)

What should be taken into account when developing university quality assurance (QA) policies to ensure maximum engagement leading to successful implementation? How could the resistance for developing *yet another* QA policy be minimised through stakeholder engagement at the policy development stage? This paper looks at the development processes of three policies at the University of East London and how the stakeholders, 'the implementers', of those policies were engaged in the development process. The policies are ranked based on the complexity of stakeholder engagement, i.e. the level of resistance the development of the policies met, and what actions were taken to address the different levels of complexity to ensure that the policies would be implemented successfully.

An Exploration of the Competency Framework for External Quality Assurance Practitioners

Huu Cuong Nguyen (University of New South Wales)

The extensive establishment and development of external quality assurance agencies all over the world has created a new profession so-called the external quality assurance profession. This paper attempts to explore the quality assurance professional competency frameworks developed by quality assurance networks, agencies and scholars to standardise and support those working within the external quality assurance profession, the external quality assurance practitioners or professionals. The study first investigates the external quality assurance profession. Second, it provides a discussion of external quality assurance practitioners. Next, it identifies essential competencies for external quality assurance practitioners, followed with a review of current competence frameworks for external quality assurance professionals. Finally, it provides a discussion and recommendations through the synthesis of associated literature. The results of this research are expected to clarify core professional competencies needed for external quality assurance officials and/or practitioners working for external quality assurance agencies.

Student satisfaction surveys as a quality enhancement tool: How many surveys and questions do we need?

Stephan Hamberg, Marie-Louise Damen (NOKUT), Harry P. Andreassen, Stine Grønvold (Hedmark University of Applied Sciences)

There is an increase in number of overlapping student satisfaction surveys in the higher education sector. Here we present results from a national and an institutional survey. The national survey for higher education in Norway started in 2013 and has been conducted for 3 years. The institutional level, represented by Hedmark University of Applied Sciences in south east Norway, has had its own student satisfaction survey for 10 years. We show that the results from the surveys are similar, stable over time and that a further increase in the number of questions seldom improves our understanding of student

satisfaction. Furthermore, we show that student satisfaction is associated to academic performance. We suggest that a tighter collaboration between the national quality assurance agency and higher education institutions may allow us to reduce the number of surveys and questions we ask students.

How to make quality assurance processes more meaningful to teaching staff – a proposal from the field of music

Martin Prchal (Royal Conservatoire, University of the Arts, The Hague, and MusiQuE – Music Quality Enhancement), Linda Messas (MusiQuE – Music Quality Enhancement and Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen)

This paper addresses a challenge that is often referred to in quality assurance processes: the involvement in these processes of teaching staff. The authors suggest that this challenge can be approached effectively by creating a common language based on a concept of quality culture, which addresses both (artistic) standards and educational quality. Furthermore, an understanding of a diversity of disciplines and the need for a diversity of quality assurance tools supporting this understanding are described as essential elements to increase the relevance of quality assurance processes to teachers. The paper describes the work done in the field of higher music education in this regard, ranging from the development and use of European-level subject-specific standards, procedures and frameworks, to the new and experimental 'critical friend' approach, which can be used alongside more traditional models of external review and which could also be useful to other academic disciplines.

Students Creating Change

Joseph Levell, Claire Thompson, Ruth Sayers, Jayne Mitchell (Bishop Grosseteste University)

The paper presents Bishop Grosseteste University's (BGU) experience of introducing and embedding an innovative whole-University student engagement initiative into a small, traditional, University.

The paper describes the development of an institutional wide 'students creating change' scheme where staff and students were coached and supported to research and create change to the learning opportunities and experiences for students. The scheme also included the development of a 'students creating change' framework, designed to identify and embed institutional enhancement in student representation, ensure that the Learning, Teaching, and Assessment Strategy is meeting the needs of students, and embed student engagement as a key part of the student experience.

The paper highlights the challenges, benefits, lessons learned and approaches to gaining the support and participation of the Students' Union, student body, senior University leaders and academic and professional services staff in the process.

Development of teaching quality and teaching competences through a teaching portfolio – findings from a pilot project at the University of Graz

Gudrun Salmhofer, Lisa Scheer (University of Graz)

In 2015, a teaching portfolio pilot project was conducted at the University of Graz. This paper aims at sharing insights and lessons learned from that project and also points to challenges encountered. Even though parameters may vary strongly at European higher education institutions (HEIs), it is possible to draw general conclusions from this case study to be used as the basis of a thorough discussion. Through the reflection of the experiences of this quality assurance practice, the authors try to indicate the usefulness of teaching portfolios as an instrument to support the development of academics and to contribute to the quality development at European HEIs.

Research evaluation @ University of Graz - reality, burden or future prospect?

Kathrin Maier, Andreas Raggautz, Wolfgang Weirer (University of Graz)

At the University of Graz (Uni Graz) one of the key quality management procedures in terms of research is peer-evaluation. After the first two cycles of evaluation, with different perceptions within the university, Uni Graz is currently conducting the third cycle with a considerably revised procedure and new aims as well. By the example of the faculty of theology the major changes and effects will be outlined.

