

15 Years of Quality Assurance: Lessons learnt

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Building Bridges: Making sense of QA in
European, national and institutional contexts

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A for Accreditation

- Introduced in CEE after the fall of the Berlin Wall and moved west gradually
- Perceived as being:
 - ✓ More rigorous for its reliance on a set of criteria
 - ✓ An effective recognition tool => route to the EHEA
 - ✓ A means to regulate HE after loosening some aspects of state control (e.g., entry of private providers)

B for Bologna, Berlin and Bergen

- Bologna Declaration (1999):
 - Convergence through common structures and tools
 - Focussed on teaching and learning
 - A concern with quality standards
- Berlin Communiqué (2003):
 - Quality moves to the top of the agenda
 - The responsibilities of HEIs is acknowledged
- Bergen Communiqué (2005):
 - European Standards and Guidelines adopted
 - European Quality Assurance Forum endorsed
 - Green light for further exploration of the European Quality Assurance Register

C for Change

Very significant change across Europe in the past decade:

- Significant rise in number of enrolled students
- Significant increase in the number of institutions, mostly private
- Most countries in Europe have introduced at least **3 significant new policies** alongside the Bologna Process (Trends 2010)

Policy changes	Number of countries
QA	18
Research	15
Autonomy	12
Funding	12

D for Dialogue

- Dialogue between QA agencies and HEIs: the hallmark of the 80's and 90's

- A way to build consensus and trust:

In order to function effectively, higher education systems require all actors to have confidence in the way the processes within that system are carried out.

(ENQA Convergence Study 2005)

- A window into the political culture
- Leading to contrasting QA philosophies:
 - Improvement vs. Inspection
 - Fitness for purposes vs. Standards

E for E4

- E4:
 - ENQA
 - ESU
 - EUA
 - EURASHE
- A unique example of cooperation at European level that is not always duplicated at national level
- Of the 27 national conferences answering the Trends 2010 questionnaire:
 - Only **eight** conferences noted that they were included in a national debate about the ESGs
 - Only **nine** conferences reported any responsibility in developing the national accountability framework; for **four** of these, this is limited to nominations to the board of their national quality agencies.

H for Humility

- How do we know what we know? Can we really get to the Truth?

Il faut douter mais ne point être sceptique

Claude Bernard

- Site visits:
 - A very short time to get to know and understand an institution/programme
 - A transactional, complex process:
 - Within the evaluation team
 - Between the evaluation team and the institution/programme

K for Knowledge

- Mode 1 research: The traditional mode of research: in the ivory tower, disciplinary based, with a clear distinction between applied and theoretical.
- Mode 2 research: interdisciplinary, created in collaboration with society and with a view of contributing to social well-being. It is socially responsive and accountable.

L for Lisbon and London

- **Lisbon strategy:** ambitious economic and social goals. Focused on
 - Research and lifelong learning
 - Modernisation agenda
- **London:** endorsement of the European Quality Assurance Register

M for Mergers (and cross-border activities)

- A growing number of mergers, associations or federations in Europe
 - A number of cross-border partnerships
 - Growing transnational education provision within Europe
- ⇒ What are the implications for QA? Should the process remain focused at the micro level (programme) or even the institutional level or move to a higher unit of analysis?

O for Order

- Is too much order a good outcome for HE?
- The QA field has been very dynamic
- In praise of a balance between disorder and order:

Two dangers threaten the world: disorder and order (Paul Valéry)

- In praise of a balance between consistency in accountability procedures vs. diversity & creativity

P for Power

Q for Quality

- Quality is not a neutral concept, but closely related to questions of ideology and power: who defines quality and in which way
- Quality assurance:
 - A tool for addressing the complexities of European higher education
 - A set of shared principles but no shared definition of quality

R for Rankings

Rankings... reassert the hierarchy of traditional knowledge production.

Ellen Hazelkorn

Finland has achieved remarkable progress as an knowledge economy, and yet does not boast any university among the top 50 in the world.

Jamil Salmi

S for Students

- A European tradition of student engagement in institutional governance
- ESU: A unique example of a representative association at the level of one region
- A growing participation of students in evaluations
- A question for the future: are we defining too narrowly students as members of the 18-24 age group?
- Student-centred learning => student services: what are the implications for QA?

U for Universities

- Quality is the primary responsibility of the institutions
- Many historical processes of quality in institutions but not necessarily identified as such. What do we achieve/lose when we call them quality assurance?
- Nevertheless, for 60% of HEIs in Europe, a major development of the past 10 years (Trends 2010)
- Institutional success factors:
 - An international orientation
 - Institutional autonomy
 - Availability of financial and human resources, incl. staff development schemes
 - A strong institutional core and appropriate devolution of responsibilities to faculties
 - A shared understanding and a shared responsibility within the institution
- A shared understanding between the institutions and their QA agency: Internal quality must be supported by, and articulated with, external quality processes

V for Value and Values

- Value:
 - To ensure value, bureaucratic burden must be kept to a minimum
 - Assess frequently the cost/benefit (including intangible costs such as stress, loss of morale, etc.)
 - Values: QA must support a vision of HE and the self-definition of each institution
- ⇒ **QA is a means to an end**

X for (e)Xcellence

- Having a single definition of excellence is detrimental to achieving social goals:

Diversity of institutional missions without diversity of values leads to social failure in failing to ensure the success of a diverse student body

Tom Collins

President

National University of Ireland, Maynooth

Z for Ze end!

- Excellence or multiple definitions for quality?
- Teaching or knowledge triangle?
- National or European?

Thank You for Your Attention!