Standards of quality assurance:
A closer look at some underlying principles

Dr. Andre Vyt
Rehabilitation sciences & physiotherapy
Ghent, Belgium

The accreditation system
in Flanders and the Netherlands

Headstart principles for quality management

- Combining a helicopter view with an experience-driven knowledge of different processes in the organisation: *e.g., investigating bottlenecks or recurrent problems*
- Combining expert knowledge in quality management with expert knowledge of the core processes: *e.g., using QM techniques in teaching & learning*
- Anticipating unintended consequences of actions and measurements: e.g., *avoiding pitfalls in measuring student satisfaction about teaching quality*
- Looking from different perspectives towards a situation or a problem: *e.g., taking the perspective of the student*
- Installing a quality management system by nourishing a culture of involvement and commitment: *e.g., how to combine the best of two cultures?*

Overview

- Some general preliminary remarks on principles
- Principles underlying standards
- Principles and dimensions in total quality management

Principles underlying standards?

- Standards as such
- Successful implementation of standards
- Failure in implementation of standards

Are we acting coherently / accordingly ?

- We require from students that they are aware of the reasons why they need to acquire specific knowledge and/or skills

- *But*
- We fail sometimes in accurately perceiving the underlying principles of the standards
- We even sometimes wrongly interpret standards as being content-driven quality criteria of study programmes

The problem of communication and perception
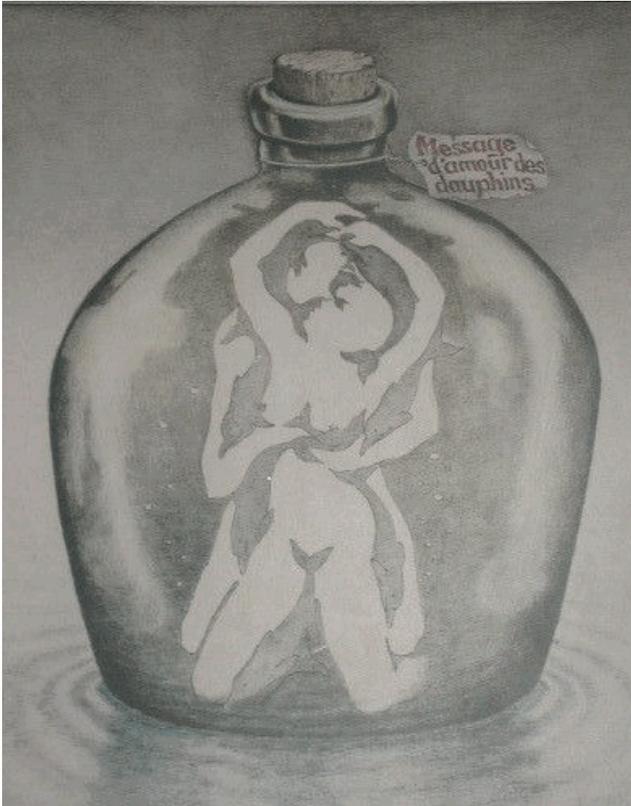
- People see what they like to see
- People believe what they like to believe
- People remember what they like to remember

Errare humanum est

- Sometimes we don't know or have forgotten the underlying principle of regulations or guidelines *e.g., putting assessment criteria in the forefront*

- Sometimes we disregard the need to define correctly the reason for action or measurements *e.g., study load measurements*

- Sometimes we are deriving incorrect interpretations of indicators or measurements *e.g. # problems or complaints handled*

The gap

- What you see, is not always what you get
- What you get, is not always what you want
- What you want, is not always what you need

For the sake of principles…

A moral rule or strong belief that influences your actions

A belief that is accepted as a reason for acting or thinking in a particular way

A law, a rule or a theory that something is based on

A general or scientific law that explains how something works or why something happens

Idiom:

A principled approach: In general but not in detail

If something can be done in principle, there is no good reason why it should not be done although it has not yet been done and there may be some difficulties

prin•ciple /ˈprɪnsəpl/ noun

1 [C, usually pl., U] a moral rule or a strong belief that influences your actions: *He has high moral principles.* ◇ *I refuse to lie about it; it's against my principles.* ◇ **Stick to your principles** *and tell him you won't do it.* ◇ *She refuses to allow her family to help her as* **a matter of principle.** ◇ *He doesn't invest in the arms industry* **on principle.**

2 [C] a law, a rule or a theory that sth is based on: *the principles and practice of writing reports* ◇ *The principle behind it is very simple.* ◇ *There are three fundamental principles of teamwork.* ◇ *Discussing all these details will get us nowhere; we must get back to* **first principles** (= the most basic rules).

