

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
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Tensions

external	vs	internal QA
external reference points	vs	fitness for purpose
relative (intern. and local)	vs	unique
rigid processes	vs	ability to show quality
output focus	vs	org policies
one scale	vs	multi-dimensionality
simple (public)	vs	nuanced
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