United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

International Institute for Educational Planning

Edited by Michaela Martin

Quality and Employability in Higher Education:

Viewing Internal Quality Assurance as a Lever for Change

New Trends in Higher Education

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABET	Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology
AHELO	Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes
AQW	academic quality work
CINDA	Centro Interuniversitario de Desarrollo
CLA	Collegiate Learning Assessment
CMU	Carnegie Mellon University
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQA	external quality assurance
EUA	European University Association
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines
GSA	Graduate Skills Assessment
HEEC	Chinese Higher Education Evaluation Centre
HEI	higher education institution
ICT	information and communications technology
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
IQA	internal quality assurance
IR	institutional research
NCAT	National Centre for Academic Transformation
NSSE	National Survey of Student Engagement
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QA	quality assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency (UK)
TEAC	Teacher Education Accreditation Council
UCUES	University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey

CONTRIBUTORS

JOHN BRENNAN is an Emeritus Professor of Higher Education Research at the UK Open University, a Visiting Professor at the University of Bath and the London School of Economics and Political Science, and an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Oxford. His interests lie broadly in the area of higher education and social change. For nearly 20 years he directed the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information at the Open University, where he led and participated in many national and international projects on topics such as graduate employment, quality assurance, and universities and social transformation. Prior to joining the Open University, he was a Director of Quality Support at the UK Council for National Academic Awards, the quality assurance body for the then polytechnic sector of higher education. He has published several books and many reports and articles on higher education and its changing relationship with society, and has spoken at countless conferences on higher education in the United Kingdom and many other parts of the world.

DAVID D. DILL is a Professor Emeritus of Public Policy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr Dill also served as Assistant to the Chancellor for Planning at the University. He has been a Visiting Professor at the University of Manchester, the University of Twente, and the European University Institute in Florence, and a Visiting Fellow at Wolfson College, Cambridge. Dr Dill has published 11 books and over 100 articles and chapters on higher education policy, research policy, and the governance and management of higher education. He has served as a policy advisor and academic quality assessor for governments, agencies, and universities in Austria, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Hong Kong, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

LEE HARVEY is a quality advisor to institutions across the world and has given over 50 keynote addresses at major international conferences. His area of expertise extends to employability, diversity, quality, funding, learning and teaching, and student feedback issues. He has published over 35 books and research monographs and over 120 articles

on higher education in international journals, books, and compilations. He was a Professor at the Copenhagen Business School until the end of 2010. Prior to that, he established and was a Director of both the Centre for Research into Quality at the University of Central England in Birmingham and the Centre for Research and Evaluation at the Sheffield Hallam University.

MARIA JOSÉ LEMAITRE, a sociologist with graduate study in education, is the current Executive Director of CINDA, a network of universities in Latin America and Europe. She is a former President of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education (INQAAHE) and of the Ibero-American Network of Quality Assurance (RIACES). She is a member of the Advisory Council of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation International Quality Group. She was in charge of the design and implementation of quality assurance processes in Chile between 1990 and 2007. She has published many articles on higher education and quality assurance. She has served as a consultant to higher education institutions, governments, and bi- and multilateral organizations in Central and South America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Asia.

MICHAELA MARTIN is a Programme Specialist at the UNESCO International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP), Paris, where she is in charge of research and training activities in the area of higher education policy and planning. Since 2000, she is leading IIEP's research on internal and external quality assurance in higher education, indicator systems for higher education, management of university–enterprise partnerships, tertiary education in small states, and management of higher education institutions. Prior to joining IIEP in 1990, Michaela Martin was a researcher at the European Centre for Strategic Management of Universities in Brussels (Belgium).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As knowledge organizations, higher education institutions (HEIs) are affected by globalization and the societal transformation taking place in their respective countries. Growing graduate unemployment means that employability is a major policy concern. This phenomenon occurs during a period where HEIs are undergoing significant changes due to rapid enrolment expansion and diversification. Under these circumstances, questions of how quality can be maintained and employability improved are at the centre of policy concerns in the higher education sector.

In many countries, internal quality assurance (IQA) has been widely adopted by individual institutions to tackle various issues relating to quality and employability. This publication argues that IQA enables institutions to identify areas to be improved and to design strategies that respond to needed changes. IQA can support teaching and learning, employability, university management, and the development of a quality culture. This publication advocates that national and institutional policy-makers develop an enabling environment for IQA. It makes recommendations on major points to be taken into account when developing policy for internal quality assurance.

In four chapters, an Introduction and Conclusion, the publication opens with a discussion of the concepts of quality and employability in higher education and affirms the capacity of IQA to assist individual HEIs to respond to changing economic and employment conditions. It also highlights how IQA can benefit from external quality assurance in this process, particularly in less established national and institutional settings.

Chapter 1 focuses on the importance of developing stronger collective governance processes for quality improvement in teaching and learning. This chapter argues that establishing a dialogue among peers and internal stakeholders is critical to improve teaching and learning. The chapter also highlights the need for support from both national and institutional administrators in promoting this dialogue.

Chapter 2 argues that concerns about employability should be integrated into IQA policy, responsive to a rapidly transforming higher

education sector and labour market. It defines employability as requiring not only the skill sets needed to enter the labour market, but also the development of a broader knowledge base which students can apply across different employment fields.

Chapter 3 approaches IQA from the management perspective. It defines IQA as a set of mechanisms for quality management in a HEI; while an element of quality enhancement is necessarily included in a university's vision and mission, this chapter argues that IQA also contributes to overall strategic management.

Chapter 4 presents the development of a quality culture as the most important outcome of IQA. Arguing that quality culture is a complex concept involving change in attitudes rather than merely a set of tools and procedures to enhance quality, this chapter identifies the particular conditions that need to be met to effect change and to transform the teaching and learning domain.

Finally, the publication concludes with recommendations to both national and institutional policy-makers on how IQA can be effectively managed and established at different institutional levels.

FOREWORD

In 2016, the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), Xiamen University, and the Chinese Higher Education Evaluation Center (HEEC) jointly organized a Policy Forum on 'Higher Education Quality and Employability: How Internal Quality Assurance Can Contribute?' The Forum, which took place at the University of Xiamen from 9 to 11 June, brought together more than 120 international participants from 25 countries to discuss the effectiveness of internal quality assurance (IQA) for improving quality, employability, and management in higher education institutions. Participants included national policy-makers and officials of quality assurance (QA) agencies, university leaders, quality managers, and researchers in the field of QA.

The Forum served as a platform to review the findings of IIEP's research on 'Exploring innovative and effective options for quality assurance in higher education', which consisted of an international baseline survey and eight university case studies from five different regions. It also provided an opportunity for broader discussions on how IQA can best support teaching and learning, graduate employability, management effectiveness, and a quality culture. In addition, it offered a welcome opportunity to present and discuss reforms in the QA of Chinese higher education.

This publication originated in four keynote speeches presented at the Policy Forum, which were further developed and reworked for this book. They offer important messages for national and institutional higher education policy-makers on the conditions that allow IQA to become a tool for the identification of needed change. While policy-makers do not themselves implement QA, they play an important role in developing QA policies and in creating an enabling environment for IQA to function at its best.

We would like to thank the four contributors, John Brennan, David D. Dill, Lee Harvey, and Maria José Lemaitre for drafting, presenting, and subsequently revising their papers into chapters for

this publication. They form a group of leading scholars in the area of QA. Michaela Martin from IIEP is thanked for her editing of this publication and the preparation of policy recommendations in the conclusions.

Suzanne Grant Lewis (Director, IIEP-UNESCO)
Wu Yan (Director General, HEEC, China)
Wu Daguang (Vice-President, Xiamen University, China)

INTRODUCTION

John Brennan and Michaela Martin

Internal quality assurance and the preservation and transformation of quality higher education

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are an integral part of global knowledge societies. Their core mission as creators and disseminators of knowledge positions them as knowledge organizations. The changing roles of universities and other HEIs reflect societal changes, which inevitably create opportunities and threats, as well as important gains and losses.

This publication contains papers based on keynote presentations at the Xiamen Policy Forum, organized by IIEP in collaboration with the Chinese Higher Education Evaluation Centre (HEEC) and Xiamen University, and held from 9 to 11 June 2016 in Xiamen. A central proposition of the Forum was that internal quality assurance (IQA) can play a crucial role in identifying needed changes as well as designing strategies to achieve desired results. The papers thus aimed to discuss the conditions in which IQA can contribute to effective and needed change in higher education.

In *Chapter 1*, David D. Dill reviews the conditions under which quality assurance, both internal and external, can lead to quality improvement in teaching and learning. Dill stresses the need to develop stronger collective governance processes, arguing that a dialogue among peers and internal stakeholders should be at the centre of IQA, with national and institutional administrators supporting it.

In *Chapter 2*, John Brennan maintains that within a rapidly transforming higher education sector and labour market it is necessary to integrate the needs of employability into IQA. However, he cautions that employability should be considered from a longer-term perspective, and not be directed merely to preparing students for their first entry into the labour market.

In *Chapter 3*, Maria José Lemaitre stresses that IQA should be part of the overall strategic management cycle of a HEI. Lemaitre sees the role of IQA as supporting a university's vision and mission, which should necessarily contain an element of quality enhancement. She views IQA as a set of mechanisms to enable quality management in HEIs, and argues that quality management in turn contributes to the overall strategic management of the institution.

In *Chapter 4*, Lee Harvey reminds us that the development of quality culture should be the most important outcome of IQA. However, he views quality culture as a complex concept which involves change in the attitudes and thinking of higher education professionals rather than simply tools or procedures to improve quality. Harvey discusses the conditions which need to be met to transform teaching and learning. He particularly warns the reader that a bureaucratic approach to QA can be an obstacle rather than a support for quality enhancement.

Higher education quality and employability in changing times

Two principal themes guided the discussions at the Forum. One concerned higher education quality and how it can best be maintained and enhanced. The other addressed the employability of graduates as one of the principal outcomes that higher education is expected to provide and develop, at a time when many countries face growing graduate unemployment. Both issues are central to the roles of higher education in contemporary societies, and both are frequently considered to be under threat in many parts of the world.

An underlying theme in the discussions at the Forum was the question of what constitutes 'quality' in higher education. Different interests are reflected in various answers given to this question. The internal values of academic disciplines as viewed by the teaching staff in HEIs provide one set of answers. Student satisfaction, employers' needs, and the structure of modern knowledge societies provide yet another set of answers. The challenge is to collect information on the perceptions of all these stakeholders, and more importantly to compare these perceptions in order to represent all legitimate stakeholder interests.

In many developed countries, a major driving force behind the expansion of higher education has been a concern with employability

and the requirements of labour markets, as well as the changing knowledge and skills required of graduates. The concept of a 'graduate job' continues to be referred to in policy and other discourses, but what this means evolves along with the labour market and as higher education expands and diversifies. Employability is understood to be an important component of quality in today's higher education systems. However, what it actually means and how it relates to other aspects of quality in higher education is a complex question.

The changing meaning of employability is of course part of a broader set of developments within knowledge societies which affect the relationship between higher education and other institutions and organizations. Universities have no monopoly over knowledge production, and knowledge increasingly flows in both directions, into and out of HEIs. These flows affect organizational boundaries, analysed by Gibbons *et al.* (1994) with regard to new modes of knowledge production which entail collaboration among researchers in universities and in other types of organization.

Teaching now includes interdisciplinary courses and work-based learning in university courses for students at the beginning of their careers. There is also a growing tendency for employers to provide continuing education and learning opportunities for their staff at different career points. These can involve cooperation with university faculties and their rich resources, including knowledge bases to which HEIs have contributed substantially.

Combining local and global concerns requires differentiation to drive effective change

While some areas of higher education seek to combine the local and the global, this distinction appears as one of the forms of differentiation to be found among virtually all higher education systems. A few institutions claim world-class status and global impact, while others, more modestly, engage actively with local organizations and institutions and become involved in economic, social, and cultural activities in order to help develop and indeed transform local communities. It is highly important within the knowledge society that the local does not ignore the global, but neither should the global ignore the local.

Differentiation within higher education systems links the issues of employability and quality in the present publication. Borrowing the terminology introduced by Clark (1983), we may say that it takes both vertical forms (i.e. hierarchy and stratification of institutions) and horizontal forms (i.e. differences between institutions in terms of missions and functions).

Vertical differentiation arises out of the reputational hierarchies of institutions, linked to features of social stratification in the wider society. Horizontal differentiation, in contrast, concerns more functional differences: professional versus academic courses, pure versus applied research. These are sometimes manifested in different organizational sectors within institutions and generally reflect different kinds of linkage with employability and labour markets, local for some institutions and more global for others.

The forms differentiation takes in a higher education system have important implications for QA. In vertically differentiated systems, QA needs to demonstrate that some components are better than others, with rankings and league tables providing valuable information to consumers and funders of higher education. In horizontally differentiated systems, QA has more to do with how institutions differ in the quality of the different services they provide to their societies. It too assists consumers in finding the HEI best suited to their needs and preferences. There can also be a mismatch if the QA system creates an unintended hierarchy of institutions by failing to take into account the distinctive qualities to be found chiefly in the lower-status institutions. How QA relates to diversity in higher education provision is thus a crucial but challenging issue.

Viewing IQA as a change agent

A main focus of the Policy Forum was to examine the potential of IQA in HEIs to help them to respond effectively to changing external circumstances, and at the same time to continue to play an innovative and transformative role within society, driving change as well as responding to it. It became clear that conditions differ across countries and institutions, partly reflecting national traditions and institutional cultures, but also reflecting current power distributions, which determine whose interests receive priority in processes of institutional change and transformation.

A condition which potentially drives change is the close association between internal quality processes – faculty observing each other in the classroom and evaluating the quality of students' academic work, formal and informal feedback received from students – and the practice of teaching and learning in a particular institution. This association can provide opportunities for applying the knowledge gained through IQA processes to the improvement of teaching and learning within an institution. But whether educational change is achieved or not depends on another set of factors, not least of which are internal management, the organizational structure, the response to the requirements of EQA agencies, and the interests pursued by the internal stakeholders. IQA can be both a conservative, conformist force and an innovative, transformative one. Different contexts and situations require varied approaches to IQA. Another important factor is the amount of institutional resources available for QA activities relative to core activities.

Possible obstacles to change

In assessing the potential of IQA to drive and support change and transformation in HEIs, potential obstacles to change have to be recognized. Concerns about reputational and other forms of potential damage to institutions from EQA processes can be legitimate. Becoming different carries risks, possibly large ones, and a preference for convention and conformity is understandable. It is therefore not surprising that the focus of IQA is often the attempt to obtain a good rating from the EQA process. Although it may be of limited or no benefit to students, and not enhance the quality of their educational experiences, this does not prevent institutions from continuing the practice of ranking.

As already discussed, mass higher education systems are increasingly differentiated, with many kinds of provider supplying different offerings to a variety of clients. The quality of the offerings is important, but it needs to be remembered that individual HEIs are unlikely to be good at everything. The question 'quality of what?' is always an important one, the right answer usually being dependent on who is asking the question. IQA is directed to the practices of individual HEIs. However, the importance of higher education is

ultimately external, in the contribution that it makes to society through employability, citizenship, community development, and many other economic, social, and cultural benefits. Thus, while IQA may be central to achieving quality, it alone cannot define it. IQA requires external elements just as much as EQA requires internal perspectives.

Connecting the internal and the external: the role of national frameworks

The relationship between internal and external quality assurance (EQA) was the focus of several presentations and discussions at the Forum. EQA has been an almost universal development in national higher education systems over recent decades. The primary function has been regulatory, ensuring that quality is being maintained in expanding systems of higher education, as new providers join established universities.

