

## *Internal Institutional Diversity and Quality Assurance*

Dr Heinz Lechleiter  
Director of Quality Promotion  
Dublin City University

## Outline

(following the concerto form)

1. Present the theme
2. Discuss rhetorically
3. Analyse
4. Contest
5. Refute
6. Show theme to be 'true'

## Background

### Ireland

- Relative autonomy of universities
- Quality assurance in primary legislation
- Department based
- Improvement orientated

Universities are institutions for creating and disseminating knowledge, held together by rational and critical reflection.

## 1 Present the Theme

## Quality and Diversity

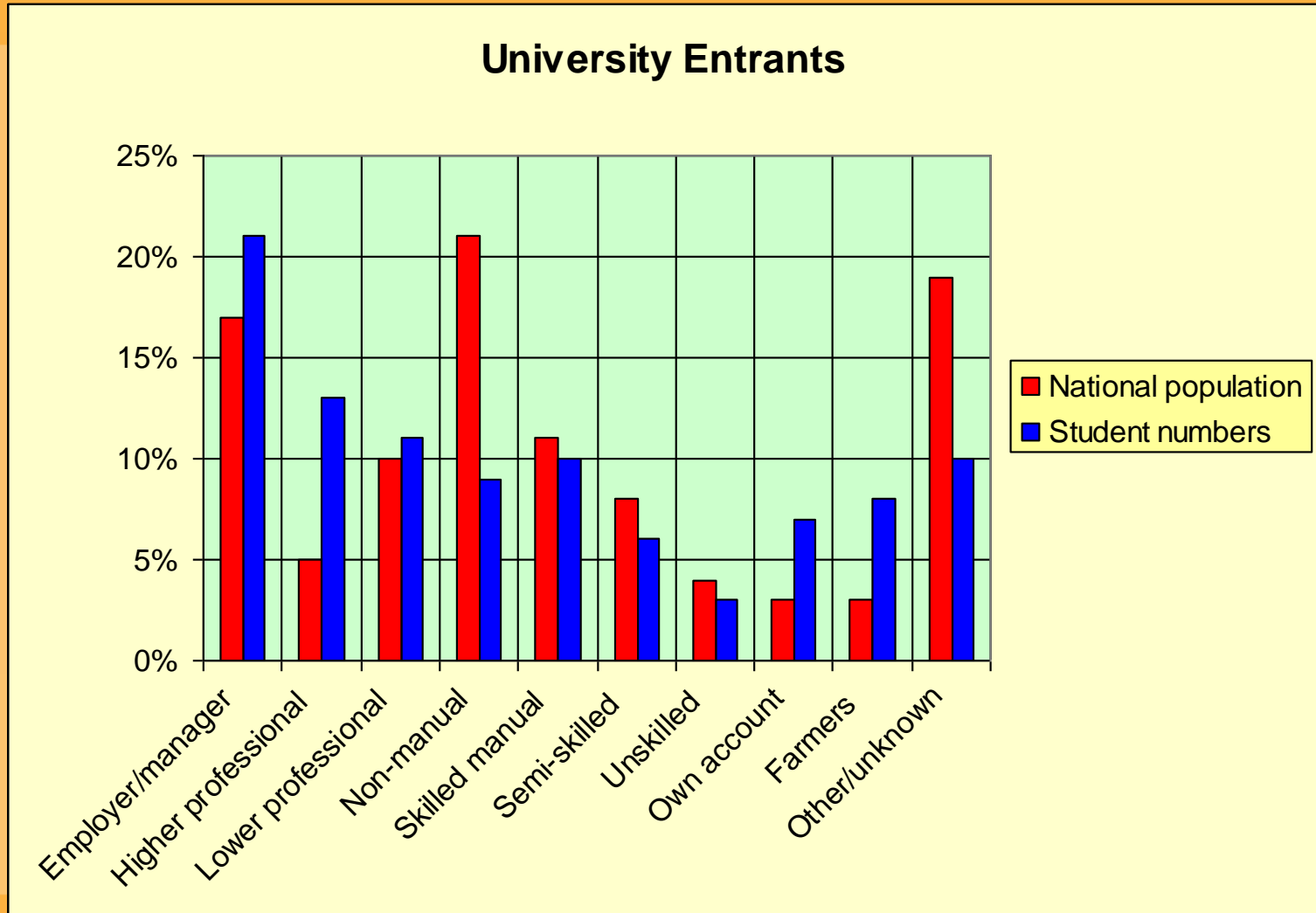
- Forum title: *Quality assurance has to come to terms with diversity.*
- ESG: *Quality assurance stifles diversity.*
- Session title: *Quality assurance respects diversity.*
- Talk invitation: *Quality assurance manages diversity.*

Is quality assurance the problem or the solution?

## 2 Discuss

## Diversity that isn't

- Participation
- Balances
- Student perception





“It is a remarkable feature of our higher education system that some of the high-profile professions have not become more diverse in their student intake. The socioeconomic profile on these courses has changed very little over the past decade.”