Quality assurance frameworks in context: a diversified implementation of the ESG by various French-speaking quality assurance agencies

Caty Duykaerts (AEQES), Geneviève Le Fort (AAQ), Julien Lecocq, François Pernot (HCERES), Julie Nolland (CTI)

Six quality assurance agencies have recently decided to be part of an active yet informal network (réseau FrAQ-Sup) with the goal of sharing professional experience and supporting the development of a quality culture within the French-speaking higher education sector. They jointly organise quality events and support various projects. One of them was to translate into French the newly revised version of the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the EHEA (ESG 2015). This task has lead the agencies to examine further and compare their national QA frameworks and quality standards and discover how much they were alike and to which extent they would differ. This paper is about the lessons learnt from this comparative analysis.

The relevance of international experts in capturing the national higher education context in institutional evaluations

Goran Dakovic, Tia Loukkola (EUA)

The paper aims to contribute to the on-going discussions on whether the solely international teams of experts are able to correctly grasp the national system-level features when evaluating higher education institutions. As higher education systems are, generally, very diverse across the EHEA, previous research on EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) emphasises the need for "evaluation teams [to] acquire adequate information on the country and its higher education system, which may be a high demand placed on the limited resources of the IEP secretariat" (Rovio-Johansson et. al., 2008, p. 53). However, our study shows that international experts accurately capture the system-level features. Even more, they bring an additional value to the institutions by referring to the European framework policies and practices, and by addressing the feasibility of these policies and practices for the individual institution.

Introducing a new national QA system in Sweden. A discussion on opportunities and challenges

Bengt-Ove Boström (University of Gothenburg), Åsa Kettis (Uppsala University)

Over the last decades higher education in Sweden has been subject to a number of different national quality assurance (QA) systems. Now and then, they have been met with criticism. In 2012, the Swedish Association of Higher Education (SUHF) decided to take a constructive and long term position on the issue. The position proved to be successful, and now a new national system is being launched. This paper is about the opportunities and challenges that this new system brings, not least because the political decision about the system means that parts of the old system will be fused into the new system – which may cause unwanted effects.

Quality hazards in the learning outcome model

Martin G. Erikson (University of Borås), Malgorzata Erikson (Gothenburg University)

Core academic principles and purposes of higher education can be expressed in such terms as students' personal development or academic identity. These are important in the Bologna process, for example in relation to life-long learning. At the same time, policies about learning outcomes regulate much of the teachers' everyday practice. The paper analyses the extent to which this combination of perspectives can be a quality hazard, and it is argued that two particular areas can be problematic. The first is that desirable effects of higher education that cannot be expressed as learning outcomes are at risk of being neglected. The second is that learning outcomes can become a roof, restricting students' ambitions and their entire outlook on what higher education is supposed to be. How these risks can be taken into account when formulating quality criteria is discussed in relation to the responsibilities of students, teachers and institutional management.

The quality culture paradox and its implications – is there a way out?

Vanja Perovšek (University of Ljubljana)

The quality culture definition, used in higher education, surprisingly, neglects the complexity, by being defined as a special improvement-oriented culture and not as an organisational culture focused on quality aspects (thus more narrow then the organisational one, but just as diverse). The concept further neglects the need of learning experience as a necessary factor in the culture development. This quality culture paradox favours the setting up of pretended quality cultures, without in-depth organisational change. The organisational culture being stabile in its nature, is hard to change.

In addition to a critique of the identified paradox the paper is exploring practical ways for in-depth quality culture evolvement and change, drawing both from literature and practice. In contrast to old mechanistic, new approaches to changing organisations are dialogue-based and see the organisation as a living-organism. The dialogue methodologies prove influential, since the dialogue has a formative or degenerative influence on the organisations.

Monitoring education quality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Taya Louise Owens (Global Education Monitoring Report, UNESCO)

In September 2015, United Nations member states adopted a new global development agenda, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Goal 4, which focuses on education within a lifelong learning perspective, represents the vision and aspirations of the global education community for 2030. Target 4.3 intends to bring attention to actively developing three education levels – technical-vocational, tertiary and adult – in national education policy agendas. The target indicates these policies should include: (equitable) access, affordability, and quality. This paper reviews two quality measures: national qualifications frameworks and student skills outcomes. What is evident from this review is the absence of any measures that evaluate learner backgrounds and most importantly, school and classroom settings. If the global community is truly to advance in an understanding of what makes post-secondary education work, there needs to be transparent measures of instructors and the teaching process, learning materials, and institutional leadership.

Collaboration between student QA pools– Embedding improvement and enhancing quality of student QA pools in Austria, Germany and Switzerland

Thomas Bach, Katharina Mahrt (German Student Accreditation Pool), Melanie Gut (Swiss Students' Union), Silke Kern (Austrian Students' Union)

Countries across Europe shared similarities in quality assurance in the higher education area even before the ESG. This paper explores these similarities in different contexts from a student perspective and analyses how QA policies and practices are adapted to respect diversity and remain fit for purpose. We will present the collaboration of student experts' pools in Austria, Germany and Switzerland. While we share a common language, our experiences and expectations differ considerably. This paper shows how better trainings and regular exchanges of experience within the DACH collaboration increased awareness of student participation in QA procedures. We present an example that illustrates the improved cooperation between agencies and the three student experts' pools. We also analysed the challenges that need to be addressed by the still young DACH collaboration, namely limited resources, transfer of know-how and the development of tools for international QA trainings.