In many cases it is the EQA requirements that are the driving force behind the shaping of IQA. The need to satisfy the external requirements of an authoritative regulatory body is of course important. This is especially true for the less well-established institutions which are in the process of building their capacities, relationships, and reputations with funding and client groups. Well-established institutions with good capacities and reputations are generally less concerned by these processes. But an important message from the Forum was that all institutions stand to benefit from IQA. At its heart, IQA is a learning process, a way of identifying what is being done well and what could be done better, and therefore identifying what needs to change. It can inform an institution about who is satisfied and who is not, about its strengths and weaknesses, and about how the latter can be remedied. Quality provision of services is a responsibility of the institutions themselves, and a large part of the discussion turned on whether this was enhanced or limited by the efforts and processes of the external agencies.

IQA in support of quality development

Lastly, the Forum also addressed the question of how IQA can support the continuous development and improvement of quality in HEIs. This issue is relevant to all institutions, including new and

alternative providers. An institution may be doing things well, but other institutions may be doing the same things better or differently. Contexts and circumstances change, and what worked well in the past will not necessarily be needed in the future.

As has already been noted, IQA requires external perspectives: the crossing of organizational boundaries and sharing of information among internal and external stakeholders. A review of an institution's existing internal arrangements is only part of the picture IQA needs to provide. There is a need for multiple perspectives and for external evidence to compare and contrast with internal reviews. IQA thus needs to be part of a larger framework of comparative analysis of modern differentiated higher education systems, in which national and international data are brought together concerning the similarities and differences to be found both within and between different systems and institutions.

Among the elements to be investigated using such frameworks are the changing economies and labour markets in which HEIs and their graduates need to position themselves. Challenges and opportunities are presented by developments in information technologies, which are providing new and innovative ways of doing existing things. They also offer the possibility of doing new things and doing them well. They provide new forms of communication and collaboration across institutional and national boundaries, leading to new kinds of relationship and partnership. Through new relationships and partnerships, new things can be achieved, with implications in turn for HEIs and the societies in which they are located.

Notwithstanding the preference for internal over external approaches to QA, it is also acknowledged that IQA needs support (though not domination) from EQA. The principal ways this may happen include the following:

- External bodies – whether national, international, or regional – need to supply evidence about higher education structures, processes, and outcomes in order to enable IQA to compare an HEI's local strengths and weaknesses with that of other HEIs.
- External bodies can also provide information about good practices and innovations which can be applied to different institutions.

- In providing information on higher education system diversity, more emphasis should be placed on differences than on hierarchies.
- Support services should be offered to institutions, such as identification of peer reviewers for use in IQA, contacts with employers, and availability of employer expertise to assist in IQA.
- Information should be provided to support more effective delivery of outcomes such as employability and social mobility.

The list can no doubt be extended. However, the main point is that QA takes both external and internal forms, which can be brought together in constructive and informative ways. Both processes should be involved in and should emphasize change and differentiation in modern higher education systems, but in a constructive and collaborative rather than a controlling or competitive way. The most appropriate way to do this will be discussed in the subsequent chapters of this publication.

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Gibbons, M.; Limoges, C.; Nowotny, H.; Schwartzman, S.; Scott, P.; Trow, M. 1994. *The new production of knowledge: The dynamics of science and research in contemporary societies.* London: SAGE Publications.

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1. VIEWING INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AS STRENGTHENED COLLECTIVE GOVERNANCE FOR IMPROVED STUDENT LEARNING

David D. Dill

The definition of academic quality is frequently a point of debate. Academic quality can be defined as equivalent to academic standards, that is to say the knowledge, skills, and attitudes achieved by graduates as a result of their academic programme or degree. Over their lifetimes the 'human capital' developed by graduates provides both private and public economic benefits as well as valued societal outcomes in the form of improved parenting, healthier lifestyles, greater civic participation, and increased social cohesion. This conception of academic quality is increasingly reflected in national higher education policies concerned with improving academic outcomes, the educational 'value-added' of an academic programme or degree.

The basic argument of this chapter is that all institutions of higher education, including the most highly ranked and respected universities, can enhance their internal processes for ensuring and improving teaching and learning. In a 2015 lecture John Hennessy, the President of Stanford University, persuasively argued that his university could both markedly improve the quality of instruction and learning and lower costs by making changes to the university's internal processes (Hennessy, 2015). The key challenge in this respect is to make internal governance of academic programmes and instruction as rigorous, evidence-based, and subject to continual review by academic peers as are the institutional processes governing research in the best universities.

The design of effective internal quality assurance (IQA) is the heart of the matter, and it is widely impacted by the external forces increasingly affecting academia, including universities' efforts to ensure academic quality.

1.1 Strengths and weaknesses of public policies to enhance the quality of higher education

Public policies designed to ensure and improve academic quality have had a mixed impact (Dill and Beerkens, 2013). Universal national assessments or accreditations of subject fields within a university have encouraged more attention by faculty to improving programme instruction, but have proven expensive, draining faculty energy and producing diminishing returns over time. They may also lessen the incentive for universities themselves to develop collective action by the academic staff as a whole to ensure academic quality. A second type of assessment, external quality evaluation of the university, is often too 'top-down' or comprehensive in its focus to have a positive impact on the educational quality of academic programmes. These institutional reviews often assume that the 'hard' factors of rules, procedures, and decision structures play a critical role, and tend to ignore the 'soft' factors by which universities communicate the attitudes and norms that significantly influence academic performance (Kaplan, 2006; Paradeise and Thoenig, 2013). Institutional reviews can also encourage a 'culture of compliance' in which universities adopt highly visible but superficial mechanisms to impress external evaluators, such as the appointment of academic quality officers; they may even encourage institutions to change the composition of the teaching staff in order to gain better evaluation ratings.

Performance-based funding for instruction and research has been another means through which governments have attempted to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. This has, however, generally been ineffective in improving teaching and learning within universities. It is obviously difficult to identify valid and reliable performance measures of academic quality. Student grades or marks, progression towards a degree, or graduation rates, for example, can all be increased by lowering academic standards. In addition, increased competition for research funds may motivate academic staff to invest less time in instruction and in the institutional processes required to ensure and improve student learning.

Policies encouraging greater authority for university administrators have also been implemented in a number of countries. In the contemporary world, active promotion of high-quality education and

research within universities is becoming more essential, and strong leadership by their presidents has long been a characteristic of the best colleges and universities in the United States (Dill, 2014). However, if national policies instead encourage centralized decision-making in universities and diminish faculty influence over academic governance often described as 'managerialism' these policies may undermine needed efforts to improve academic quality and university efficiency. An econometric study of US universities (Carroll, Dickson, and Ruseski, 2012) discovered that decisions made primarily by university administrators led to an over-investment in university 'non-academic quality' – such as athletics, amenities for student life, and residential facilities – as well as to higher total costs for undergraduate students. In contrast, decisions reflecting greater faculty participation in institutional governance led to lower investment in non-academic quality and to increased academic quality, as measured by the scope and rigour of academic programme offerings as well as faculty qualifications.

Policies designed to increase the transparency of higher education by providing student applicants with better information about academic institutions constitute another set of actions designed to improve educational quality. They have proved that they can improve educational choices. However, studies of university or subject rankings (Dill and Soo, 2005) reveal that they frequently emphasize research performance measures or reputational ratings primarily based on research. Such rankings encourage some universities to cross-subsidize research expenditures with funds originally intended for instruction (Ehrenberg, 2012) and, as previously noted, may motivate academic staff to invest more time in research and less in instruction. Advocates of transparency often assume better informed student choice will also lead to improvement in the quality of academic programmes. However, as a recent respected study of academic standards in the market-oriented US system concluded, 'there is no reason to expect that students and parents as *consumers* will prioritize undergraduate learning as an outcome' (Arum and Roksa, 2011: 137).

Finally, one clear indicator of the limitations of external policy-driven efforts at academic QA is the rapid, almost continual change in the design of these national policies in many countries. The reality is that improving academic quality and student learning is a complex

human undertaking, which is the reason most nations have historically delegated the assurance of academic standards to the collective faculty of each university.

In addition to national policy, another external force warrants attention: innovations in information technology or online learning. Economists have traditionally argued that institutions of higher education were subject to the 'cost disease' (Bowen, 2013). That is, like other personal services such as medicine, academic instruction requires direct personal interaction. Therefore, academic wages necessarily rise at a rate greater than increases in productivity, because technical efficiencies are difficult to achieve in this sector. However, economist William Bowen, co-author of the 'cost disease' concept, now asserts that productivity growth in higher education instruction and learning has become both technically feasible and essential.

As evidence, Bowen reports on a rigorous study (Bowen *et al.*, 2014) of a statistics course in which Carnegie Mellon University's (CMU) Open Learning Institute online instructional software was combined with a weekly face-to-face meeting. This 'hybrid' course also employed adaptive learning techniques, which provide timely online hints for students as well as valuable feedback data for the teachers. The study was carried out at six US public university campuses, and students were randomly assigned to either a conventional classroom version of the course or the hybrid model, in order to control for selection effects. Findings were remarkably consistent across campuses. The hybrid course was found to yield essentially the same learning outcomes with much less face-to-face staff time and 25 per cent less reported time invested in the course by students. Another key finding was that an important subset of students, those who were relatively less prepared academically, did as well with the hybrid model as did their better-prepared classmates.

Bowen does not argue that online education can be an effective substitute for traditional university first degree programmes, but his analysis leads him to call for openness to new means of instruction by institutions of higher education, and he emphasizes the need for reforms in institutional processes of academic governance:

> Decisions … have to be made as to how to shape the export and import of new pedagogies across institutions as well as across fields

> of study. Advances in technology make it imperative to move away from historical notions that departments must drive all decisions of this kind. Moving away from a vertical, departmental, 'silo' approach to resolving important questions will not be easy, but it is essential. We have to organize ourselves to think more horizontally (Bowen, 2016: 1415).

1.2 Using the design principles of the 'commons' model to guide quality assurance within higher education institutions

A particularly valuable framework for improving IQA within universities is the 'commons' model for addressing issues of collective action in self-governing communities, as developed by the Nobel laureate in economics Elinor Ostrom. In her Nobel Prize lecture, Ostrom (2009) emphasized that neither the regulatory intervention of the state nor market forces are the most effective institutional mechanisms for governing, managing, and providing complex public goods. Instead, she identified universal design principles which enable individuals within self-governing organizations to effectively address collective action dilemmas.

Do Ostrom's principles apply to institutions of higher education? She argues that a commons perspective is most applicable in organizations where effective cooperation and integration among independent individuals is critical to performance, as is clearly and increasingly the case in university instruction. A commons perspective is also most appropriate when organizations are self-organizing communities, the organization's members share common values, the organization possesses a 'nested' structure with multiple levels of rule-making (similar to the 'federal' model of academic governance in most universities), and the organization itself is of a size to facilitate the active participation of its members.

In one of her recent studies (Ostrom and Hess, 2007), Ostrom directly applied her framework to universities and concluded that they are best understood as humanly constructed, self-organizing, 'knowledge commons'. The following sections will utilize Ostrom's (2005) design principles to clarify the best means of rebuilding and strengthening the collective capacity of faculty members within universities to implement and improve student learning.

Recognition by government

An important first question is whether the government recognizes and confirms the professional autonomy and responsibility of commons members to govern their own institutions. Such recognition strengthens members' motivation and commitment to investing the necessary time and effort in the collective action necessary to address challenges to effective performance. One example of this type of recognition is the statement made in the Communiqué issued by the Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education held in Berlin in 2003: 'consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework' (Berlin Communiqué, 2003).

Another example of such government recognition is the US Federal Policy on Human Subjects Research in academic institutions, implemented over the last 25 years (Lynn and Nelson, 2005). Because the US federal government finances over two-thirds of all expenditures on academic research and scholarship, this policy applies to all public and private colleges and universities in the United States. The policy requires all related academic studies to be approved at the proposal stage by an Institutional Review Board within each college or university. These Boards are composed primarily of university-appointed faculty peers. Significantly, negative decisions about proposed research issued by these panels cannot be reversed by any university administrator or by a court of law. While these review boards have been subject to academic criticism, this policy nonetheless represents one of the strongest national confirmations of university autonomy and collegial authority that I have discovered.

Strengthening the shared values of commons members

Recent intensive case studies (Paradeise and Thoenig, 2013) of leading universities in France, Italy, Switzerland, China, and the United States have produced general conclusions regarding the internal governance processes by which contemporary universities sustain or attain standards of excellence in research. Consistent with Ostrom's commons model, these studies have concluded that academic quality is primarily

sustained through the social interactions that occur within and between academic sub-units and among academic staff at the university. These collegial processes play a major role in building shared identities and developing valuable common knowledge in research among academic staff, as well as generating and communicating communal norms and values through socialization and internal regulation. Lastly, these processes legitimate certain decision-making criteria within academic institutions and have an impact on the distribution of authority and power within the university.

However, external assessments of the quality of university education suggest that traditional collegial processes do not appear to be as effective in ensuring the quality of teaching and learning (Dill and Beerkens, 2010). External quality evaluations often reveal substantial variation in the academic norms influencing teaching, student assessment, and marking standards across disciplines and fields within the same university. Those who have taught in one of the newly emerging inter-disciplinary or cross-disciplinary fields are likely to have experienced significant debates among faculty colleagues about academic standards in both instruction and research.

Thus, one valuable way to enhance internal academic quality assurance is for respected academic professionals to generate and communicate guidelines clarifying expectations about instruction and student assessment for all teaching staff. Such guidelines are a core component of US national policy on human subjects research.

Guidelines may be developed at the national level, similar to those promulgated by the Higher Education Academy (HEA, 2018) in the United Kingdom, or, more valuably, developed and communicated by a university's Faculty Senate or its Centre for Teaching and Learning. An influential example of university-based guidelines is the 'Principles of Teaching and Learning' developed by the Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence and Educational Innovation at CMU in the United States. These principles were derived from the research of the University's Open Learning Initiative, which creates academic courses based on the findings of learning science and evaluates those courses in terms of student performance in traditional university classrooms. Lastly, related guidelines are provided and disseminated through a

free, informative, high-quality online course, 'Academic integrity: Values, skills, action', developed by FutureLearn at the University of Auckland in New Zealand. Successful completion of a similar online course, addressing the ethics of human subjects research, is required by the University of North Carolina for all academic staff and students conducting such research.

Cultivating the ability of commons members to learn from one another

Ways to improve academic quality can also be learned from other respected universities. Several US websites, for instance, offer valuable assistance which a university's Centre for Teaching and Learning could use to support improvements in instruction in its own institution. The above-mentioned Open Learning Initiative, covering course design and student learning, at CMU offers free, carefully developed and evaluated online university courses to anyone who wishes to use their materials for learning or teaching. These materials include the course syllabus as well as online learning materials and exams for numerous web-based courses which could be adapted or adopted by academic instructors anywhere in the world. While all the course materials are in English, CMU is primarily a school of engineering, so many of the courses are in the sciences and likely to be broadly applicable internationally. A second related resource on course design is the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT), which consults with US HEIs to help achieve their student learning and retention goals while reducing their instructional costs. The NCAT website provides free guidelines on redesigning college courses using their proven methodology, which features more active forms of student learning.

