Different stakeholders and conflicting expectations

Quality assurance in the political context

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Tensions related to the QA

- Some examples
  - Quality ‘scandals’ and public legitimacy:
    – Processes and outcomes
    – Institutional level legitimacy

- The effects of rankings on public opinion, public policy, institutions

- Lack of QA in teaching has also an effect
QA and political context: Meta-level

Part of larger regulatory context:
- (De-)regulation wave
- Measurement and performance indicators
- (semi-) independent regulatory agencies
- better regulation wave? Risk based regulation.

QA has contributed to changes in the existing “power structures”:
- more legitimate role for students and other stakeholders
- more authority and responsibility to the center and leadership within universities, vis a vis individual academics
Stakeholders and views

- Different groups - “stakeholders”
  - Students (…. and potentially their parents)
  - Academics and university leaders
  - Government officials and politicians (public)
  - Employers
  - … quality assurance agencies, media etc

- Why is there a difference in views?
  - opinions about quality and the role of the QA
    - the nature of the “stake” is different
    - expertise and patience for nuance
  - within a group difference due to sector characteristics: multiple dimensions, not easily measurable etc.
Different ways to define quality

Lee Harvey:

Exceptional: surpassing standards
Perfection / consistency: getting things right
Fitness of purpose: related to institution’s mission
Value for money: accountability
Transformation: ongoing process enhancing the consumer and empowering the consumer
Quality assurance

Different purposes:
- Introducing quality culture
- Controlling for the minimum threshold
  Recognition of degrees
- Consumer choice and protection
- Supporting international mobility
- Improve links with employment sectors
- Informing funding decisions
- Smoothen down-sizing

Different approaches: (Brennan and Shah 1992)
- Academic type - content
- Managerial type – processes
- Pedagogical type – delivery
- Employment type - output
Stakeholder expectations

.. can be:

explicit - clear
implicit - revealed when they are not met,
fuzzy - expect something but not sure

as well as:

realistic or unrealistic

We must be specific: expectations of stakeholders to the QA system vs QA meeting the needs of the stakeholders given their “stake”
Expectations to quality assurance

- **Academic staff (rectors, academic staff):**
  - Support internal development of an institution
  - Guarantee credibility of the programs
  - Comparative information

- **Employers**
  - To inform stakeholders about credibility and relative standing with respect to other (foreign) institutions
  - Guarantee credibility and (foreign) comparability of the programs

- **Students**
  - Assurance that a university does what it should be doing. Meets states’ needs.

- **State representatives**
  - To optimize resources, higher education landscape; Value for money; Capacity for improvement: Assess forward lookingness, leadership, having a vision.

  Udam (2013)
Tensions in the QA system

“Hard” vs “Soft”
- Attention directly to academic standards.
  - Outcry about declining standards in the HE. Consistent standards (contact hours, assessment).

- Comparison with other institutions locally and internationally
  - Relative standards and international standing (UK, AU, Canada)
  - Single yardstick, clear criteria, “one model”, no fitness for purpose

- Transparency (in case of relative judgments)
  Better indicators, stronger evidence base – more procedural? (Leiden)
Tensions in the QA system

- Information needs to the public:
  - must be made available
  - must be made understandable
    - objective criteria, comparability
    - single dimensionality vs multi-dimensionality

Entering the problem world of rankings?

- middle ground: provide data but not to get hands dirty
- present consumer choice (e.g. Multirank)
Tensions in the QA system

“Soft”

- Focus on internal quality policies - audit
  - Ultimately it is the university that is responsible for quality, needs a conscious and continuous attention
  - Costs and feasibility: program level accreditations costly and slow (for dynamic program offerings)

- Improvement as a primary purpose
  - Open and trusting atmosphere,
  - But also time-consuming, if not checking boxes
  - “Taylor made” individual approach: unique solutions, recognize innovation and attention to true learning
# Tensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External</th>
<th>vs</th>
<th>Internal QA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External reference points</td>
<td>vs</td>
<td>Fitness for purpose</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relative (intern. and local)</td>
<td>vs</td>
<td>Unique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigid processes</td>
<td>vs</td>
<td>Ability to show quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Output focus</td>
<td>vs</td>
<td>Org policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One scale</td>
<td>vs</td>
<td>Multi-dimensionality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple (public)</td>
<td>vs</td>
<td>nuanced</td>
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| Reduction of red tape | vs          | Thoroughness     |
Key variable missing:
   Ability to measure student learning
   e.g. attempts with AHELO

Multiple goals with multiple instruments:
- Regulatory overlap: a problem but also a solution
- Interaction between instruments
  e.g. rankings vs government owned quality assurance schemes
Questions for discussion

- Which other tensions we see?

- Where are the strongest dilemmas?

- Are the dilemmas linked to different stakeholder expectations?

- Do all stakeholder expectations matter?
Variety of QA instruments

- **Clark’s triangle** (Dill and Beerkens 2010)
  - Professional self-regulation: external examiners, professional accreditations
  - State-centered: institutional and program accreditations, audit, performance budgeting
  - Market based (informational tools): rankings, student satisfaction surveys

- **Three approaches** (Dill 1992)
  - Reputational approach: peer review to assess the quality of programs
  - The student outcome approach: student and graduate achievements
  - Total quality management approach: about management, process and organizational learning
Variety of QA instruments

- ‘Evolution’ of accreditation (Jeliazkova and Westerheijden 2002 +)
  - Phase 1: Doubts about education standards -> Identifying sub-standards programs
  - ...
  - Phase 4: Need to stimulate sustainable quality culture in institutions. -> Improvement based on self-regulation + public accountability.
  - New challenge: Information provision