Impact Evaluation of External Quality Assurance: Different Perspectives and Prospects for the Future

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Studies on QA in Europe: a brief history

The shifting (but also enduring) research interest in QA:

1) QA and (changed) governance of HE
2) QA and methods (control vs improvement)
3) QA and the human dimension (Q-culture…)
4) QA and impact on teaching and learning/students (learning outcomes)
Impact evaluation – some considerations

• «Impact» of what? If «quality» means different things, we need impact studies that reflect this diversity
  - Many studies on QA and the impact on governance, power, people…
• «Impact» – only about causal relationships?
  - Higher education is a complex area, what about in-direct and unintended effects?
Impact evaluation – some considerations

• Impact studies – just for accountability purposes?
• Impact studies for designing the next generation of QA systems….
  - How change takes place
  - How changes are perceived
  - Who engage in change processes
What do we know about impact of QA from previous studies?

- Power (centralization, identity, student interests enhanced)
- Professionalisation (formalization, «bureaucracy», routines established)
- Public relations (external communication, education put on the agenda)
- Permeability (transparency, informed decision-making)
Impact studies: current empirical coverage

Dominant perspectives:
- Governance
- Organization
- Leadership
- (Culture)

Less visible perspectives:
- Student views (Quest…)
- Teaching and learning practices
- Academic results
Enter: Learning outcomes…..

- A shift in political interest from «process» to «outcomes»
- Qualification frameworks are becoming more visible and more important in a number of countries
- The political emphasis on the link between higher education and the world of work is strengthened
Learning outcomes and QA-frameworks

• Towards a global shift where QA is much more attentive to learning outcomes?
  - US example, transforming accreditation
  - Australian example, TEQSA and the new threshold standards
  - European examples, with perhaps Sweden as the extreme case (71% of agencies are «covering» LOs in their activities, Grifol et al. 2012)
How dramatic will the shift to a learning outcome approach be for QA?

- Depends on whether learning outcomes should be understood as «pre-defined» or more «open ended»
- Depends on whether learning outcomes should be assessed at the individual or at the organizational/study program level
**Possible links between LOs and how these can be assessed through EQA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning outcomes understood as</th>
<th>Assessing learning outcomes at the Individual level</th>
<th>Organizational level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Predefined</strong></td>
<td>Academic standards, tests,</td>
<td>Drop-out, completion rates, entry qualifications, employer satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open-ended</strong></td>
<td>Attitudes, values, beliefs</td>
<td>Quality culture, leadership involvement, staff-student interactions</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Implications for impact studies

• Impact studies will provide QA with increased public legitimacy (or, not…)
• Impact studies will be expected to provide comparative information
• Impact studies can be a way of connecting the academic community closer to QA (beyond bureaucracy…)