One reason the many institutional Centers of Teaching and Learning in the United States have had a limited impact on improving academic quality is that they often adopt the individual faculty member as their unit of analysis. These centres focus their efforts on faculty volunteers who seek instructional assistance, and/or on the redesign of individual modules or courses of instruction. However, research in Northern Europe (Hovdhaugen, 2011) confirms the positive influence of the structure or 'cohesion' of an academic programme as a whole on student progression and degree completion. Similar research in the

United States (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991) indicates that learning of academic content as well as cognitive development are most significantly associated with the pattern and sequence of the courses in which students enrol, by programme requirements which integrate learning from separate courses, and by the frequency of communication and interaction among faculty members in the subject field. Following Ostrom's perspective, Centres for Teaching and Learning might be better advised to focus on supporting and motivating collective action by the faculty from each academic programme to redesign their curriculum and courses to maximize the effectiveness of instruction and learning.

As has been found in research on leading universities (Paradeise and Thoenig, 2013), the evaluations and influence of respected faculty peers are a much more powerful incentive for real academic change than administrative policies, government edicts, or market forces. In their research and scholarship faculty members continually learn and improve their performance based on peer reviews and criticism of their papers and publications, as well as through contacts with esteemed colleagues. Similarly, the best means for cultivating faculty engagement in quality assurance within a university is through a rigorous process of 'academic quality work' (AQW), a term coined by Bill Massy of Stanford University, who designed and helped implement the University Grant Committee's Academic Audit Process in Hong Kong (Massy, 2010; Massy, Graham, and Short, 2007). In AQW, each academic programme or department's procedures for ensuring and improving the quality of its educational provision are carefully reviewed by a panel of university peers. These reviews examine a programme's stated learning objectives, the design of its curriculum and co-curriculum, the teaching and learning methods employed in its courses, its means of assessing student learning, and the processes the programme uses to ensure educational quality.[1]

1. AQW was developed in Hong Kong with an emphasis on improving teaching and learning, and was also initially implemented in this form in the US public university systems of Missouri and Tennessee. However, the concept of academic quality improvement can also be applied to research. In Missouri the AQW process was subsequently successfully adapted to include the review both of a programme's quality of teaching and learning and of the quality of its research. For a discussion of this combined process see Massy, Graham, and Short (2007).

A very effective academic quality assurance process exists at a highly respected university in Hong Kong, where an elected Faculty Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning Quality reviews annual reports from each academic programme on its process for ensuring teaching and learning quality. When the committee has questions about the rigour or effectiveness of a programme's processes, they meet in person with the programme's faculty to discuss needed changes and improvements and then follow up systematically on proposed reforms. These structured faculty discussions between respected academic peers and a programme's academic staff appear to be particularly influential in improving teaching and learning.

This point is supported by Ostrom's research on commons organizations (Ostrom and Walker, 1997), which discovered that face-to-face communication in social dilemmas is the most effective means of producing substantial increases in needed cooperation and coordination over time. Similarly, research on professional settings (Hage, 1974) shows that communication which influences individual behaviour is not vertical (as between faculty and administrators), not primarily written (as in reports or procedural documents), and not focused on the detection or imposition of sanctions. Rather, helpful communication is horizontal, with respected peers, largely verbal and face-to-face, and focused on the exchange of information about means of improving core professional tasks.

Because the rigour and effectiveness of QA often varies across departments and degree programmes within the same university, peer review of a programme's QA practices by university colleagues is more beneficial if it is truly cross-disciplinary, or horizontal, as Bowen has suggested. Faculty members in the humanities need to discuss their QA tools and processes with faculty members from medicine, social scientists need to compare their methods with natural scientists, and so on. This is the most effective means to ensure academic standards within a university and to promote the transfer of effective tools for improving instructional quality and student learning across programmes. If the faculty of each academic institution are collectively responsible for the academic standards of each programme, this reality should be clearly manifest in the design of internal academic governance processes for ensuring academic quality.

Developing more valid and reliable information for improving professional performance

The challenge of developing more valid and useful measures of added value in academia has led to experiments with standardized tests of general knowledge and skill, such as the Graduate Skills Assessment (GSA) in Australia and the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) in the United States. But there are significant issues regarding the validity and reliability of these types of instrument as means of differentiating the educational quality of universities (Dill and Beerkens, 2013).

The claim 'if you can't measure it, you can't improve it' does have relevance to academic work, certainly with regard to the progress made in the improvement of knowledge gained from academic research over the last century. But as the recent experience with the OECD's Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) Project suggests, the search for universally valid measures of added value in academia looks a lot like the quest for the Holy Grail and often distracts academic institutions from the needed reform of internal processes.

A major focus of effective internal QA should be providing incentives and support for collective action by the academic staff within each programme or department to develop valid, direct measures of learning outcomes at the subject level. As Pascarella and Terenzini (2005: 648) concluded in their exhaustive review of the available empirical research on teaching and learning in higher education:

> Assessment of department-specific learning outcomes can be a useful vehicle for change. Assessment plans and activities developed and approved by faculty can provide an empirical foundation of systematic and ongoing rethinking, redesigning, and restructuring programmes and curricula. For faculty members, trained to be sceptical about claims, evidence is the gold standard in the academy, and they are unlikely to adopt new ways of thinking or behaving without first being convinced that the new pedagogies and organizational structures are better than the old. In addition, the findings of assessment studies specific to faculty members' academic units will generate more interest and action than general or institution-wide evidence.

Tests such as the above-mentioned Graduate Skills Assessment and Collegiate Learning Assessment, however, as well as US measures of the student experience such as the National Survey of Student

Engagement (NSSE) and the University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES), could be valuable as diagnostic tools within universities. For example, they could be applied by a Centre for Teaching and Learning to identify academic programmes or departments doing particularly well or poorly in QA. Such 'evidence' could be influential in motivating the academic staff of a programme to collectively address needed improvements in instruction and learning. These measures could also help the institution identify effective practices and tools from high-scoring programmes, which could then be usefully transferred to programmes with needs.

However, if a programme's academic staff is to experiment with new teaching practices and act collectively to improve student learning, this will require, as in research, provision of time and financial resources by the university, possibly through competitive grants to programmes for innovative quality assurance. As Bowen (2013) has argued, a critical challenge for all countries is how best to increase the academic outcomes of higher education without a commensurate increase in costs. In addition to better measures of student learning, useful measures of the cost of the increasingly varied forms of instruction now possible within university courses are essential to improving academic quality and productivity. Cost per unit ratios, such as cost per student credit hour or instructional costs per course, fail to take into account the specific and rapidly changing activities which now constitute teaching and learning. Determining the productivity of the different technologies involved in teaching and learning is complex, and often of little interest to the academic staff responsible for the effectiveness of academic programmes or to the faculty as a whole. Bowen (2013) has recommended a 'portfolio approach' to curricular development which would encourage consideration of the most effective and efficient instructional activities for different sizes and types of course; these include using lower-cost 'hybrid' instructional approaches with well-designed online instruction in large introductory courses in appropriate fields, using more costly digital adaptive learning techniques permitting instructors to provide personalized lessons and assessments in advanced seminars and laboratory courses, and using tutorial instruction in 'capstone' courses designed to provide students with an integrative or summative experience at the end of

their academic programme. By associating the costs of a course with relevant instructional activity, academic programmes, deans, and the collective university faculty will have the type of information needed to make decisions about improving student learning in the most efficient manner. Massy's *Reengineering the university* (2016) illustrates how a university can develop an activity-based costing model for academic courses to assist administrators and academic staff to improve quality and productivity. This approach is now being used experimentally in universities in the United States and Asia. In addition, the Pilbara Group in Australia has developed and is marketing a similar activity-based costing model for academic courses, which it is now applying to other countries.

Developing more effective collective governance processes

Universities have always had internal processes by which the collective academic staff ensured academic standards. These include processes for developing, approving, and evaluating academic courses and programmes, evaluating and improving instruction, and ensuring both the integrity of grading standards across subject fields and the validity of means for assessing student learning outcomes.

A number of the more influential subject accreditation processes – the learning-oriented review processes developed by the former Teacher Education Accreditation Council and the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) in the United States, as well as the review process of the General Medical Council in the United Kingdom – provide potentially valuable models for the design of more effective collective QA processes within universities (Dill and Beerkens, 2013). An important component of these accreditation processes is the adoption of a more rigorous evaluation methodology in conformity with social science standards of evidence. These reviews strongly emphasize the development within universities of a 'culture of evidence' (Shavelson, 2010) for ensuring and improving academic standards through progress monitoring, feedback, and encouragement of active experimentation in academic programmes.

From this perspective the key issue for effective IQA is not whether an institution's core academic processes require the formal

submission of information and reports by academic programmes. Rather, the critical question is whether evidence-based judgements about academic programme quality have been made with reference to these core academic processes, resulting in selective scrutiny, effective support, and observable improvement in identified programmes.

In the most respected universities there is an appropriate balance of strong administrative academic leadership with effective, collective faculty responsibility for and engagement in ensuring and improving academic quality. How can this balance be best achieved (Massy, Graham, and Short, 2007)? In one approach, the Board of Control of each university adopts a systematic institutional process for evaluating academic quality work and spurring its improvement. In another, responsibility is clearly assigned to the relevant academic administrators as well as to the collective faculty to review and improve the institution's AQW. This includes, for example, specifying the collective faculty's responsibility for developing and implementing peer reviews of each programme's quality, and specifying the responsibility of the academic deans and chief academic officer to approve the reviews of each programme's AQW, the programme's response to the review, and the programme's plans for improvement and implementation. A third approach is the adoption of a public mechanism for rating the relative performance of each programme's AQW. For example, the University Grants Committee in Hong Kong adopted a five-level 'capability maturity scale' describing the relative effort or stage of development of a programme's or institution's AQW (Massy, 2010). Immature entities can thereby be encouraged to do better while mature entities can be appropriately celebrated.

University planning and budgeting processes also play a significant role in IQA, as has been well illustrated over the last 25 years by Stanford University in the United States (Massy, 2016). In recent decades, most leading US universities, including publicly funded ones like the University of North Carolina, have reformed their administrative structure to ensure, like Stanford, that academic values effectively guide financial planning and budgeting. This has been accomplished by assigning responsibility for all planning and budgeting decisions to the chief academic officer, who usually has the title of Provost or Vice President of Academic Affairs. This

responsibility involves developing and allocating a comprehensive operating budget, including all restricted and unrestricted operating revenue and expense for the next year, as well as the university's capital budget.

At Stanford, as at other leading US universities, the Provost is a senior professor, most often with prior experience as a department chair or dean. In order to guarantee that planning and budgeting decisions truly reflect the university's collective academic values, the Provost's decisions are made in close consultation with a University Budget Committee. At Stanford, this committee is composed primarily of academic administrators, who are also university professors, as well as of experienced senior faculty, including the chair of the Stanford Faculty Senate. Full-time Stanford faculty members represent more than two-thirds of the University Budget Committee members.

The Stanford financial planning and budgeting process involves a number of noteworthy practices. Certain academic units such as the Medical School and Business School, which have access to substantial external funding such as private gifts and research grants or contracts, are included in the comprehensive budget, but unlike other academic units they are funded on a formula basis. This formula funding, as well as needed cross-subsidies among the remaining academic units, ensures that all academic units receive sufficient financial resources to maintain and improve their academic quality. All allocations in the comprehensive budget, and the academic values informing these choices, are announced to the members of the Stanford University community annually via the Stanford University Budget Plan. This very informative document effectively illustrates and communicates the university's core values to all members of the university. Lastly, Stanford, like other leading US universities, has sometimes set a specific limit on administrative expenses, calculated as a percentage of the total budget, as a budget planning parameter. As a consequence, funds are reallocated as needed to ensure maximum investment in academic instruction and research. Similarly, establishing a minimum percentage of a total university budget to be allocated to instruction could be an effective tool for combating the declining institutional investment in teaching and learning now evident in the United States and a number of other countries (Ehrenberg, 2012).

1.3 Conclusion

Over the many centuries of their existence, universities have been continually adjusting and adapting their internal governance and core academic processes. As publicly supported or subsidized organizations, universities have necessarily been conscious of and responsive to legitimate government directives. However, improvements in the core activities of instruction, research, and public service, and their respective management within universities, have also occurred over time, most often without government intervention.

Given the critical importance of higher education to individuals and society, collective action to improve the effectiveness of each university's internal processes for ensuring and improving academic standards would genuinely be in the public interest. The design principles of Ostrom's (2005) 'commons' model provide a valuable approach to the development of more effective public policy for ensuring academic quality within self-governing universities:

- Government policy should first clearly recognize and confirm the professional autonomy and responsibility of the collective faculty of each university to govern and ensure its academic standards.
- This policy should encourage respected academic professionals to define, communicate, and strengthen the shared values and professional obligations required of all academic staff regarding their individual behaviour and collective responsibility for instruction and student assessment.
- The policy should cultivate the ability of academic staff to learn ways of improving instruction and learning from one another, through better designed collegial evaluation and monitoring of each academic programme's mechanisms for ensuring academic standards.
- The policy should encourage the development within each university of more well-founded and reliable information and evidence for evaluating and improving teaching and learning. The policy should stimulate appropriate faculty involvement and engagement in each university's processes of academic planning and budgeting, to ensure that academic values predominate in institutional decisions affecting academic standards.

As these principles suggest, and consistent with the traditional values of academic research, the best approach to ensuring and continually improving instruction and learning in higher education is through systematic, evidence-based analysis and continual review by academic peers within each institution.

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2. LINKING EMPLOYABILITY AND INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE: HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR GRADUATES

John Brennan

Higher education has been expanding rapidly in most parts of the world. At the same time, it has become increasingly differentiated, with different kinds of institution providing different kinds of educational experience to different kinds of student. In the terms of American sociologist Martin Trow's well-known distinction between elite, mass, and universal higher education systems, in many countries higher education has reached its 'universal form', defined by Trow as the exposure to higher education of over 50 per cent of a nation's population. In one of his last publications (2010: 605), Trow looked further into our future, noting:

> We are moving toward a situation that might be described as a 'learning society', with very large parts of the population more or less continually engaged in formal education of one kind or another. Under those circumstances, education becomes more highly distributed, taking many different forms in different locations, offering a variety of certificates and degrees. ... Moreover, the success of such education will be attested not through examinations and certificates, but through an individual's performance on a job, or of a unit performing a function or service.

The expansion and differentiation of higher education has been closely associated with the development of a so-called 'knowledge economy' or even 'knowledge society' (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994). Higher education assumes an ever greater role in such societies, although it shares its role of knowledge creator and transmitter increasingly with other organizations, such as research foundations and private enterprises (Brennan, 2012). It performs tasks for new clients, and it innovates. It delivers new tasks, and it delivers traditional tasks in new ways. In such a situation of rapid transformation and increasing diversity, questions about quality inevitably arise.

Higher education in its traditional and elite forms has little need for legitimization, but higher education that is 'new' and intended for a 'mass', or even 'universal', audience must satisfy its clients, be accountable

to its funders, and prove that it is performing worthwhile and socially useful functions. These needs are usually expressed in economic terms: the generation of economically useful knowledge through research and the creation of an economically efficient workforce through education and training. Higher education institutions (HEIs) need to be able to demonstrate that they are producing value and that they have the right processes in place to do so. Internal quality assurance (IQA) processes, which have precisely this function, thus become increasingly important within HEIs. They are needed to ensure and to demonstrate that what is new is also good, and what is good is also useful. This usefulness is generally defined almost exclusively in terms of benefits to national economies and labour markets.

IQA processes can take many different forms, but central to them is the objective of ensuring that educational aims are appropriate and being achieved, and that courses and programmes are adapting and developing to reflect changing external conditions, which include the future employment needs of their students. IQA can enhance the quality of educational provision by identifying and sharing good and innovative practices across and beyond institutional boundaries.

