

# **Workshop on the notion of training in quality assurance**

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# Objectives of the workshop

- Why this workshop?
  - Points of departure
  - Background questions
- What experience?
  - Facts
  - Possible explanations
- What could be in the core of training in QA?
  - Three assertions and linked questions open to debate

# Method

- Why a workshop rather than a paper session?
- Three assertions and their linked questions will be presented.
- Ideally each point will be discussed during 20 minutes.
- A final discussion will be devoted to the elaboration of a set of lists of arguments, points of consensus and divergence and, possibly, a brief description of learning outcomes specific to quality assurance in higher education trainings.

# Points of departure

The growth of autonomy given to the higher education institutions lead to an interplay between Ministries, higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies in which assessments and decisions have to be justified by methods and evidences.

The clarification of the mechanisms by which the evaluators reach their judgments is crucial for the recognition by all of the legitimacy of the decisions that follow from these assessments.

# Backgrounds questions

What should be the content of appropriate training in quality assurance in higher education?

What are the core elements of quality assurance mechanisms in higher education?

What are the possible expected learning outcomes trainings in quality assurance in higher education should aim at?

# Experience shows...

Training in quality assurance is not an easy notion.

How to explain that training in quality assurance seems to be slow to develop?

# Possible explanations

The approaches used by an agency are largely driven by the context in which they develop.

The specificities of the approaches to evaluation make difficult to agencies to go beyond the merely mechanistic.

There is always a distance between the intentions and the outcomes of the evaluation activities.

QA activities are enshrined in the field of what is politically and socially acceptable at a given time and in a given place.

The core mechanism of any evaluation process – the production of value judgment - is difficult to clarify.

# In conclusion

*The demand for training in quality assurance in higher education is separate from a demand for knowledge of the specific practice of a given agency covered by briefings.*

*This demand for generic trainings leads us to think about what is common to evaluation systems.*

*If fundamental mechanisms exist in all evaluation systems, is it possible to name them and to describe the know-how necessary to work them out?*

*What are the expected competences of the evaluators and of the designers of quality assurance systems in higher education?*

# Let's start the debate...

**Assertion 1** – The European Standards and Guidelines Part 2 specify a conceptual and coherent framework for the development of a professional approach to evaluation in higher education. This framework rests on great fundamental principles aiming at specifying the objectives and at clarifying the conditions under which the judgments about the educational activities of higher education institutions are made. The framework is devised in order to allow the specific forms, more often than not national, needed by such or such context to be developed.

***Do these principles adopted in 2005 and the agencies' specific approaches allow room for new convergences, in terms of methodology for example?***

# Let's start the debate...

**Assertion 2** – In complex organisations that demand the autonomy of those who contribute to them – notably higher education institutions and higher education systems – the efficiency of the approaches that rest on evaluations is coming as much from the final outcome or decision as from the collective knowledge or information to which they contribute. In this respect, the external evaluation, or the internal self-assessment phase, are, before being tools for the assessment of the situations, steps of a process during which a community agrees on what gives meaning to it – relationships, objectives, outcomes - and, of course, the values that underpin the interpretation of real-life experience.

***If the evaluations work towards the elaboration of shared knowledge/information, is it possible to draw consequences from this social dimension in terms of methods in order to reinforce their relevance and efficiency?***

# Let's start the debate...

**Assertion 3** – In order to go beyond the debates about the distinction, if not the opposition, between the evaluation of the outcomes and the evaluation of the quality systems and procedures, it is proposed here to describe evaluation mechanisms in general as systems made of the items to be evaluated, the standards that are applied and the rules of interpretation in use. Thus, whatever their purposes are, the evaluation mechanisms would have in common to be based on the achievement, in a more or less explicit and mastered way, of agreements between the stakeholders involved about 1) the objectives of the evaluation process 2) the items subject to evaluation 3) the interpretation of the facts.

***Does this approach seem to be pertinent? Does it help a clarification of the debates about quality assurance in higher education? Does it help to think training in quality assurance in terms of learning outcomes?***

Thank you for your attention

Let's start...