3 [C] a belief that is accepted as a reason for acting or thinking in a particular way: *the principle that free education should be available for all children*

4 [sing.] a general or scientific law that explains how sth works or why sth happens: *the principle that heat rises* ◇ *A tidal current turbine is similar in principle to a windmill.*

IDM in ˈprinciple

1 if something can be done **in principle**, there is no good reason why it should not be done although it has not yet been done and there may be some difficulties: *In principle there is nothing that a human can do that a machine might not be able to do one day.*

2 in general but not in detail: *They have agreed to the proposal in principle but we still have to negotiate the terms.*

procedures
methods
standards
principles
dimensions

The goals of the standards

- Develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance and explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance
  Berlin communiqué, September 2003
- no more than a first step in what is likely to be a long and possibly arduous route to the establishment of a widely shared set of underpinning values, expectations and good practice in relation to quality and its assurance
  ESG, ENQA, 2007

Combining flexibility and rigour

- Give way to different approaches and methods in putting principles into practice

- *But also*

- Making sure that standards are measurable and can be checked

- Making sure that standards are communicated unambiguously

- Provide no excuses

Standards for internal quality assurance

- Institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders.
- Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.
- Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.
- Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so.
- Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered.
- Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities.
- Institutions should regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information about the programmes and awards they are offering.

Fundamental principles of the standards

- The interests of students as well as employers and the society more generally in good quality higher education;
- The central importance of institutional autonomy, tempered by a recognition that this brings with it heavy responsibilities;
- Efficiency: the need for external quality assurance to be fit for its purpose and to place only an appropriate and necessary burden on institutions for the achievement of its objectives.

- Balance between:
- accountability and improvement
- the creation and development of internal quality cultures, and the role which external quality assurance procedures may play
- transparency and respecting the diversity of national contexts and subject areas

- A generic instead of a narrow, prescriptive and highly formulated approach

Basic principles

- providers of higher education have the primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance;
- the interests of society in the quality and standards of higher education need to be safeguarded;
- the quality of academic programmes need to be developed and improved for students and other beneficiaries of higher education;
- there need to be efficient and effective organisational structures within which academic programmes can be provided and supported;
- transparency and the use of external expertise in quality assurance processes are important;
- there should be encouragement of a culture of quality within higher education institutions;
- processes should be developed through which higher education institutions can demonstrate their accountability;
- quality assurance for accountability purposes is fully compatible with quality assurance for enhancement purposes;
- institutions should be able to demonstrate their quality at home and internationally;
- processes used should not stifle diversity and innovation.
- the interests of students and other stakeholders should be at the forefront of external quality assurance processes

Standards for internal quality assurance
strategy

- **Institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders.**

- *Why?*
- **Provide public confidence and ensuring transparency**
- **Provide opportunity for reflection and adjustment**
- **Ensuring participation**
- **Ensuring commitment and continuity at all levels**
- **Provide a useful reference point for those who need to know about the practical aspects of carrying out the procedures**
- **Strategy should precede implementation (PDCA)**
- **Strategy should define priorities and long-term goals**
- **Students and stakeholders can point out neglected areas or goals**
- **Students have knowledge about professional needs**
- **Involvement of relevant persons is needed for a quality culture**
- **Universities have to avoid constantly of becoming an ivory tower**

Standards for internal quality assurance **mechanisms**

- **Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards, including:**
  - **development and publication of explicit intended learning outcomes;**
  - **careful attention to curriculum and programme design and content;**
  - **specific needs of different modes of delivery and types of higher education;**
  - **availability of appropriate learning resources;**
  - **formal programme approval procedures by a body other than that teaching the programme;**
  - **monitoring of the progress and achievements of students;**
  - **regular periodic reviews of programmes (including external panel members);**
  - **regular feedback from employers, labour market representatives and other relevant organisations;**
  - **participation of students in quality assurance activities.**

- *Why?*
- **Securing confidence and continuity**
- **Coherence of the programme design tends not to come first**
- **Expertise of educational scientists is not always easy to find**
- **Teachers do not always have the most up-to-date skills and knowledge**
- **Unsuccessfulness of students can provide important information**

Standards for internal quality assurance
assessment

- **Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently. Student assessment procedures are expected to:**
  - be designed to measure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes and other programme objectives;
  - be appropriate for their purpose, whether diagnostic, formative or summative;
  - have clear and published criteria for marking;
  - be undertaken by people who understand the role of assessment in the progression of students towards the achievement of the knowledge and skills associated with their intended qualification;
  - where possible, not rely on the judgements of single examiners;
  - take account of all the possible consequences of examination regulations;
  - have clear regulations covering student absence, illness and other mitigating circumstances;
  - ensure that assessments are conducted securely in accordance with the institution's stated procedures;
  - be subject to administrative verification checks to ensure the accuracy of the procedures