This chapter examines the potential benefits of IQA for higher education's capacity to contribute effectively to ensuring the employability of its graduates, and through this to the successful development of wider knowledge economies. It is divided into four parts: (1) an examination of changing conditions and trends in higher education's relationship with employment, (2) an examination of the aims, processes, and impacts of IQA processes, (3) an examination of ways to bring employability more centrally into IQA, and (4) a consideration of the differences that this might make to modern knowledge societies and to the roles played by HEIs in these societies.

2.1 Higher education and employment: changing conditions and new trends

The massification and differentiation of higher education systems in recent decades in many countries has brought new providers into higher education systems, some to do new things and some to do old things in new ways. Expansion has inevitably entailed a greater diversity among

students, in terms of their social and educational backgrounds and their experiences in higher education as well as in their subsequent lives and careers. People increasingly engage with higher education at different stages in the life course. Higher education is no longer mainly just a transitional period between leaving secondary school and entering the labour market. Workers need to update their knowledge and skills in light of changing employment conditions and opportunities at different points in their lives. For some, this may mean a return to university, though as already noted higher education has no exclusive monopoly on new knowledge – neither its creation nor its transmission – within modern knowledge societies.

All of this is driven by the perceived requirements of modern knowledge economies and the political drivers behind them. For example, the European Union's central development objective, as stated in the Lisbon strategy, was 'to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' (European Council, 2000). This strategy entails the requirement that 'Europe's education and training systems need to adapt both to the demands of the knowledge society and to the need for an improved level and quality of employment' (European Council, 2000). The transformation of many countries into knowledge societies, together with reformed education systems, is beginning to provide citizens with 'new employment possibilities, more fulfilling jobs, new tools for education and training, easier access to public services, increased inclusion of disadvantaged people or regions' (Välimaa and Hoffman, 2008: 15). Similar sentiments have been expressed by many other international and national organizations around the world. They paint a picture of a changing world with new opportunities, but also with challenges for HEIs to adapt and change in order to seize these opportunities.

Individuals in developing knowledge societies may find new opportunities in the job market but also new uncertainties: about the availability of jobs, about their location, and about the knowledge and skills required to perform them. Higher education thus becomes a preparation for uncertain futures, raising the question of how best to prepare for the unknown. The relevance to future employment of the knowledge and skills acquired in higher education may be quite clear or

quite limited, but may possibly also be quite different in the long term and the short term.

Most graduates obtain jobs shortly after they have left higher education. For some, higher education is a direct preparation for that first job, though it might not continue to be relevant to subsequent jobs. For others, the relevance of the degree is less obvious, though the usefulness of the broader skills and knowledge acquired may in fact make it highly relevant. For still others, the skills and knowledge acquired may not be particularly relevant to that first job but could still have a major influence on their attitude to work, their capacities, and their ambitions and the likelihood of achieving them.

Higher education's relationship to employment is not just about 'getting a job'. It is about doing that job, and indeed changing that job, as well as about getting a different job at different stages in the life course. Higher education does provide students with skills and competences which will be useful in the workplace. But it also provides them with a broader knowledge base which they can apply across different employment fields. It provides them with networks and relationships, confidence and aspirations which will help shape their approach to their work and movement through the labour market. And lastly, it will affect how others regard and treat them, as well as what treatment they expect. In this regard, the status and reputation (both educational and social) of the HEI attended contributes a great deal.

Thus, the relationship between higher education and employment is something which has relevance for all students, whatever they study, whatever their backgrounds, and whatever their aspirations. In consequence, the relationship is relevant to higher education's role in society and, consequently, is a central factor in how higher education is valued and developed within society. In this respect, it is an important aspect of how higher education's quality and impact is assessed and assured.

The relationship between higher education and employment can and should be analysed at many different levels. There is the global knowledge economy at one end and the job that the individual graduate obtains at the other. In between is a continuum of elements including nation-states, HEIs academic disciplines, courses of study, individual

students and graduates, employers, and jobs. At all of these different levels there are questions of context, process, and impact.

Some of the different ways in which higher education links with the labour market have been summarized in the 'Quality assurance framework' developed by the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). This notes the need to balance an institutional strategic approach with a concern with subject-specific employability skills at a programme level. It points to the importance of employer involvement in the design and delivery of the curriculum, including the provision of work-based learning opportunities. It describes the rise of business development units within universities and their contributions to curriculum development, entrepreneurship, and links with industry and employers. Other features include the advice and guidance provided to students by university careers services, partnerships between universities and professional statutory and regulatory bodies, and a range of ways for ensuring and energizing the impact of industry and professional experience in the classroom.

The QAA recently commissioned a review of employability initiatives at UK universities and colleges (QAA, 2016).[2] Some key findings were:

- UK universities and colleges are providing a wide range of innovative employability initiatives for their students.
- Employability initiatives appear to be most effective at engaging students when embedded in the curriculum and/or supported at departmental level.
- Around 50 per cent of students make use of their institution's careers service (though they may not be engaged in the full range of employability initiatives on offer).
- Employers tend to regard the ideal graduate-job applicant as someone with a good academic record who is able to demonstrate transferable generic skills.

Higher education and student employability are linked in a wide variety of ways, including the overall quality of the student experience and the wider benefits of higher education to society as a

2. The review was commissioned by the QAA and the Association of Graduate Recruiters and was undertaken by the Warwick University Institute of Employment Research in 2016.

whole. Employability concerns are generating innovations in course design and delivery in many HEIs. These involve areas such as work-based learning, entrepreneurship, and business start-ups, and the resulting changes need to be evaluated and their impacts assessed. Good practices need to be identified and shared within and across subjects and professional fields. Consequently, it is important that student employability should form a central part of QA agendas within institutions of higher education.

2.2 Internal quality assurance

While IQA naturally focuses on the internal structures and processes of institutions, it must do so in ways which take account of external conditions and requirements. Central to these are the EQA criteria that the institution is subject to. These take various forms in different places, but they impose requirements on institutions which cannot be ignored. Thus, an important goal of IQA is to ensure that external quality requirements are satisfied. Depending on the precise nature of the external requirements, these may either strengthen or weaken the capacity of the IQA mechanisms to meet particular institutional needs. However, external considerations are not restricted to the requirements of EQA. Institutions must necessarily keep themselves informed about developments in higher education generally, and in particular about what their competitors are doing. They must also take account of the requirements of funding bodies, the interests of existing and potential consumers (i.e. students and parents), and the interests and experiences of external stakeholders such as the employers of their graduates.

In many cases the development of IQA systems has been a direct reaction to EQA processes. Indeed, they may be a requirement of these processes, necessary if the higher education provision on offer – whether at institutional or course level – is to receive recognition and acceptance within the national context of which it is a part. And acceptance within a national context is generally a precondition for acceptance internationally. There is therefore a real need for institutional compliance with EQA requirements, and this will often shape core elements of the IQA processes within an institution. But IQA is not only about such compliance.

With or without the requirements of EQA agencies, most HEIs have processes, formal or otherwise, to assess the quality of their educational provision. First, they need to know whether they are 'good enough' to be an accepted part of the higher education system, to be recognized as such both within the system and by the larger society of which they are part. Without such recognition, they will struggle to recruit students and their graduates will struggle to get jobs. Recognition by employers, in other words, is an important part of the process of making sure an institution is 'good enough'.

Alongside the question 'are we good enough?' is the related question of 'how good are we?' in comparison with others. This becomes a key question within expanded and differentiated higher education systems. There are vertical and horizontal approaches to answering the 'how good?' question. In his classic text on the higher education system, Burton Clark first made the distinction between the 'vertical' and 'horizontal' differentiation of HEIs (Clark, 1983). In the former, difference is seen in terms of a quality hierarchy. Is institution A 'better' or 'worse' than institution B? With the publicity given to public rankings of universities in many countries, answers to such questions have major consequences for an institution's status and can affect many of its central activities, not least its ability to recruit students and staff. For the recruited students, it can affect their employment prospects after graduation. The 'horizontal' differentiation, on the other hand, focuses on the content of 'difference', not in terms of 'better' or 'worse' but in terms of distinctiveness. Here the question is 'what are we good *at*?' just as much as 'how good are we?'

Higher education systems are differentiated in different ways. One binary distinction separates the more vocational from the more academic. But institutions also differ in terms of whom they seek to recruit, the kinds of experience offered, and the kinds of destination available after courses have been completed. Here again employment is an important part of the picture. Does the institution specialize in certain things, and if so, what? The claims that institutions make about their distinctiveness and their specialties need to be supported by evidence, and IQA processes can be key providers of that evidence. Distinguishing between academic and vocational emphases and elements in higher education can be an important part of the quality assurance process (Skolnic, 2016).

Many higher education systems are differentiated in ways which reflect different relationships to employment. These are sometimes formalized by binary distinctions between more academic and more vocational sectors. Within nearly all national systems, specialized HEIs geared to the needs of distinctive professional fields (e.g. business, medicine, or technology) exist alongside the more general academic providers. The linkages with employment take different and stronger forms within the more specialized institutions, which typically require a stronger employability focus in their IQA processes. However, it must also be recognized that most universities are internally differentiated along disciplinary and professional lines, with similar implications for the different ways in which employment considerations enter IQA processes.

IQA processes exist to help the institution learn about itself but also to inform others. Again, in mass systems of higher education, 'how do others see us?' becomes an important question for institutions. When students have many choices about where to study and employers have many choices about whom to recruit, evidence-based self-knowledge is vital for an institution's long-term development, and even survival. But there are also questions of 'who are the others?': who are the people the institution is seeking to attract or influence, whether to participate in its activities, help pay for those activities, or benefit from the existence of those activities? Students, funders, and employers of graduates are among the main 'others', along with the rest of the higher education system and the wider academic community.

Students are not all looking for the same things, but they do want to find the 'right institutions' which provide the kind of education that they value. Thus, as well as assessing whether institutional and subject goals and requirements are being met and determining what needs to be improved, IQA needs also to examine the relationships between what the institution is providing and the kinds of education that its target groups of potential users value and are looking for.

While participation in higher education has obvious potential benefits for students, there are also benefits for their societies. Universities – their students and their staff – engage with the wider communities in a variety of ways. They can be drivers of change within

those communities. Indeed, it is the wider benefits to society that justify the significant amounts of state funding most governments still provide for higher education. And of course a substantial proportion of these are the benefits to the economy which derive from the existence of a qualified and skilled workforce. This point in turn raises questions about which parts of the economy higher education, both generally and in particular institutions and courses, is attempting to reach. It also relates to questions about how skills are developed, what skills are needed, and what broader knowledge needs to be acquired in particular sectors of the labour market.

Employment considerations are potentially present in most of the processes of IQA. It can begin with a review of what is on offer to students: the curriculum, the reading lists, the timetables, and the assessment schemes. Typically this takes the form of peer review, sometimes by internal peers in neighbouring disciplines within the institution and sometimes by external peers working in the discipline under review. However, since some of the beneficiaries of higher education, including employers, are external, it can be asked whether the perspectives of employers should also be brought into the review process.

As well as examining what is on offer to students, it is necessary to consider how the students experience their education. Surveys of students are often undertaken, enabling different courses and year groups to be compared. However, again from the employment perspective, there is a case for collecting the views of graduates about their higher education experience in retrospect and its relevance to their current lives, including their work lives.

Curriculum content, how it is experienced, and its effects and outcomes, can all usefully be examined by IQA. But the outcomes of higher education are not just the result of engaging with curricula and sitting in classrooms. Relationships and friendships are formed, new interests developed, attitudes and values transformed: these are all major effects of higher education upon students, and have been widely researched (e.g. Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Brennan *et al*., 2010). These outcomes differ for different students and across courses and institutions, and they have different consequences for life after higher education, including employment. In other words, what is 'on

offer' in higher education is something much broader than lectures and assignments. It can produce life-changing personal transformation, with implications not only for the persons transformed but also for all those around them. It can derive from activities such as student representation, volunteering, work experience, enterprise, and engagement in clubs and societies. In many HEIs there are reward schemes which recognize student achievement in such activities.

IQA in the area of courses and the student experience requires the collection and analysis of data from many sources, a comparison of aims and outcomes with an evaluative purpose in mind, and the development of strategies to develop the good and to try to eliminate the bad in future course offerings. It also involves bringing in different perspectives and voices. First, self-evaluation is undertaken by teachers on their courses. What worked and what didn't, and why? How can things be improved? Effective self-evaluation has to draw on a range of perspectives beyond those of the teachers. Students – whether as 'consumers' or 'learners' – are clearly central to the evaluation process, in terms of both whether they are satisfied with what they have experienced, and the changes in their lives as a consequence of those experiences.

While teachers and students are central to IQA processes, other inputs can add considerable value. External perspectives brought in by academics from other departments and/or institutions can introduce greater objectivity and contrasting experiences. Professional evaluation expertise from QA specialists can assist in the collection and analysis of data as well as a comparison of local data against a wider knowledge base – institutionally, nationally, and internationally. A management perspective is also likely to be brought to bear on the process: this may sometimes focus on compliance with externally or internally set rules and procedures, but generally reflects strong interest in the outcomes and implications for policies and practices within the institution.

Even though separate EQA assessments may be taking place, it is generally desirable for internal processes to include some external perspectives, and for most higher education courses these appropriately include the perspectives of employers. Their involvement can take many forms – responding to surveys, interviews, membership of review

teams – and include comparisons and contrasts with the perceptions of other stakeholders. Other external stakeholders – local politicians and representatives of civic society – might also be involved. Higher education has considerable impact on society (including the economy), and society and the economy should be represented when QA processes are implemented.

2.3 Bringing employability into internal quality assurance

We have already argued that there are consequences for employability in most forms of higher education, and that this is not a feature purely of vocational and professional courses directed towards specific career destinations. Most graduates will get jobs, and these positions and their performance in them will be affected by their experiences in higher education. Additionally, they are likely to change jobs, and quite possibly career directions, at different stages in their lives. QA – internal, external, or both – needs to look forwards to graduate futures as well as backwards to student experiences. This necessarily involves bringing in the perspectives of both graduates and employers.

Here are some possible questions to be asked of graduates about their experiences of higher education:

- Have you found the 'right job' for you?
- How easy was it to find?
- How well prepared were you for the job?
- What knowledge and skills were needed?
- What knowledge and skills were you lacking?
- What do you think is going to be your next job?
- How well prepared do you think you will be for it?
- Do you think you would benefit from some additional education?
- If so, what sort?

When should graduates be asked such questions? In practical terms, it is clearly easier to obtain the views of recent graduates, but in a fast-changing world and economy, the adaptability of individuals to change in order to meet new circumstances and challenges is also important; surveying less recent graduates is thus highly desirable.

Questions that might be directed to employers include:

- What are you looking for when you recruit graduates?
- Are you finding it?
- How easy is it to find? And where?
- What is lacking and/or needs improving?
- What is changing in the world of work?
- Will this mean that your future needs are going to be different from your present ones?

Different employers will give different answers to these questions, and their answers may differ from those given by students, graduates, and other stakeholders. But there are no 'right' (or 'wrong') answers. Answers reflect the different perspectives and experiences which can feed into IQA processes. It is the purpose of these processes to examine data from different sources, compare it with the aims and intentions of providers and users of higher education, and use it to innovate and improve the quality of future higher education courses.

Since much innovation in higher education is linked to economic and employment objectives, there is probably also a case for increased innovation in making employment perspectives more central in IQA. There ought to be a greater awareness of changing labour markets and the kinds of job which are going to be available in the future, and the ways in which higher education can prepare students for the changing employment world. It should also be recognized that students increasingly engage with higher education at different stages in their careers. Many students will bring considerable employment experience to their universities, raising the question of whether universities are drawing on such experience and the knowledge acquired through it in the design of their academic programmes. Many students are also in employment, sometimes in ways that may damage their educational experience, but sometimes in ways that can complement it. IQA cannot ignore these different and changing conditions of the higher education experience and its relationship to employment.

