Studies on the impact quality assurance in Quality in Higher Education

Lee Harvey
Introduction

- 20 years of *QHE* only about 10% of papers on impact.
- One third in special issue in 1997.
Quality assurance and quality

• Tenuous link.

• Disengagement and ‘translation’ to suit academics’ needs.

• Hostility when the game is not clear.
Quality assurance and academic culture

• The more compatible the greater the buy-in and the more effective QA is.

• QA impact effected by discipline culture and by organisational structure
Accountability and improvement

• Not a continuum; different dimensions

• Also compliance and control
Direct effect of QA

- Evidence ambiguous (therefore is this the best use of resources?)

- Countries with a history of QA less effect than those without.

- Agencies claim impact: periodic reviews show change, PIs improve, high degree of compliance with recommendations [at least on paper]; internal QA set up.
External QA focus on improvement

- Evidence not clear whether this leads to more impact

- Greater impact in countries with some history

- Countries with less history of QA (and more private providers) impact strong with accountability/control models.
Impact on learning

- More articles claiming limited impact than significant impact.
- Positive impact mainly on ‘superstructure’:
  - Outcome specifications
  - Compliance with NQF
  - Rigorous course approval
  - Detailed documentation
  - Team-based action planning
  - Dissemination of good practice
  - Seeking student feedback
- QA must focus on curriculum, learning and teaching and assessment
Internal and EQA

- Internal QA has more impact on teaching and learning
- External provides legitimation for IQA
- (External legitimation for managerialism!)
- Problem of trust.
- Linking IQA and EQA needs to be worked on doesn’t just happen
- EQA may replace IQA (out of convenience or because it demands attention)
Bureaucracy, burden, peer review, self-assessment and creativity

• All an issue in the ‘literature’ but didn’t really come up much in research.
• Burden, pedantry, legalism...
• Lack of consistency of peer review.
• Self-review unreliable (and not the main benefit that agencies think it is).
• Stifles creativity when EQA is overly prescriptive.
Conclusion

• Not much evidence of EQA impacting directly on learning and teaching.

• So, should we forget EQA as a means to improve learning and teaching: can it not reach the transformative front line?

• Perhaps the ‘climate’ has changed after 20+ years of QA and we are more open to talking about teaching and learning

• [But maybe investing the same money into the innovative teaching and learning movement 25 years ago would have had far greater results much sooner?]
Question

• Can impact evaluation contribute to resolving conflicting stakeholder expectations of quality assurance in HE?

• This review won’t have helped much in answering this question positively, thus far. But maybe better impact work might?