Tom Boland, Chief Executive of the Higher Education Authority

## Diversity that is

Perception: Staff vs. Students

Quality: Audit vs. Review

Disciplinary: Sciences vs. Humanities

Educational: Training vs. Education

Other considerations: Democracy (Harvey), Happiness (Watson), Virtuousness (Nixon), Active Citizenship (Barnett)

## Individual diversity

There is a lecturer who does not find it emotionally right to face his students, and so he lectures with his back to them. It's really rather a striking image, a kind of pre-Vatican 2 approach to teaching. ... students have never complained (though it is a matter of some humorous comment), ...

...but a visiting quality assurance team found it unacceptable.

<http://universitydiary.wordpress.com/> "Snuffing out academic eccentricity" posted on 13 November 2009

## Diversity of Perception Staff vs. Students

What looks like rapid progress to staff looks like standstill to students.

Information flow has to keep up with movement in the student body.

## Diversity of Quality Approaches

Quality assurance should not be understood merely as specific quality monitoring (such as process descriptions, data collection and analysis) or evaluation processes often carried out by a specific quality unit, but including all activities related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality of an HEI from strategic planning to staff and curriculum development. ... Monitoring and evaluation processes alone, with no link to the curriculum development process, do not guarantee the quality of higher education. [The authors also] highlight the importance of a bottom-up approach to the development of genuine quality processes which enhance creativity as much as improve quality.

*Improving Quality, Enhancing Creativity* (EUA, 2009, 13)

- Quality assurance and enhancement has to be flexible (e.g. go beyond the law)
- Quality assurance has to be self-reflective and self-critical.

## Disciplinary Diversity

### Epistemological:

hard vs. soft

pure vs. applied

### Social:

convergent vs. divergent

urban vs. rural

Becher/Huber 1990

## Educational Diversity

Education vs. Training

critical thinking vs. skills

theory vs. practice

civil society vs. market

individual potential vs. utility



## 3 Analysis

<b>Quality</b>	<b>Diversity</b>
Standard	Deviation
Comparability	Uniqueness
Judgement	Acceptance

## 4-5 Contest and Refute

## Contestation and Refutation

- Diversity disables Quality
- Professionalisation leads to inflexibility
- Quality without proven educational success
- Quality stifles Diversity

## Contestation and Refutation

### Professionalisation leads to inflexibility

“...agencies are not used to questioning their own activities. They do not tend to challenge the frameworks that form the basis of their *raison d'être* and to question the political decisions that impact their work. They resolutely see themselves as operators of a set of procedures and defend themselves against encroaching on the territory of those that they see as political decision makers or the academic world.”

Crozier, Curvale and Hénard (2007, 27)

## Contestation and Refutation

Quality assurance without proven educational success

*“... the improvement measures implemented in the degrees during the three years after the evaluation have not resulted in any variation of the achievement rates.”*

Fernández, Fernández and Álvarez (2008, 66)

## Analysis

Quality	Diversity
Standard	Deviation
Comparability	Uniqueness
Judgement	Acceptance
Cosmopolitan	Parochial
Cross-disciplinary	Disciplinary
Universal Values	Anything goes

## 6 Show the 'Truth'



## Diversity as precondition for change

- Deviation (helping to define parameters; acceptable minimum standard internally)
- Uniqueness (precondition for mutual learning; celebration, but also critical appraisal of difference)
- Acceptance (respect and trust as preconditions for successful quality assurance measures)

## Diversity in practice

### Quality Assurance

- Combination of different quality assurance measures (example: departmental, thematic reviews; programme reviews, external examiner system)
- Composition of Quality Promotion Committee (all Faculties, all functions, student participation; rota of membership)
- Composition of Peer Review Groups (internal and external; proven expertise)
- Make next year's reviewee this year's reviewer.

## Diversity in practice

### Disciplinary

- Assess people by their own criteria (example Schubert's unfinished symphony)

## Diversity in practice

For considerable periods of time the four oboe players had nothing to do. The number should be reduced and spread over the whole orchestra thus eliminating peaks of activity. All of the twelve violin players were playing identical notes. This seemed unnecessary duplication and the staff of this section should be cut drastically. No useful purpose is served by repeating with horns the passage that was already played by the strings. If all the redundant passages were eliminated the concert could be reduced by half. Had Schubert attended to these matters he would probably have been able to finish his symphony after all.

Christie/Stehlink 2006

## Diversity in practice

### Disciplinary

- Assess people by their own criteria (example Schubert's unfinished symphony)
- Subject expertise is more important for building trust than quality expertise
- Acknowledged mutuality (give and take in Peer Review Process)
- Transparency through Feedback (example: Your voice. Heard)

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## Diversity in practice

### Educational

- Danger of over-relying on surveys (little evidence of critical thinking)
- alternative: talking to students (example Student Forum for Quality) and other interest groups
- Potential for diverse methods of “taking the pulse” (example: robot competition)

## Conclusion

- **Mutuality:** All quality assessment should be based on mutuality of learning and respect
- **Inclusivity:** Quality assessment should be inclusive of the various stakeholder positions (both internal, students and staff, and external (employers, funding agencies))
- **Multiplicity** (of methods and perspectives) and reciprocity (of learning)
- **Trust and flexibility** by those who look after quality processes within the institution.
- The Quality review process in itself is a quality improvement measure



Questions?  
Comments!