However, there are also practical challenges to be overcome in bringing employment perspectives into IQA. Graduate tracer studies designed to collect information on how graduates enter the labour market frequently report low response rates, which can reduce the

credibility of these studies. They are often carried out over quite short timescales, with a focus on graduate entry into the labour market rather than longer-term career development. Initiatives that can help to improve the response rate to tracer studies include engaging with students before they graduate, and providing them with feedback on the results of earlier surveys. These can increase the interest and commitment of graduates.

There are also limitations in the ways and extent to which institutions make use of graduate employment data. As some of the case studies from the IIEP-UNESCO project on innovative and cost-effective solutions for IQA systems have demonstrated, the data are often not widely circulated within institutions, and receive little attention from the academic community, including existing students (Martin, 2017: 82). The same problems can arise with data from employers, which may be seen only by management and administration within institutions instead of being widely shared among the academic and student communities. Ensuring that employer perspectives are collected from the 'right' employers, that is to say those who have first-hand contact with an institution's students, is also a challenge. All of these considerations concern the adequacy of the evidence base for bringing employability more firmly into IQA processes and ensuring that it takes account of changing circumstances, in economies and in societies more generally. The concept of a 'quality culture', discussed in *Chapter 4*, is central to ensuring that evidence about employability is acted upon and correctly interpreted, and that it really improves the quality of the higher education experience for future generations of students.

2.4 Making a difference

Change – both organizational and personal – is increasingly central to relationships between higher education and employment, and an important role for IQA is to help steer that change in directions that will benefit both students and employers as well as the larger society. The relationship between QA and employability needs to be viewed in the context of changing and developing economies, and the consequences of these changes for the kinds of preparation for employment that higher education needs to provide for students. Many jobs are disappearing and new ones are arriving. Graduates face increasingly uncertain employment

futures. They will need to change and adapt as job requirements change, and their higher education experience needs to prepare them to meet these new requirements.

Practical courses about business start-ups, in which graduates apply their knowledge and skills to developing new businesses of their own, have been introduced in many HEIs. Some universities actively support graduates by providing them with the necessary skills for entrepreneurship. But this is just one example of the broader processes of economic and social change. The overall implication for HEIs (and others) is that what worked five years ago may not work now, and what works now may not work in five years' time. Many employers explicitly refer to graduates as change agents in their organizations, and, they might well add, in the economy and society as a whole.

A further point which needs reiterating is that knowledge needs to flow in both directions, from higher education into employment and from employment into higher education. Graduates can bring new knowledge and skills into the workplace, but employers need to be aware of them: employers' engagement with higher education, and IQA processes in particular, can be a learning process for them, showing what is on offer and what the graduates they recruit can contribute that is new and has innovative potential for their organizations. But employers can also bring new knowledge into higher education and raise awareness within institutions about changes in jobs and the workplace, and about problems faced and in need of solutions.

As we noted earlier, with change comes increasing diversity. HEIs and the educational experiences they provide are not the same today as they were ten years ago. Employers need to have solid information about how higher education has changed and about the different qualities and learning outcomes to be found in graduates from different courses and institutions. They also need solid information on what is on offer in higher education now and will be in future, and the opportunities available to support workforce development and updating.

In conclusion, IQA needs an external focus, which requires interaction with the external environment. This is necessary to both inform and learn from the changing characteristics of modern knowledge societies. Knowledge flows in many directions, and introducing a focus

on employability into IQA means recognizing these different flows. Higher education must both respond to change and drive change, in the workplace and the larger society. There must be recognition of the need for differences within modern higher education systems, and better information about system diversity. Quality is multi-dimensional, and individual institutions and courses will not be 'good at everything'. IQA requires listening to many voices, from within and beyond higher education. Through sharing information and ideas, it can help to provide the 'evidence-based criticality' necessary to ensure effective innovation across higher education systems, and the change and development required to meet changing societal and economic needs.

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3. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT: A NECESSITY IN AN INCREASINGLY COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT

Maria José Lemaitre

Historically, internal quality assurance (IQA) mechanisms have not been a matter of concern to universities.[3] Academic quality was closely linked to the corporate regulation of academia, without the need of external supervision. Higher education was limited to highly selective universities, with the most qualified academic staff, who taught the best and the brightest students in each cohort. The academic community, within and across countries, shared a common ethos, which regulated what to teach, how to do research, and how to manage universities. When secondary education enrolment and completion started to increase rapidly, larger numbers of students with varying academic backgrounds, interests, and expectations began to press for entrance to higher education. However, many of these students were less concerned with the content of academic programmes than with acquiring credentials that would enable them to find better jobs, earn better salaries, and improve their standard of living. This led to an expansion in vocational or professional programmes, which many universities were initially reluctant to accept as part of their mission and operation. In many countries binary higher education systems were developed, with specialized institutions dedicated to teaching in professional and vocational fields. This arrangement was not entirely successful, since students paid more attention to the relative standing or prestige of the institution where they studied than to the actual programme they followed (Neave, 2000). As a result, in most countries either these institutions were renamed universities, or traditional universities began offering the same sort of programme they had initially shunned.

Along with changes within higher education driven by the pressure for increased access from a much wider and more heterogeneous student

3. This paper draws on an unpublished background paper written for UNESCO by the author and Jose Rafael Toro on IQA in higher education institutions.

population, other forces have had a definite impact on higher education institutions. One of the most pervasive changes is the commodification of higher education: it has begun to be seen as a marketable good. Commodification can be viewed from a transnational perspective. For some countries, higher education exports provide a substantial part of their national product; corporate entities operate universities in many countries (Laureate International Universities, for example, is a company which controls for-profit HEIs worldwide); HEIs are setting up branch campuses which operate as private higher education providers in different parts of the world. Commodification also has a national dimension, manifested as a focus on demand-driven HEIs, in which students are seen as clients and institutions are increasingly dependent on private sources of income.

As a result of these and other factors, higher education systems have become increasingly diversified, with a wide range of providers, programmes, modes of delivery, and teaching or administrative staff qualifications, serving a varied population of students. Most higher education policy analysts see diversity in general as a positive development, insofar as it makes higher education more responsive to societal, professional, and labour needs. Nevertheless, diversification unavoidably leads to questions about the effectiveness of traditional practices and to concerns about the quality of new practices. It has also made it clear that the provision of some kind of external assurance of the quality of programmes and the teaching and learning process was sorely needed. Hence, EQA mechanisms have been developed, with rapid growth in the last 25 years.[4]

The development of EQA mechanisms has led to a professionalization of the field, including the definition of principles and guidelines for good practice (ENQA, 2015; INQAAHE, 2006). One of the most important of these principles, frequently quoted and underlying most of the QA processes in place, is that quality is mainly the responsibility of HEIs themselves. This implies that one of the goals of QA agencies must be to promote and contribute to the development

4. It is interesting to note that when the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies (INQAAHE) was established in 1991, only a handful of agencies were in existence. Currently, INQAAHE has 180 member agencies in over 100 countries.

of sound IQA processes, which should make quality management both possible and effective.

3.1 New governance and management practices in higher education

An interesting review by J. C. Verhoeven quotes an OECD study (Santiago *et al.*, 2008) which concluded that higher education is moving towards a new system of governance, in which the power of markets and the power of the state combine in new ways. Government is generally withdrawing from the direct management of institutions, yet at the same time introducing new forms of control and influence, based largely on holding institutions accountable for performance via powerful enforcement mechanisms, including funding and quality recognition (Verhoeven, 2007: 30).

One way in which governments have implemented this new approach to governance has been the introduction of incentives for participation in QA processes, such as linking accreditation to student scholarships or subsidized loans, access to special funds for teaching or research, and special benefits for graduates of accredited programmes.

Incentives have worked, and HEIs have increasingly submitted to EQA processes. The important question is whether their involvement in these processes actually improves quality, or at least has recognizable effects. Some studies have tried to ascertain whether institutional stakeholders link significant changes in higher education management, or in teaching and learning, to the implementation of QA. One of these, conducted by the Centro Interuniversitario de Desarrollo (CINDA), focused on Latin America, Spain, and Portugal, and analysed in-depth responses from institutional leaders, academic staff, students, and graduates in universities in seven countries (Lemaitre and Zenteno, 2012). The project asked questions about changes in institutional management and in teaching and learning, and whether these changes could be attributed to QA. Responses showed that QA has actually had a major influence in many institutional areas, most of it considered beneficial, although negative outcomes were also mentioned.[5]

5. The full report of the project can be found (in Spanish) at www.cinda.cl/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Aseguramiento-de-la-calidad-en-Iberoam%C3%A9rica-2012.pdf. A summary of the findings, in English, is available on request from cinda@cinda.cl

Some of the changes clearly linked to QA concerned the professionalization of institutional management, including administrative, financial, and quality issues. While most respondents considered this a positive development, there was also a cautionary reaction about the risk of managerialism, that is to say excessive emphasis on management practices without a corresponding prioritization of academic issues.

A second change associated with QA was the development of institutional information systems, QA units, and other similar mechanisms, initially meant to support self-assessment processes. This is a new and complex task for many academic staff members. In some institutions these mechanisms have led to explicit IQA practices, promoting the use of available information to support decision-making, and developing QA units into institutional research departments in order to provide decision-makers with updated, reliable, and valid information on institutional processes and resources. Heads of department, academic staff, and students reported that there had been clear improvement in the definition of expected learning outcomes, curricular development, increased concern about student progress and graduation rates, and improved provision of teaching and learning resources.

There appears, then, to be a close relationship between EQA and its implementation on the one hand and positive changes in the perceived need for improved quality management on the other. There is also wide agreement that quality management is strongly linked to those quality assurance processes which emphasize the need for institutions to take responsibility for their outcomes, but that it is discouraged by quality assurance systems which apply mostly prescriptive, quantitative, or formal standards, thus emphasizing compliance.

3.2 Institutional quality management

In institutions characterized by marketization, competition, changes in the student population, loss of public funding, and other similar trends which affect performance and development, one type of response is known as managerialism. This approach centres on institutional performance, and on universities' capacity to compete in the market and adapt to the requirements of this new environment through restructuring their governance and management systems. In public universities, the

guiding principles of this approach derive from so-called new public management. From this perspective, managerialism is defined as: a focus on outcomes, in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, quality, and impact; decentralized management, where feedback from clients or stakeholders can influence decisions; a focus on market opportunities and a flexible approach to exploring cost-effective alternatives; and last but not least, a focus on accountability (Brunner and Uribe, 2007).

There is at present a debate on the effectiveness of managerialism and on the risks it poses. On the positive side, it enables universities to adapt to the new environment of marketization, competition, and reduced public funding. It implies a concern for accountability, the identification of new and diverse sources of funding and market opportunities, increased independence from the government, and increased capacity to respond to contextual changes. Universities following this model have been described as entrepreneurial, and are praised for their effectiveness and efficiency. At the same time, the managerial approach has been strongly criticized. Critics have emphasized that this corporate approach has damaged the organizational culture of universities and thus weakened their institutional dimension. The academic perspective and capacity to manage the different functions of the university has also deteriorated. Management practices tend to ignore or confront academic culture, rather than working with it. As a result, the academic community's ability to ensure the quality of teaching and research is weakened. The need to find new sources of income and to use resources in the most efficient way leads to a focus on perceived opportunities, without necessarily taking the values or priorities of the institution into account. Positions previously held by academics are taken over by administrative staff, thus reinforcing the perception of distance between management and academic values.

These criticisms may be valid, but there is still a clear need to professionalize and improve university management. An alternative approach, which focuses more on the internal performance of an institution, is quality management. It is viewed as a means to respond to the institution's need to adapt to a changing societal environment without ignoring the fact that its main 'business' is academic. Institutional quality management, in this context, is designed to advance systematically

towards the institution's stated purposes. It requires that these purposes are clearly identified and shared within a HEI, and that both the internal components of the institution and its environment are known and evaluated. The institution can then gain a good understanding of the quality-related factors among its components as well as the restrictions it faces.

IQA requires a close link between evaluation and planning. Planning is meant to design programmes and actions for the best performance of actors and resources within the institution, aiming at outcomes consistent with institutional purposes. Evaluation provides a monitoring system to account for the effectiveness of those programmes and actions.

An unexpected and disturbing finding in the CINDA project mentioned above was the relative ignorance of most directors of planning about the outcomes of QA processes (including self-assessment reports, external review reports, and recommendations from QA agencies). These were only used as the basis for narrow improvement plans, and were seldom taken into consideration in institutional planning, since many institutions had not yet made the link between EQA and their future development, thus wasting an important contribution to quality management.

Basic components of quality management, from this perspective, are the institutional mission and its related elements. These include a clear vision able to guide the medium- and long-term development of the institution, an analysis of its strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities and threats posed by its environment. Foremost in this analysis is the need to learn about the difficulties or restrictions that may set limits to institutional actions – particularly the ever-present tension between what is academically desirable and the available resources that make it possible.

Quality management is not simple or easy. Its complexities begin with the definition of quality, which is certainly an elusive concept. A great deal of literature has tried to define it using different approaches, but in this chapter quality will be understood as the increasing capacity of an institution to meet its stated purposes, on the understanding that those purposes must be well chosen: fitness *for* purpose must be matched by fitness *of* purpose.

A second problem, one not frequently recognized, is the need to make quality an explicit goal of institutional management. HEIs are expected to be of high quality, and it is assumed that this is a result of good management. As they become increasingly complex, there is a growing need for new, more effective modes of governance and management: the words most commonly associated with these are effectiveness and efficiency, but while these two concepts are components of quality, it is necessary to go beyond them in order to achieve quality.

A third problem does not relate to definitions but rather to effective performance: that is, how to identify which actions will lead to substantial improvement in an institution's quality. In the initial stages of an institution's life, this will probably be quite simple, linked to the provision of the needed resources. However, in later stages progress towards increased quality becomes more difficult; once a certain threshold of availability of resources is reached, other strategies become necessary.

Identifying, developing, and implementing such strategies requires a systematic process, in which finding the relevant factors which shape quality is essential. This is addressed through institutional assessment, conducted within a framework of institutional planning. Planning defines the roadmap for the concrete actions which emerge from assessment, organized as a function of the institution's vision, which in turn is consistent with its mission and the local and global environment in which it operates.

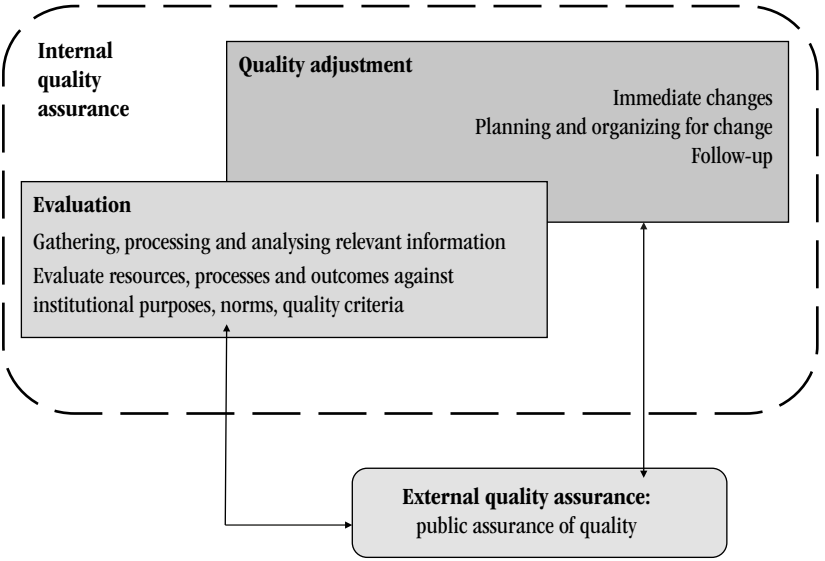
Quality management is the alignment and articulation of the institution's components (academic and administrative staff, students, academic processes, resources, academic products) through its governance and management structure. It is meant to provide the institution with a mechanism making it possible to formulate purposes and objectives based on a sound assessment of the external and internal factors conditioning institutional performance, and then to achieve these through a set of plans and programmes which clearly set out the necessary actions, resources, responsibilities, and deadlines (Grünewald and Mora, 2010).