- *Why?*
- **provides valuable information for institutions about the effectiveness of teaching and learners' support**

Standards for internal quality assurance
Staff competence

- **Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so. Institutions should ensure that their staff recruitment and appointment procedures include a means of making certain that all new staff have at least the minimum necessary level of competence. Teaching staff should be given opportunities to develop and extend their teaching capacity and should be encouraged to value their skills.**

- *Why?*
- **Teachers are the single most important learning resource**
- **Academics haven't always had the opportunities to learn teaching skills**
- **Teaching is not always regarded as being one of the most important activities**
- **Developing competences determines staff satisfaction**
- **Staff satisfaction determines quality of student-teacher interaction**

Standards for internal quality assurance
Learning resources

- **Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered. Learning resources and other support mechanisms should be readily accessible to students, designed with their needs in mind and responsive to feedback from those who use the services provided. Institutions should routinely monitor, review and improve the effectiveness of the support services available to their students.**

- ***Why?***
- **In addition to their teachers, students rely on a range of resources to assist their learning**
- **Students are not in an easy position to give feedback**
- **Suggestions for improvement can easily be interpreted as criticism**
- **Characteristics of students may change rapidly**
- **There is not one single best way of producing learning resources**

Standards for internal quality assurance
Information management

- **Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities. It is at least expected to cover:**
  - **student progression and success rates;**
  - **employability of graduates;**
  - **students' satisfaction with their programmes;**
  - **effectiveness of teachers;**
  - **profile of the student population;**
  - **learning resources available and their costs;**
  - **the institution's own key performance indicators.**

- ***Why?***
- **Institutional self-knowledge is the starting point for effective quality assurance. Without this they will not know what is working well and what needs attention, or the results of innovatory practices.**
- **One needs to have baseline measurements to be able to measure progress**
- **Available financial resources have to be spent according to priorities**
- **Student satisfaction spills over to staff satisfaction**
- **Student characteristics determine the effectiveness of T&L methods used**

Standards for internal quality assurance
Information providing

- **Institutions should regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information about the programmes and awards they are offering. The institution should verify that it meets its own expectations in respect of impartiality and objectivity. Higher education institutions have a responsibility to provide information about:**
  - **the programmes they are offering**
  - **the intended learning outcomes of these**
  - **the qualifications they award,**
  - **the teaching, learning and assessment**
  - **procedures used,**
  - **the learning opportunities available to their student**

- ***Why?***
- **In fulfilment of their public role, higher education institutions have a responsibility to provide this information**
- **Non-objective information hinders effective identification of problems**
- **An institution has the best means of generating the information needed**

Standards for external quality assurance

- **The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.**

- **External quality assurance methods should be designed and developed through a process involving key stakeholders, including higher education institutions. As external quality assurance makes demands on the institutions involved, a preliminary impact assessment should be undertaken to ensure that the procedures to be adopted are appropriate and do not interfere more than necessary with the normal work of higher education institutions.**

- ***Why?***
- **Ensure clarity of purpose and transparency of procedures.**
- **Avoid suffocating effects by anticipating bottlenecks**
- **Avoid production of unnecessary information**
- **Avoid outdated (self-assessment) reports**

Dimensions in TQM

- Formulation and management of processes
  Measurements and information gathering
- Systematisation and reliability
  Openness and transparency
- Attunement and integration
  Innovation and improvement
- Involvement of different persons
  Client and external orientation

Developmental phases

- Quality is variable
  Quality is linked to the individual
- Initiation of process-based thinking/acting
  Starting to work systematically
- High level of professionalism
  Quality is guaranteed
- Systematic innovation
  Continuous improvement
- Aiming for excellence
  Recognition of expertise and high level of quality

(PROSE)

Areas in TQM

- Input 1: Strategy, policy, leadership
- Input 2: Staff, methods, means, partners
- Core processes
- Output 1: Satisfaction of students and staff
- Output 2: Performance

(see, e.g. EFQM)

Working method in PROSE

- Checklists are filled out individually by team members and persons involved
- They gather to agree in consensus on the scores of the items and deduce the level of quality management
- but also to identify immediately specific goals of improvement
- that are then selected according priority and written down in a self-evaluation report

A hopeful evolution

- Good:
  In principle, we agree with the standards

- Better:
  We agree with the standards as being principles

- Best:
  As a matter of principle, we should implement
  the standards asap with the attached guidelines

andre.vyt@ugent.be

info@prose.be

www.prose.be