



Globalising Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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Outline

1. Achievements of the global quality assurance movement in higher education
2. Emerging risks
3. Globalisation and quality assurance
4. Strategies for quality assurance



1.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE GLOBAL QA MOVEMENT

The Global QA Movement in HE

- Most higher education systems now have well-established quality assurance arrangements
 - From input-steering by governments to output-oriented quality assurance
 - Exchange of institutional autonomy with evaluation
 - Demand for more transparency and public accountability
 - Massification, liberalisation and fears of decline of standards and erosion of academic control
 - Increasing demand for cost-effectiveness

Achievements

- Internal and external QA have a positive impact on the quality of education provision at programme and institutional level
 - QA has a crucial role in ensuring that most programmes meet threshold quality standards and sub-threshold provision has been addressed
 - QA has successfully reinforced the education function of HE, balancing the strong priority for research
 - Institutional leadership with regard to quality has been strengthened as part of general reinforcement of strategic management capacities

Achievements

- The quality imperative has pervaded the higher education systems
 - Most institutions have established internal QA procedures
 - Most programmes/institutions are subject to formal external QA procedures based on peer review
 - Most academic staff are conscious of a stronger QA regime and comply with it
 - Most students do not actively participate to, but acknowledge the existence of QA systems

Achievements

- A common approach to QA has been developed and institutionalised
 - General acceptance of some basic rules and ‘good practice’
 - Crucial role of INQAAHE and regional associations
 - Still too many national idiosyncrasies, endangering the automatic mutual recognition of QA decisions and, in turn, the automatic recognition of degrees
 - Development of meta-evaluation and registration procedures of QA agencies



2.

EMERGING RISKS

Risks

- Bureaucratisation, formalism and ‘legalism’
 - QA has been ‘captured’ in procedures and regulations, in which completing forms and ‘ticking boxes’ in standardised questionnaires becomes the norm
 - Legalistic procedures lead to extreme formalism and avoid risk-taking behaviour of evaluators
 - Formalising QA procedures often increase the difficulties for peers to ‘read’ the actual situation in programmes or institutions

Risks

- Window-dressing in the reputation race
 - Many procedures still give ample space to window-dressing behaviour or superficial compliance
 - Institutions are increasingly relying on ‘professional’ quality managers who have to guarantee the smooth processing of reviews
 - Each new review or assessment has to cope with the collective learning process to better survive the test

Risks

- Balancing accountability and improvement functions has proven to be quite difficult
 - Stringent external accountability functions endanger internal improvement functions, expose the academic professionals, and threatens the legitimacy of the QA regime in the academic community
 - Too much emphasis on improvement and enhancement functions takes the critical edge off the evaluation process

Risks

- Cost and workload involved in QA may be very high indeed
 - Cost is an issue in many countries, but direct monetary cost is in most cases still acceptable
 - State funding for QA agencies is sometimes seen by institutions as diverting their legitimate resources
 - Non-monetary cost in hidden staff time and all kinds of ‘grey’ activities probably is very high

Risks

- Most QA schemes still rely too much on input and process standards
 - QA standards and procedures defined from a supply-side or delivery perspective: is what is delivered to students of sufficient quality?
 - Tendencies towards learning outcomes still very hesitant: AHELO (OECD) projects needs more institutional and political support, because it could nurture QA with empirical evidence on actually achieved learning outcomes

Risks

- Most QA schemes apply standards situated at threshold level
 - Little support and acceptance of attempts to diversify quality statements or labels above threshold level
 - Little incentives generated by QA for good programmes to further improve themselves towards excellence and to market themselves as such

Risks

- Limits of peer review methodologies
 - Peer review is a very powerful method of inter-collegial assessment in professional environments
 - But it's also very sensitive to personal opinions and existing debates in a disciplinary field
 - Generational dimension: aged colleagues coming to assess younger colleagues/rivals
 - Independence of peers in some cases still is an issue, because of impact of networks, friendship or hostility, and competition and rivalry in academia
 - Use of international peers limited due to cost and language issues



3.

GLOBALISATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Higher education systems

- Main trends in higher education
(OECD, *Thematic review tertiary education*, 2008)
 - Continued expansion
 - Diversification of provision
 - More heterogeneous student population
 - New funding arrangements
 - Increased focus on accountability and performance
 - New forms of institutional governance and management
 - Global networking, mobility and collaboration