Quality management is, therefore, closely linked to IQA. Quality management is the institutional function, and IQA is the set of mechanisms that make quality management possible. The development

of sound IQA mechanisms should be one of the most significant goals of EQA processes, as an effective way in which quality can be permanently and effectively assured —especially if the idea that quality is mainly the responsibility of HEIs themselves is taken seriously.

This does not mean that EQA is unnecessary. It provides a valid and useful external perspective; it can provide a strong incentive for the development of IQA mechanisms; it also makes urgent what is important, by defining quality standards, setting deadlines, and carrying out external reviews. But in the long term it cannot replace the development of sound IQA mechanisms and processes.

Figure 3.1 Relationship between internal and external quality assurance



3.3 Basic elements of quality management

Any definition of quality assigns a significant role to the institutional mission: fitness for purpose is interpreted as an institution's capacity to be faithful to its mission. Thus, mission statements are the starting point for the way quality is understood, for quality management, and for the work to be carried out by IQA mechanisms.

However, while an institution's mission outlines the main values and principles that guide its operation, in many cases it is not an adequate description of stated purposes and must be translated into a set of concrete goals which accurately reflect institutional identity and provide effective guidelines for action at the different levels of the university.

For this, three basic elements are necessary. The first is a statement of institutional principles and values, which guides the institution's choices. Based on these, the institution can identify the social sector it will serve and the approach it will take to doing so. Second, the institution must determine its academic profile, including aspects such as the disciplines to be covered, the type of programmes offered, preferred modes of delivery, and the functions it will carry out. Third, the relationship of the institution with its social context must be clarified. As a public service firmly grounded on its principles and values, guided by and responding to sectoral policies and priorities, the HEI thus identifies the students it serves (how selective or inclusive it is) and its links with the labour market and with the local, national, or international context.

A second important aspect of quality management is the institutional vision. Deciding on the vision is a strategic exercise, selecting the most desirable and most feasible among possible future scenarios. It is a deliberate choice about the way in which the mission will be best served over a given period of time.

Components of a higher education institution

The previous sections have identified three basic elements of quality: institutional identity, following institutional principles and priorities; appropriate purposes, based on response to the requirements of its stakeholders (disciplinary, academic, professional, labour, regulations); and the organization of institutional components to satisfy both internal and external needs and demands arising from its purposes.

In a HEI, academic components define the nature of the institution, and governance and managerial components function to serve the institution. Academic components include: the main groups of people who implement the mission, primarily academic and administrative staff and students; academic processes such as teaching and learning, research,

and community services; outcomes such as graduates, research products, and services rendered; physical, informational, and financial resources. The way in which these interact to achieve the institution's stated goals becomes an essential part of quality management. Governance and management components include: the structural arrangements for decision-making at all institutional levels; management processes for the implementation and articulation of governance decisions; governance and management actors, that is, the individuals who carry out these processes.

The relationship between the components, and their role in managing quality (in other words, achieving the institution's stated purposes), can be summarized in these terms:

- Fitness *for* purpose (or internal consistency) means that outcomes are consistent with the institution's mission and vision. Purposes are equivalent to expected academic outcomes.
- Fitness *of* purpose (or external consistency) means that academic outcomes are consistent with the needs and demands of the external environment (labour market, academic community, social and economic context).
- Academic outcomes are the result of the effective articulation of all components in the system: students, academic staff, academic processes, resources, governance, and management. In other words, quality is measured by outcomes and achieved through a properly aligned and articulated structure.
- Each of the components can contribute to or detract from quality; the same is true of the interactions among components.

To address this last point, it is necessary to discuss quality factors further.

3.4 Quality factors and restrictions

Quality factors are the features of the system that can be changed and thus have an effect on quality. When features cannot be modified through institutional decisions, they become restrictions and must be taken into consideration as such.

Institutional components are in themselves quality factors, but can be broken up into more specific features, which can in turn be considered as more basic quality factors. Focusing on these can help to choose the actions which will lead to needed improvements. As an example, students are a quality factor. However, specific features of students, such as their general language or mathematical skills, or capacity for autonomous learning, are also quality factors. In contrast, the quality of secondary education, which determines the entry qualifications of students, must be viewed as a restriction, since no short-term actions on the part of the institution can modify it.

It is also possible to treat interactions between components as quality factors: for example, student/teacher ratios, or interactions between teachers and students in the classroom, link these two primary components and can thus influence the quality of teaching and learning. Quality management in this sense relies on the ability to identify relevant quality factors and restrictions, and the ways they interact, in order to advance towards the achievement of expected academic outcomes consistent with institutional purposes.

It is important to remember that quality is the result of a complex set of interactions between different factors. In order to improve quality effectively, it is necessary to break these down to identify the individual components and thus learn how they influence the final outcome. It is not possible to improve quality by looking at the end of a process. However, when the links in the chain are taken into account, it is possible to understand how they can be modified in order to achieve improved results.

Quality factors and evaluation

There is no doubt that quality is a moving target: it can be approached, but never completely achieved. The main goal, then, is to focus on continuous improvement, based on the identification of both direct and more complex quality factors.

The first step is to know what the expected outcome is: the vision, and its translations into the different academic outcomes, provides a useful summary. The second is to make as accurate a diagnosis as possible of the current situation, to identify the restrictions and quality

factors in order to establish a baseline. This second step, evaluation, has three stages: systematic gathering of relevant information about the aspect to be assessed; comparison of the results with predetermined criteria or expected outcomes; provision of useful feedback to enable evidence-based decision-making. Evaluation provides information leading to a judgement about the situation being evaluated, and can help diagnose issues or situations functioning satisfactorily as well as those which need to be adjusted or improved (diagnostic evaluation); it can also provide insights into the causal relationships between different attributes of the situation being evaluated, and hence identify the most effective actions to achieve the desired outcome (explanatory evaluation).

Resource-based and process-based strategies for improvement

Most responses to perceived deficiencies in quality stress the need for more resources: more lecturers, better qualifications, and improved facilities. It is obvious that academic processes can only be carried out based on interactions among actors with the support of specific resources. However, the presence of actors or the availability of resources, while being necessary conditions for quality, are not sufficient to ensure it.

To explain this point, two levels can be distinguished. The first is the management of actors and resources to ensure that the institution has the necessary capital (human and otherwise) for its effective operation; the second is the management of processes, which is intended to ensure that the relationships among the actors contribute to quality through goal-oriented action. The management of actors and resources operates on the assumption that a HEI will function effectively if it has adequate staff, students, and other resources, and that increasing staff and resources will lead to increased quality. Many QA processes take this for granted, basing their reviews on an assessment of institutional inputs. Here indicators such as the student/teacher ratio, the qualifications of the teaching staff, or the improvement of ICT are all considered to be useful quality criteria.

At a certain level of operation, this is correct: without a reasonable supply of resources, quality is impossible. However, above a certain

threshold this assumption is no longer valid. This is called the saturation point, beyond which any increase in resources will produce only small increases in quality. An example of a resource-based strategy would be increasing the number and qualifications of the academic staff, reducing the number of students per instructor, raising the entry qualifications, and increasing the availability of learning resources. A process-based strategy, in contrast, would focus on practices such as providing pedagogical training to instructors and incentives for good teaching, introducing curricular changes to improve the links between learning goals and study plans, and the development and use of teaching materials to promote autonomous learning.

Both strategies are necessary, and one of the (difficult) tasks of quality management is to determine which one is the most effective and efficient at any given point in time.

3.5 The institutional effectiveness cycle

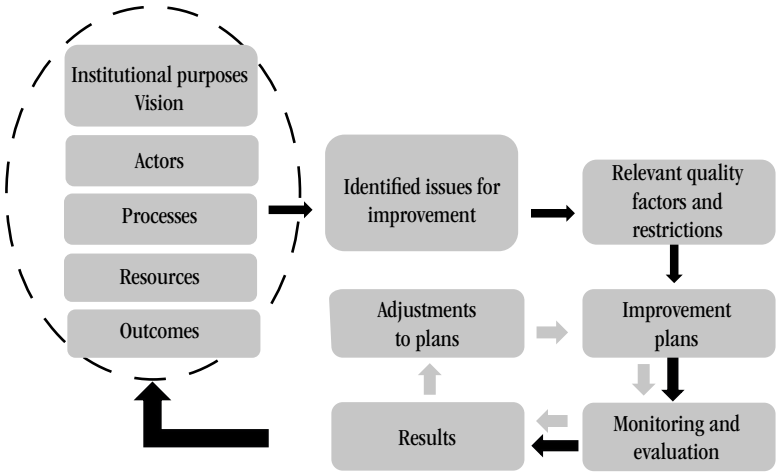
The institutional effectiveness cycle provides a link between evaluation and planning: the institutional mission and vision are translated into a strategic plan designed to take the HEI from its current situation to the one embodied in the vision. The development of such a plan can be outlined as follows:

- The different institutional components, as well as the relevant environment, are analysed in order to identify possible needed changes.
- A review of the quality factors involved, and of their interactions, is conducted in order to define a set of effective actions for each sub-system or identify problematic issues.
- Actions are then gathered into an improvement plan, which takes into consideration threshold and saturation points, and is consistent with the financial situation of the institution.
- The implementation of the improvement plan is closely monitored to discover positive or negative interactions which may have an impact on the outcomes of the plan.
- A review of the outcomes may lead to a revision of the plan in order to improve its effectiveness. Monitoring, evaluating outcomes, and making adjustments are all part of a 'short cycle' (identified

by the red arrows in *Figure 3.2*), necessary for the successful implementation of the whole effectiveness cycle.

Quality management is impossible without evaluation, and as was noted above, evaluation can take different forms. At one end of the sequence, it involves the collection of a set of basic indicators about the operation of the HEI, and the level of resources or other current conditions in any given area of the institution. At the other end, quality management involves research into academic processes, involving academic staff as the main actors along with other offices supporting this research. The outcome of this exercise is a diagnostic or explanatory evaluation, with specific recommendations for the design of improvement plans. The term 'research' is not used lightly. It is interesting to see that while many HEIs devote time and effort to studying the most arcane topics, very little time and effort is expended on issues of institutional quality which are essential for their continuing effectiveness and relevance.

Figure 3.2 The institutional effectiveness cycle



Evaluation within a HEI involves many actors and their actions. It may lead to changes in their roles and responsibilities, or to changes in the organizational structure of the institution or its governance models. It is thus essential that institutional leaders show a clear commitment to

the role evaluation plays in planning and institutional development. In addition, the institution should provide all stakeholders with the ability and opportunity for participation in the evaluation processes.

Important requirements for an effective evaluation process which actively engages different stakeholders are: credibility (evaluation is seen as useful and valuable for all decision-makers within the HEI), transparency (all actors understand why the evaluation is conducted, what are its objectives, and how it is done), focus on processes and not individuals (thus not seen as threatening), and effective dissemination of basic information, quality factors, and expected outcomes. The above-mentioned study of the impact of QA on HEIs showed that in many cases academic staff feel overburdened by the need to provide information about different aspects of institutional performance without a clear understanding of its uses, or how they will benefit from the results of the evaluation being carried out.

Institutional research and the use of information for quality management

This chapter has discussed the ways in which quality management can be linked to the strategic management of a HEI and thus contribute to its quality. In doing so, it has focused on the criteria to be applied (mission and vision, institutional purposes, and learning outcomes) and on the aspects to be considered (quality factors and restrictions, decision-making, planning, and evaluation). The next step is to look at the evidence needed to support quality management, that is to say the gathering, processing, and analysis of relevant information, and again systematic review and evaluation.

Many information systems focus on data and data gathering. However, data provide the raw material for information, and have no meaning by themselves: they require a conceptual structure to become meaningful. Therefore, data must always be gathered with a clear objective in mind. Information, in contrast, is a message about a situation of some sort; data provide the language for that message, and the grammar is provided by processing tools. Thus, information is the result of selecting relevant data and processing them in accordance with the identified objectives. Information is an important input to

quality management, but it must be translated into knowledge, that is, into a clear understanding of the causes or associated factors of the issue addressed.

A significant contribution to quality management has been the development of institutional research (IR) capacities in many higher education institutions. IR is meant 'to enhance institutional effectiveness by providing information which supports and strengthens operations management, decision-making, and unit and institutional planning processes' (McLaughlin and Howard, 2004). In other words, IR involves collecting data and conducting analysis of the functioning of an institution in order to support evidence-based decision-making by managers, planners, policy-makers, regulators, institutional leaders, teaching staff, researchers, students, and employers. The information produced can also be used to inform outside observers about the operation and effectiveness of a HEI (Terkla, 2008).

IR may have different goals and audiences, depending on the role it is expected to play, as seen in *Table 3.1* (Terkla, 2008). IR can make use of different types of information, such as descriptive quantitative information about institutional performance (basic data), descriptive qualitative information (about inputs, resources, policy documentation, academic outcomes, and opinions or judgements of stakeholders about the performance of the institution or programme), and analytical information (developed on the basis of quantitative and qualitative data).

Quality management can be understood as a process able to anticipate change, identify new opportunities, and develop and implement strategy, through the development, processing, and implementing of new ideas. For this, appropriate data must be transformed into useful information and sound knowledge about the institution and its position in its context. This is where IR plays an important role.

A significant feature of this management structure is the development of a new group of players within the institutional structure. These are mostly highly qualified professionals, working to support organizational change and decision-making. According to Barbara Kehm, they 'are not primarily active in research and teaching

themselves, but entrusted to prepare and support decisions of the management, establish services and actively shape the core activities of the organization' (Kehm, 2012: 12). Their role needs to be further explored, since it has a definite impact on the professionalization of management and on the ways in which professionalized management structures can function when based on academic values and culture. These professionals can be an important link between the managerial and academic dimensions of institutional governance, but their role and their position in the institutional structure needs to be better understood.

Table 3.1 Organizational roles, goals, and audiences of institutional research

Organizational role	Objectives and audiences	
	Objective: improvement Audience: internal Role: formative	Objective: accountability Audience: external Role: summative
Administrative and institutional	To describe the institution (functions, activities) IR as information authority	To present the best case IR as controller of information
Academic and professional	To analyse alternatives IR as policy analyst	To supply impartial evidence of effectiveness IR as scholar and researcher
Technology	To gather and transform data into information and knowledge To collaborate in the creation and maintenance of information repositories To facilitate the process of knowledge creation, capture, and sharing IR as knowledge manager	

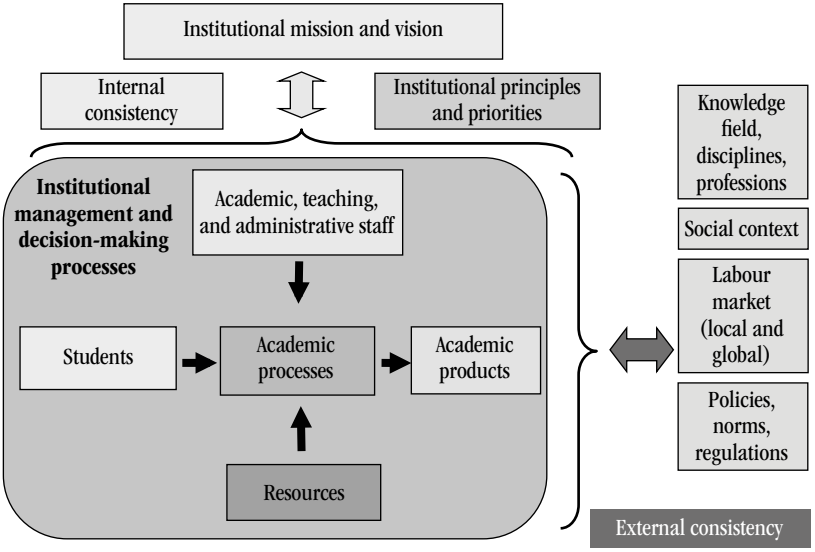
3.6 Final comments

Quality management is now an essential component of institutional governance. Quality is no longer taken for granted, and HEIs must be able to assure the government, the public, and their internal and external stakeholders that the service they provide is aligned not only with institutional purposes but also with societal expectations.

