

European QA in a Global Perspective: Holding on to Soft Power?

Mala Singh
The Open University, United Kingdom
m.singh@open.ac.uk

Presentation Headings

Section 1: Looking beyond European QA

- ▶ QA paradigm shifts from soft power to hard power
- ▶ Bologna in Africa

Section 2 : Looking within QA

- ▶ Stakeholder QA in Europe
- ▶ States, consumer markets and regulators
- ▶ QA–is increasing information and freedom of choice a democratic imperative?

Presentation Headings

Section 3 : Looking Ahead

- ▶ How many more purposes can QA deliver on?
- ▶ Can hard power QA or soft power QA get closer to quality?
- ▶ European QA-choice for ESG consolidation till 2015-advantages and tensions.

Terminologies

- ▶ QA soft power–values and approaches which underpinned ESG at its origins–commitments to collegiality, respect for diversity, strong focus on quality improvement or enhancement, recognition of institutional responsibility and autonomy, stakeholder consensus.
- ▶ QA hard power–from arm’s length government steering to centralised regulation, quality assurance for regulation, outcomes regime based on institutional performance, consumer protection and consumer information at heart of QA, from qualitative to quantitative information.

Paradigm Shifts

- ▶ Paradigm shifts in EQA—from self-regulation to arms-length regulation to state regulation. Changes in the role of the state, in the role of QA, in the role and identity of students.
- ▶ Australia—replacing AUQA and other QA agencies with centralised regulator Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) : Registration and evaluation of HEIs against a Standards Framework. Risk-based regulation. Language of compliance and sanctions for non-compliance.

Paradigm Shifts

- ▶ UK: 2011 White Paper(Students at the Heart of the System) proposes new regulatory regime to protect standards and quality. Risk-based quality assurance
- ▶ OECD AHELO project–focus on learning outcomes and institutional performance–being piloted in 16 countries including US, Australia and some European countries
- ▶ Beyond QA to regulation–what are the implications of this regulatory regime for European QA predicated on the ESG?

Bologna in Africa

- ▶ African Union–launched a project to harmonise HE programmes across African HEIs–to facilitate mobility, improve quality and help regenerate regional growth and development.
- ▶ Bologna process is indicated as holding valuable lessons for African Union strategy–rationales and purposes of harmonisation are rendered in a language resonant of Bologna considerations:

Bologna in Africa

‘Harmonization will benefit Africa, since it will allow for greater intra–regional mobility, thereby fostering increased sharing of information, intellectual resources, and research... On a broader level, harmonization has the potential to create a common African higher education and research space.’(AU 2007)

Bologna in Africa

- ▶ Similar emphasis on QA as a means of overcoming quality differences in HEIs and national HE systems, producing graduates with required competencies, and facilitating mobility.
- ▶ Most visible development has been proliferation of QA agencies in more than a third of 53 African countries—little public investment in improving institutional capacity.

Bologna in Africa

- ▶ Harmonisation process in early stages with many concerns about capacity and resourcing at all levels but especially of regional co-ordinating structures.
- ▶ No common QA reference point like the ESG
- ▶ Influence of Bologna as model for regional integration and education reform—contexts and conditions for soft power to work?

Looking within QA

- ▶ Stakeholder model for QA–strength and distinctiveness of European QA
- ▶ Pact for governance or quality or both?
- ▶ States, Consumer Markets and Regulators– who is missing from the party?
- ▶ QA –increasing freedom of choice in a market democracy

Purposes of QA–Endless Frontier?

In 1997 Brennan and Shah identified 7 purposes for QA from a study of 40 universities in 15 countries:

- ▶ ‘to ensure accountability for the use of public funds
- ▶ to improve the quality of higher education provision
- ▶ to stimulate competitiveness between institutions

Purposes of QA

- ▶ to check the quality of new institutions
- ▶ to assign institutional status, especially in diversified systems
- ▶ to transfer authority from the state to institutions
- ▶ to make international comparisons.'

Purposes of QA

A decade and a half later the list of purposes has grown:

- ▶ To facilitate mobility
- ▶ To facilitate regional integration/ regional competitiveness/ regional attractiveness
- ▶ To be a consumer information tool–facilitate market democracy
- ▶ To serve as a regulatory tool

Looking Ahead

- ▶ Multiplying purposes of QA—can quality improvement compete in a struggle with multiple economic and political imperatives for QA?
- ▶ Risk-based quality assurance
- ▶ Learning Outcomes moving to centre stage
Will an outcomes regime get us closer to quality than soft power ESG?

Looking Ahead

- ▶ The changing contours of ‘Europeanness’ – implications of economic crisis for stable functioning and resourcing of HE systems. Lesser or greater mobility? Less spent on HE, on QA?
- ▶ Debate in 2012 INQAAHE Forum – the future of QA in relation to less expensive methodologies, QA for institutional diversity, building institutional quality culture, the independence of HEIs and agencies (relationship with government)
- ▶ European QA – choosing consolidation over radical change – advantages and tensions.