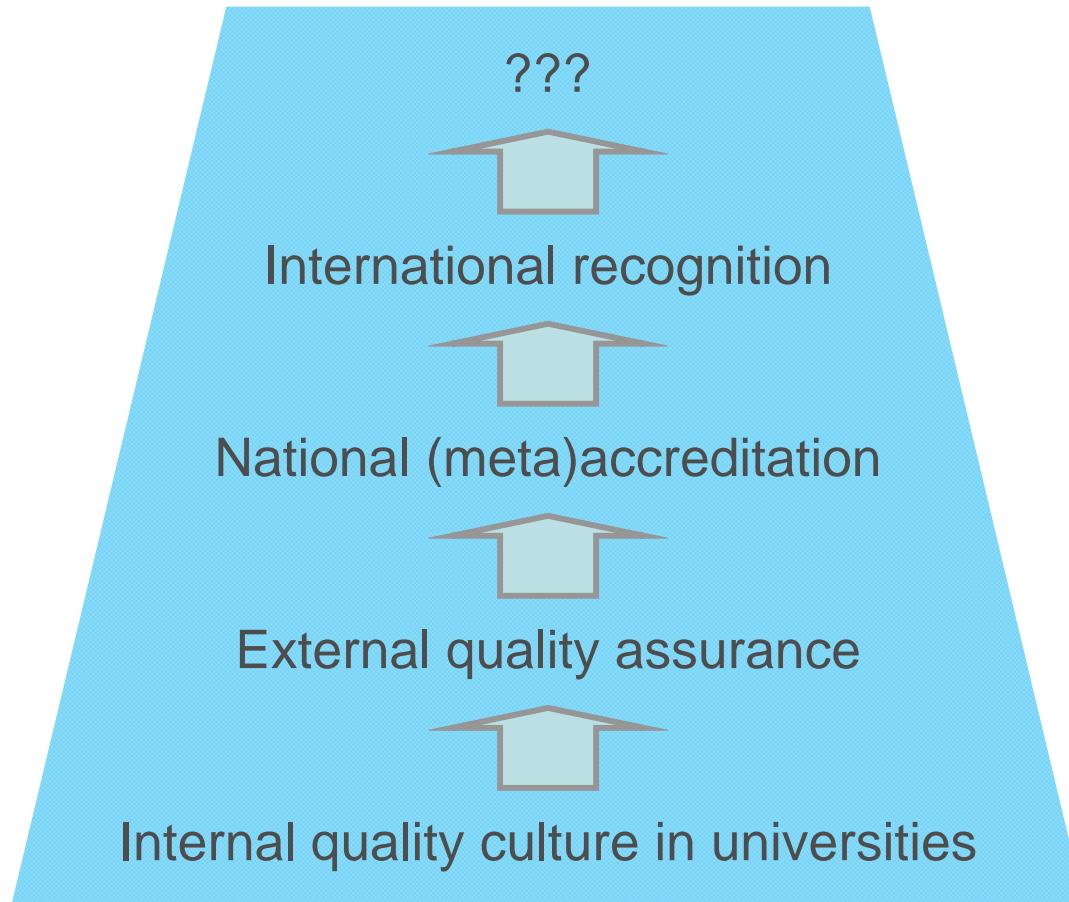
Globalisation

- Worldwide convergence and integration
 - Integrated global system of scientific research
 - Increasing mobility of students, researchers, teaching staff and institutional leaders
 - Emerging market of academics and researchers
 - Technology-driven expansion of new delivery modes in teaching and learning
 - International labour market of graduates
 - Globalising organisation of professions
 - Migration of high-skilled labour is increasing

Globalisation

- Challenges and risks of globalisation
 - International activities of higher education institutions ‘escaping’ the ambit of domestic quality assurance
 - Low-quality provision or even ‘diploma mills’ driven by commercial interests
 - Difficulties with regard to credit transfer from or to foreign institutions
- Need to complement national QA systems with international arrangements

Levels of quality assurance



Functions of internationalisation in QA

- Collaboration, exchange and professional development in networks and associations
 - E.g. INQAAHE
- Common guidelines and standards
 - E.g. European Standards, UNESCO-OECD Guidelines
- Mutual recognition of QA outcomes and decisions in view of credit transfer, recognition of qualifications, etc.
- Recognition (meta-accreditation) of QA agencies
 - E.g. European Register of QA agencies



4.

STRATEGIES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Critical conditions

- QA in HE functions best
 - When it is at arm lengths of governments, while maintaining a strong public policy focus
 - When it supports institutional autonomy by demonstrating how QA can help to improve
 - When it enhances the transparency of and trust in higher education
 - When it is fundamentally trusted by academia as being part of their own sphere

Strategies

1. Be a driver of *innovation* in the system
2. Focus on what is really *relevant* to academia, institutions, students and society
3. Positively recognise institutional *diversity*
4. Combine the *local* and the *global*
5. Invest in your main capital which is *trust*.

Strategy 1. Innovation

- For quite some time, QA was one of the most powerful drivers of innovation in HE
- When institutionalising, standardising and mainstreaming, the risk of conservatism grows
- QA should again become one of the main innovation-oriented forces in the system
 - QA tools for innovative practices
 - Innovators belong in peer-review panels
 - Linking and networking with other innovation-oriented forces

Strategy 2. Relevance

- After 20 years of QA, it is no longer necessary to check all standards and indicators of quality
- Focusing more on what really matters, will help to restore the balance
 - Outputs and outcomes, more specifically learning outcomes
 - Complementing and correcting reputation-oriented transparency tools by providing real information on achieved quality

Strategy 3. Diversity

- It is critically important to escape the risk of standardisation, by tuning to the real diversity in students and institutional profiles
 - By critically making our tools and instruments more flexible and sophisticated ('smart quality assurance')
 - By accepting that 'one-size-fits-all' approaches are not going to help in a diversifying world
 - This may involve a process of 'de-standardisation'

Strategy 4. Local & Global

- Recognise the increasingly important international roles and functions of quality assurance, accompanying the overall globalisation of higher education
 - Sharing good practice, recognising outcomes, developing agreed standards
- But also stay close to the academic work floor and the specific needs of the local situation

Strategy 5. Trust

- Trust is probably the most important capital of the QA system and community
 - Invest more in restoring trust levels in academia and institutions
 - By demonstrating the added-value of being a ‘critical friend’
 - Convincing them that real openness and transparency based on evidence is at the core of the academic value system and that reputation races based on perception are not sustainable



Thank you !

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