The focus of institutional governance is on the structure and processes through which strategic decisions are taken. This exercise must be based on a thorough understanding of a wide range of trends,

on measuring and undertaking risks, on a commitment of resources and actions, and in general on the design and implementation of a set of planning and management activities which will take the institution from its current situation to that envisioned for the medium or long term.

Figure 3.3 A model of institutional quality



Quality management, because it focuses on the achievement of institutional purposes (especially but not limited to the field of teaching), is an essential component of these planning and management activities. In many institutions, quality issues are dealt with in a parallel structure, mostly linked to external QA requirements. The main challenge is to bring them into the institutional structure, as an internal commitment, which may or may not be reviewed externally at specific points in time. Quality is too important not to be a key goal – maybe the most significant goal – of a HEI, and consequently a major and continuing concern of institutional governance and management.

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4. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE IN SUPPORT OF QUALITY CULTURE: FROM RHETORIC TO TRANSFORMATION

Lee Harvey

The last quarter century has seen the rise of quality assurance (QA) in higher education. Yet throughout this time, the link between QA and the intrinsic quality of higher education has remained uncertain. It has been obscured by innumerable claims that quality in higher education cannot be defined or pinned down. The main focus of QA around the world continues to be on external systems of accreditation, audit, or assessment. However, in many countries this does not necessarily lead to the development of robust and effective internal quality procedures. Internal systems of QA tend to be overlooked or taken for granted, or mimic external requirements. Yet it is internal systems that are at the heart of effective transformational quality, though staff and students remain reluctant to become actively involved in these processes.

QA has four basic roles or purposes: accountability, control, compliance, and improvement (Harvey and Newton, 2007; Harvey, 2008).

Accountability is about institutions taking responsibility for the service they provide (ensuring that an appropriate educational experience is both promised and delivered) and the public money they spend. This generates public information that funders can use to aid funding allocation decisions, and prospective students and graduate recruiters can use to inform choice. Accountability has been the dominant underlying rationale for introducing quality evaluation.

Control is about ensuring the integrity of the higher education sector, in particular making it difficult for poor or rogue providers to continue operating, and making access to the sector dependent on the fulfilment of criteria of adequacy. In many countries, especially those with a significant private sector, governments seek to control

unrestrained growth in higher education in an increasingly unrestricted market. They may do this via financial controls or ministerial decree, but quality monitoring and accreditation are increasingly being used to restrict market-led expansion. Linked to this is the perceived need to ensure the status, standing, and legitimacy of higher education. External review is used to ensure that the principles and practices of higher education are not being eroded or flouted and that the standard or level of student academic or professional achievement is comparable nationally and internationally.

Compliance is about ensuring that institutions adopt procedures, practices, and policies considered by funders, governments, and professional bodies to be desirable for the proper conduct of the sector, and to ensure its quality. Government expectations include various forms of compliance which go beyond financial accountability and include the achievement of policy objectives. Governments place increasing emphasis on securing specified outputs and outcomes from publicly funded activities, in response to community expectations about improving service quality and policy effectiveness.

Improvement, sometimes also referred to as enhancement, is less about constraint and more about the encouragement of adjustment and change. Most systems of external review claim to encourage improvement. However, it has been a secondary feature of most systems, especially at the initial stage. As systems move into their second or third phases, the element of improvement has been given more attention. Whether EQA processes set out to improve the quality of academic research or not is a moot point. Is the aim to improve standards? Is it intended to directly improve the student experience or to improve the way the institution monitors its own activities? Is 'improvement' essentially about transparency and the provision of programme documentation and information about outcomes?

External systems accommodate a (sometimes poorly designed) mix of these four roles. EQA processes which are designed to ensure effective control of higher education systems or which demand compliance with governmental expectations are not necessarily good at encouraging improvement in teaching and learning. Indeed, they are often counterproductive. Compliance, for example, leads to

conservatism and reluctance to take risks; innovation is shelved and burdensome paperwork to confirm compliance takes over. In short, external monitoring procedures are poor tools for improving learning and research, hence the widespread use of the term 'enhancement' rather than improvement when discussing external processes. With the exception of the rarely found, non-confrontational, personalized supportive inspection undertaken by professional full-time inspectors (such as Her Majesty's Inspectors in the United Kingdom, now defunct), external assurance models focus on accountability and control using confrontational panels which lead to onerous paperwork (taking time from improvement activity), reluctant compliance, and concealment.

IQA is by far the most effective way of ensuring improvement, but only if management, academics, and students want improvement. This is where QA meets quality culture.

4.1 What is internal quality assurance?

IQA, or more generally internal quality monitoring (Harvey, 2014—16), refers to procedures within institutions established to review, evaluate, assess, audit, or otherwise check, examine, or ensure the quality of the education provided or the research undertaken. Internal monitoring operates at various levels including the institution, a sub-institutional unit such as a faculty or discipline, the course, and the module. Internal monitors (assessors, evaluators, auditors) include: institutional units, such as audit and assessment units, institutional research units, and management information units (such as the statistics section of central administration); subcommittees of academic boards or senate; standing institutional audit and review bodies; specially convened review boards; faculty-based units; subcommittees of faculty boards; programme boards (or subcommittees, programme directors); individual teachers and researchers; student organizations; formal or ad hoc groups of students at the programme or module level; external examiners; and invited consultants.

Assurance in higher education is formally restricted to establishing whether the explicit or implicit pledge made by an institution or programme has been met. However, the mechanisms for QA, both internal and external to an institution or programme, are so diverse that

they overlap with mechanisms and rationales for reviewing and checking quality. It is often difficult to draw a precise dividing line between assuring, evaluating, assessing, or auditing quality. Consequently IQA processes range from formal checking of compliance with documented regulations, to analysis of statistical data such as student pass rates, reflection on external examiner or consultant commentaries, periodic internal reviews of course content and revision of syllabi, annual monitoring reports compiled by course leaders, and the collecting of students' views about their educational experience. Exactly what is done depends on the perceived purpose and the local academic and management culture.

Nonetheless, in brief, IQA is not very effective as a control mechanism, even internally. All it can do at best is ensure regulations are complied with on paper; it cannot ensure they are complied with in practice. There is a difference between writing a course outline in a specified format and teaching it in that format. Similarly, IQA can ensure a degree of compliance with institutional policy, but it is not a vehicle for encouraging engagement. Academics are clever people and will circumvent any compliance requirements of which they disapprove. For example, a double marking (grading) policy for course papers may be manipulated due to workload to include only those papers that the first marker deems marginal. Internal quality monitoring can ensure that staff are accountable for their actions and responsible for their courses, individually and collectively; but again, there is a difference between formalized processes and engaged staff. Engagement comes about when internal processes are focused on creativity, development, and improvement. This is what IQA is good at – in the right conditions.

Martin (2016: 52) sums up how EQA can be supportive of IQA:

> EQA may also be geared explicitly towards improving existing practices. To achieve this, it must rely largely on the individual or collective involvement of academic staff at the institutional level. External quality assurance will naturally lead to improvement, partially through the compliance objective and partially through the setting of high or good practice standards that provide targets towards which institutions and their departments will strive; but the main reason why EQA brings about improvement is the formal and systematic self-assessment procedures it helps establish within

> institutions. Indeed, 'transformative' quality improvement happens more easily when academics start self-assessment by reflecting on their own teaching reality. Otherwise, a system of external quality assurance may simply produce a 'compliance culture'.

Trow (1995: 22) argued that 'internal reviews and assessments are more accurate and fruitful than those done by outsiders', a view reinforced by Kristensen in her study of the Danish system. She noted that while there can be a fruitful synergy between external and internal processes, external monitoring can never stand alone and 'will never be able to replace valuable internal quality monitoring' (Kristensen, 1997: 91). However, despite their importance IQA processes tend often to be less developed and taken less seriously than their imposed external counterparts. Fifteen years ago this led the European University Association (EUA, 2002: 9) to issue a warning – which seems to have fallen on deaf ears: 'European higher education sector is at risk of witnessing the development of external procedures that could be heavy-handed and potentially negative in altering the mission and function of higher education towards narrow economic interests. The only way to protect it from this risk is to develop robust internal quality monitoring, guided by academic rather than merely economic imperatives.'

However, some encouraging developments can be seen: QA agencies in several European countries, such as Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands, are moving towards audit approaches, whereby they assess whether a HEI has an efficiently functioning IQA system in place to assess and manage the quality of its study programmes.

It has been suggested that a quality culture can overcome the shortcomings of IQA (Bastová *et al.*, 2004; Rozsnyai, 2003). In essence, the idea is that developing a quality culture will lead to a vibrant and responsive academic environment in which the institution will take the responsibility for quality improvement. This is the declared aim of QA guidelines such as the European Standards and Guidelines (ENQA, 2015). The reality, as Harvey and Stensaker's (2008) analysis suggests, is that quality culture is far from homogeneous (Kohoutek, 2016). It may be forward-looking and creative, but equally it may be conservative and reproductive.

4.2 What is quality culture?

Harvey and Stensaker (2008), following Williams (1983), argue that culture is a complex concept. They explore the numerous definitions of culture and how its meaning has changed over time, not least from an elite notion of 'high culture' to a more democratic view of multiple cultures and subcultures. They suggest that at its core culture is shared, learned, and symbolic. In short, culture is a way of life. This interpretation has been confirmed by the work of the EUA, which explored the concept in a selected number of member universities. The EUA (2005) identified both a cultural-psychological element of shared values, beliefs, expectations, and commitments, and a structural-managerial dimension with defined processes.

When applied to organizations, Harvey and Stensaker noted that culture is perceived as either something an organization has (a potentially identifiable and manipulative factor) or something that an organization is (an integrated product of social interaction and organizational life, impossible to differentiate from other factors) (Alvesson and Berg, 1992). What is tending to happen is a drift towards seeing quality culture as something that an organization has, an additional element related to assurance processes, rather than an embodiment of the essential being of an organization.

Harvey and Stensaker (2008), drawing *inter alia* on Douglas (1982), constructed a two-dimensional dichotomized grid based on how far individual behaviour is group-controlled (the extent of the individual's commitment to a bounded group) and how far it is prescribed by external rules and regulations. This generated four Weberian 'ideal-type' quality cultures (see *Table 4.1*). These are characterizations that 'cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality' (Weber, 1949: 90). The two dimensions are just two of several potential dimensions, which have been dichotomized for the sake of simplicity. None of the resulting types (responsive, reactive, regenerative, or reproductive) are 'correct' although in certain settings some may be preferred to others. Staff, students, and institutional managers should reflect on their own 'culture' and critically examine its appropriateness and efficacy.

Table 4.1 Adaptation of Harvey and Stensaker (2008) ideal-type quality cultures

		Degree of group control	
		Strong	**Weak**
Intensity of external rules	Strong	Responsive quality culture: led by external demands, opportunistic, combining accountability and improvement, but also sometimes a lack of ownership and control	Reactive quality culture: reward- or sanction-led, task-oriented, doubts about the potential of improvement, compliance, reluctant ('beast to be fed')
	Weak	Regenerative quality culture: internally oriented with strong belief in staff and existing procedures, widespread, experimental, although not always adaptive to external demands and developments	Reproductive quality culture: wanting to minimize the impact of external factors, focusing on sub-units, lack of transparency throughout the institution, emphasis on the expertise of the individual

In a recent study, Blanco Ramirez and Haque use this typology to show that the 'prevailing culture of quality among private universities in Bangladesh would be reactive' (Blanco Ramirez and Hague, 2016: 142). Kohoutek (2016:319–320), exploring institutions in the Czech Republic, distinguishes two distinct implementation styles and quality cultures:

> [The first style] entails strong institutional leadership prioritising quality assurance and centralising the relevant agendas through the rectorate QAC [Quality Assurance Committee]…. showing *a strong managerial bent*…. This gives the intuitional leadership and management a free hand to orchestrate the quality assurance measures to their liking. Coupled with the broad tenets of national rules, this style of strong internal control seems to show affinity to *regenerative quality culture*. [The second style] owes a lot to traditional, collegiate governing preferring a steering-from-a-distance approach. Quality assurance is thus not an explicit concern of the top management…. which leaves room for a variety of fragmented approaches at the micro level, not least due to markedly different views on what constitutes quality culture. This approach, showing a notable academic bent with low internal control, leaves room for discretion of individual front line staff. Combined with the low regulatory intensity of national policy, this implementation style points to the institutionalisation of *reproductive quality culture*.

Taking as a 'point of departure' the idea that culture is a way of life (Harvey and Stensaker, 2008: 435), Kohoutek argues that quality culture 'implies that we should look for tools that could be helpful in answering more fundamental questions about individual, group and organisational functioning' (Kohoutek, 2016: 304).

However, a quality culture is independent of any formal specification of IQA procedures. A set of bureaucratic procedures is not the same as a quality culture. Most internal processes do not exhibit the characteristics of a lived culture; rather, they reflect the rules and expectations of an 'audit culture'. 'They are fundamentally distrustful and constrained by an externally imposed or oriented framework of thinking' (Harvey, 2009*c*: 23).

Nonetheless, the concept of quality culture has come to be taken for granted, broadly associated with supporting development and improvement in higher education. In many discussions, quality culture is a concept used as an end-product, preferably codified as a set of procedures to ensure 'accountability' or to encourage improvement. In practice, the meaning of quality culture has drifted towards 'how a unit adapts to quality assurance'. It is increasingly taken for granted that quality culture is about the development of, and compliance with, processes of IQA.

In the final report of the European University Association's project, 'Examining quality culture in higher education institutions', Vettori (2012: 1) began his introduction:

> An important step in developing the concept's key principles was achieved in the context of EUA's Quality Culture project, which was launched in 2002 in order to assist universities in their efforts to develop and embed an internal quality culture as well as to encourage the dissemination of existing best practices in the field of quality assurance. From this perspective, it was found that a quality culture cannot be simply equated with the institutional quality assurance system – although the system forms an important part of it – but that it builds on the values and practices that are shared by the institutional community and that have to be nurtured on many levels and by various means at the same time.

Similarly, Jawad *et al.* (2015: 72), discussing the situation in Pakistan, argue that 'to ensure sustainable high-quality education, it

is essential to develop an internal quality culture in Higher Education Institutes'. However, they add:

> Quality culture is commonly misunderstood as a system of internal quality monitoring. It is important to realize that quality culture is not a process or set of procedures, nor it can be imported and imposed [Harvey, 2009a]. Quality culture needs development rather than assurance and innovation instead of standards compliance. Development of quality culture requires structural, procedural and behavioral changes at organizational level…. The quality culture within an organization requires total commitment and devotion to quality of all the stakeholders. Mutual respect, trust and cooperation is the shared responsibility.

4.3 Intrinsic quality, quality culture, and internal quality assurance

It is often assumed that quality culture is linked to the process of IQA. This is misleading on two fronts. First, quality culture and IQA are not necessarily complementary. Contrary to the popular discourse on quality culture, academic staff in many institutions continue to be sceptical of an IQA system. This casts doubt on the efficacy of systems which generate reports but do not engage with the heart of the academic endeavour (Newton, 2000; Stensaker, 2003; Vidal, 2003). In short, internal quality monitoring is viewed by most academics as a set of alien, internal-external requirements which demand compliance rather than encourage engagement.

Wahab *et al.* (2010) have suggested some principles for developing appropriate quality culture linked to IQA. They propose an internal quality culture framework which embeds quality culture in the organizational context as a continuous improvement process, empowering all stakeholders by minimizing bureaucratization. The framework has four components: planning, support, execution, and assessment. They argue that strategic policy and planning are the main requirements for embedding quality culture in an institution, yet sustainable and long-term strategic planning for quality improvement is a challenge for institutional leadership. Just as important is a 'conducive organisational environment and appropriate infrastructure', which involves 'financial, operational and moral support for all academic and administrative activities' (Jawad *et al.*, 2015: 73). They reaffirm that provision of quality teaching and learning is the prime responsibility of the institution, and requires

'participation, ownership, commitment, effective interaction and teaching and learning between all stakeholders' (Jawad *et al.*, 2015: 73). In particular, the implementation of a quality policy requires 'systematic execution of all academic and administrative processes across all departments/units .... assessment and evaluation of all the major academic and administrative processes against defined quality standards play a very vital role in improving the quality culture' (Jawad *et al.*, 2015: 73). Such assessments can be used to 'review quality policy in accordance with the institutional vision/mission' (Jawad *et al.*, 2015: 73).

This encapsulates both the potential for an inclusive quality culture and the dangers of managerialist usurpation. An engaged and democratic policy can easily slip into an imposed one, and there is a thin line between supportive reviews of progress and confrontational checks on compliance.

However, as Kohoutek (2016: 321–322) warns, this does not mean that one approach or one culture should be seen as better than another:

> the enquiry among Czech higher education institutions points to the significant prevalence of structural elements over notional ones in quality culture designs … it is contestable whether under the present-day rise of regulations and diminishing trust, higher education institutions can commonly exhibit true quality cultures as lived and shared experience by a self-critical and reflective community of practitioners. Faced with such evidence, it is perhaps time to clearly differentiate between quality cultures and quality assurance cultures (cf. Harvey, 2009*a*) on empirical grounds. Difficult as this may be, we can then at least stop deluding ourselves by using the term quality culture as a short-cut for 'an end product preferably codified as a set of procedures to ensure accountability' [Harvey, 2009*a*: 3].

A second misleading element is the illusion that intrinsic quality is linked to the process of IQA. Intrinsic quality and IQA (of whatever kind) have no necessary symbiosis. Internal processes such as those mentioned above may or may not take into account and enhance the intrinsic quality of learning and research.

However, in his doctoral dissertation Newstadt (2013: 356–357) argues that while it is true that quality and QA are not the same, the socio-political setting in which QA operates inevitably conflates the two:

> Harvey wants to distinguish between 'quality' and the processes that are created to assure it. Quality and quality assurance are not homogeneous and, for example, a fitness-for-purpose approach is not adequate, nor even appropriate, for evaluating many quality issues. What an epistemological analysis does … is to draw attention to the way that we construct quality as knowledge. It differentiates reductionist causal explanations from interpretation of meanings of actors from socio-historically specific deconstructed and reconstructed alternative understandings. In this drive to create a 'quality culture', which we can take to mean a reflective, gracious, and considerate academy within which critique (including self-critique) is appropriately prized and used to facilitate constant improvement, Harvey [2009*d*] argues that it is possible, within a system of QA, to create the conditions necessary to, in turn, create a quality culture. The obstacle to quality, is, in other words, not the systematization and bureaucratization of QA, but its rendering by political forces into something else.

The key is the meaning of the concept of quality. In a seminal, widely quoted paper, Harvey and Green (1993) identified five definitions of quality: excellence, consistency, fitness-for-purpose, value for money, and transformation. In essence, they argued that while all had a role in higher education, exemplified by Kristensen's (1997) account of the functions of quality at Copenhagen Business School, it is the transformational notion of quality that is fundamental to improvement and which underpins effective quality culture and internal procedures.

4.4 Quality culture, internal quality assurance, and transformative learning and research

IQA and quality culture should not be seen as two complex mechanisms trying to shift and twist until they mesh together. Quality culture should not be seen as a set of procedures, but as a context which promotes the development of transformative learning and research. It should be remembered that transformative learning is one of very many different learning theories. Arguably, there are three overarching foundations of learning theory – behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism – though not all theories fall under one of these umbrellas, nor do they

match up neatly with epistemological positions. Suffice it to say that transformational theory is a form of radical constructivism, informed by a critical dialectical epistemology.[6] It is important, then, not to claim that IQA has a particular set of features which encourage quality culture, any more than that a quality culture of a particular type will result in effective IQA procedures.

A dialectical approach, one which starts from the intended outcomes, is essential. If the aim is transformative learning and research, then the quality culture embodies professional reflection within a comprehensive and all-inclusive learning community. Internal quality processes would then be designed to enable and encourage such reflective development. They would be based on transformative learning, which entails a qualitative change, rather than a stable state to be judged against predefined standards, desires, or mission statements. IQA would be intrinsic to a way of life, a way of thinking, and a way of reaching understanding. A quality culture is not something that can be codified in a manual of procedures. A key feature of IQA would be to encourage openness and communication, risk and innovation, enthusiasm and pride; in short, to open up the context for academic creativity rather than foreclose it.

In the conclusion to 'Deconstructing quality culture', Harvey (2009*c*: 10) writes:

> What this analysis raises is the need to think of quality culture not as a set of procedures but as context in which efforts are linked to the development of transformative learning. However, a more

6. There are two main approaches to transformational learning theory, those of Harvey and Knight on one hand and Mezirow on the other. Harvey and Knight (1996) maintained that transformative learning is based on the notion of qualitative change, which also links to the notion of quality as a transformative process (rather than a stable state to be judged against predefined standards or desires or mission statements). Transformative quality in education has two elements: enhancing the participant and empowering the participant. Enhancement is not itself transformative. The empowerment of students involves giving them power to influence their own transformation, taking ownership of the learning process. Mezirow undervalues the active process of transformation, claiming that transformative learning results from a disorienting dilemma or from an accumulation of meaning transformations (Mezirow, 1995: 50), and suggesting that transformative learning may also be mindlessly assimilative. Harvey and Knight's critical attitude is not a mindless, habitual process. The focus on paradigm-shift change is where Mezirow differs from Harvey and Knight. For them, transformative learning is about enabling a continuous dialectical process of engagement, a critical attitude versus assimilation and occasional radical change.

cynical reading might suggest that quality culture is an ephemeral construct that serves to mystify rather than render transparent quality development. One might argue that quality culture has no meaning if the construct is 'a way of living', is truly embedded then it is just part of the culture of an organisation, or rather more generally and abstractly, academic culture. In short, prefacing culture with 'quality' detracts from the real issue of developing a critical reflective academic culture that will generate quality outcomes.

4.5 Conclusion

The one enduring function of EQA is control of the sector: keeping rogues at bay and ensuring a credible level of academic standards. It is now time for its accountability and improvement functions to be passed to internal processes. Improvement comes from within, making an appropriate IQA process necessary, one that engages academics and students rather than alienating them, and fits local needs and local ways of working.

This is where quality culture comes in. A regenerative quality culture is, arguably, the best at driving improvement, although this depends on local circumstances. There is no off-the-shelf magic formula: both a quality culture and an IQA process need to be forged locally through meaningful discussion. An open, sanction-free, bottom-up development with clear common aims for all is the most likely way to achieve the appropriate blend of internal processes and receptive culture.

To date, the evidence that QA has led to improvement, especially improvement of the process of learning, is sparse. The obsession with codified accountability-oriented processes is underpinned by an ontological belief in the untrustworthiness of those subject to QA processes, which results in obfuscation rather than transparency. It is unfortunate that a rather simplistic notion of quality, fitness for purpose, has been so widely adopted by quality agencies. This pragmatic approach has resulted in the epistemological basis of quality being ignored. The transformative essence of quality has been sacrificed on the altar of measurability. Consequently, QA processes are asking the wrong questions, and fail to engage with learning. QA's positivistic pseudo-pragmatism is at variance with the epistemological basis of most modern learning theory, particularly constructivism and the more radical transformative learning approaches.

Quality culture is mooted as a panacea but it is a poorly understood or examined concept. It is a mistake to think that a quality culture is an environment in which staff and students accept and engage in QA processes. Indeed, a lived quality culture can remain impervious to QA processes, while continuing to pay lip service to them and delivering transformative quality learning. A 'real' quality culture is epistemologically distinct, internally motivated, guided by transformation, and independent of external assurance protocols. It is a dynamic, critical, self-reflective academic culture: 'quality culture' evaporates under close scrutiny.

Transformative learning has been going on for a long time, as have many other approaches to enhancement and innovation in learning and teaching. They have developed independently from QA and, in some cases, in spite of it. QA does not exactly encourage risk-taking. There was a short-lived hope that an improvement-oriented approach to quality (as in some Scandinavian countries in the past and in Scotland currently) might shift to asking questions about transformation. However, political interference, the demand for simplistic indicators, and the closed-mindedness embodied in the implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines (if not in their original intention) conspire against a coming together of QA and learning.

Unless internal quality processes strive for improvement to which all are committed, then IQA is just a game to fend off or cope with external impositions. It is in its commitment to improvement that a quality culture may be identified. Yet if the real aim is transformative learning, then 'quality culture' is no more than a progressive academic culture, one of creativity and empowerment, compatible with intrinsic quality. If transformative learning is not at its heart, then a quality culture simply acts to corral scepticism and create an illusion of engagement, focusing on assurance of quality rather than quality itself. Let us instead redeploy our resources to better enable learning and encourage critical, self-reflective teaching.

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CONCLUSION. VIEWING INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AS A LEVER FOR CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: HOW TO CREATE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT?

Michaela Martin

The preceding chapters have discussed the role of internal quality assurance (IQA) as a lever for change. IQA involves many stakeholders in higher education. Academics are of course at the heart of IQA processes and of the implementation of decisions to improve quality, together with (academic) administrators, students, and external stakeholders. This final section attempts to draw conclusions for higher education policy-makers at both the national and institutional levels, arguing that they can play a crucial role in developing an appropriate framework within which IQA will work best to achieve its intended outcome of quality enhancement.

IQA enables higher education institutions to be better connected to their environments

All the authors of this publication remark on the many and profound changes occurring in the increasingly complex environment of HEIs worldwide. In the introduction, Brennan and Martin note that IQA needs to be seen as a tool which enables HEIs to be better connected to external stakeholders and responsive to rapid change. This connectedness is seen as a necessary condition for HEIs to stay informed of emerging skill needs when consulting with employers and former graduates. These interactions will assist HEIs to identify market opportunities and to engage in innovative partnerships, especially in their areas of strength.

In light of the increase in diversification of learning needs generated by students and the labour market, in *Chapter 2* Brennan insists on the importance of recognizing that quality is multi-dimensional, given the diversity in HEIs. He observes that 'higher education institutions cannot be good at everything'. The focus of IQA should therefore be on those particular needs that relate to their particular strengths. Brennan and Martin also note that IQA enables HEIs to compare themselves

with others. Through a benchmarking of results and processes, the knowledge gained can be used to strengthen strategic positioning and identify developmental needs.

IQA needs to be flexible to allow for diversity, innovation, and experimentation

All the authors caution that QA can become a straitjacket hampering diversity and innovation if quality standards are too rigidly applied without regard to particular local circumstances. While IQA needs to establish internal points of reference for expected practices, it should also provide space for experimentation and innovative practices, for instance with regard to new modes of delivery and instructional methods. When there are no opportunities for risk-taking and failure, innovation and organizational learning will be hampered. The existence of IQA should not become a hurdle for academics trying out new things.

EQA should support the development of IQA for institutional self-regulation

The connection between EQA and IQA is a topic addressed by all the authors. In *Chapter 1*, Dill draws on international experience in external quality assurance and quality enhancement. He points out that research on EQA in developed countries shows that it has not always been effective for quality enhancement. In *Chapter 4*, Harvey also warns against compliance-driven EQA and the illusion that bureaucratic processes will be able to generate quality improvement. He emphasizes the fact that internal processes are at the heart of effective transformational quality.

This leads to the question of how EQA methods can best support organizational learning and change at the institutional level. The answer may depend on the higher education context, and in particular whether HEIs can be identified as mature and ready for self-regulation. Where this is the case, EQA should be development-oriented and support a HEI in its capacity for self-regulation. Quality audit, for instance, can focus on whether a HEI has the capacity to manage its own quality. However, where this does not apply, EQA needs to provide a stronger reference framework for good institutional practices which can provide needed guidance to younger institutions. With its emphasis on good

practice standards, institutional accreditation is clearly more relevant to this latter purpose.

A debate on quality among higher education professionals should be at the heart of IQA

All the authors of this publication have asked which IQA processes are the most appropriate. With reference to the 'commons model in self-governing organizations', both Dill and Lemaitre stress that governments need to accept that HEIs have the primary responsibility for QA and quality enhancement. In Dill's opinion, IQA needs to be based in shared collective governance and should strengthen the role of academics rather than shifting power from academics to administrators. From this perspective, IQA tools and processes need to enable academic staff to engage as peers in meaningful discussion on the quality of educational provision. This requires peer review and, more broadly, a culture of sharing information and ideas to contribute to the creation of an 'evidence-based criticality' among professionals.

Both Dill and Lemaitre also emphasize the critical importance of objective information (derived from information systems, regular technically sound surveys, and interview data) to IQA. In *Chapter 3* Lemaitre observes that institutional research supports IQA because it generates much-needed information for the institutional self-analysis which underlies IQA processes. Dill emphasizes the need for clarity regarding the use of information generated from IQA (who receives it and what is done with it), and recommends the creation of institutionalized opportunities to establish quality dialogue among academics and professionals. He also points out that an effective IQA requires an effective balance between administrative leadership and shared collective governance by the faculty, with the understanding that the right balance will depend on the organizational culture, existing distributions of responsibility, and the managerial capacities at different levels of a HEI.

External stakeholders need to be involved in the discussion of quality

In *Chapter 2*, Brennan discusses IQA in relation to the employability of graduates. In his view, mass higher education systems are already

highly diversified, but they must cater to the needs of a rapidly changing labour market. As a consequence, IQA needs to be able to capitalize on new demands placed on academic service providers by external stakeholders. HEIs can utilize IQA to obtain feedback on the quality of their services from those they serve.

In discussing the relationship between IQA and employability, Brennan argues that QA needs to look forwards to graduate employability and student satisfaction as well as backwards to student experiences. To do so, external stakeholders such as professional bodies, employer organizations, and alumni must be involved in IQA processes. The feedback from graduates' experience must be included as part of the IQA process to evaluate higher education provision. Employers should participate in permanent or ad hoc programme review bodies, or be involved in the peer review of programmes. When those in charge of study programmes evaluate the views of external stakeholders to identify necessary quality improvement, they need to balance external perspectives with that of the educators. How far employers should be involved in decision-making about academic programmes, however, remains an open question. A more dominant view is that major decisions about curriculum change should rest with the educational experts, who have a broader and longer-term vision.

IQA should be part of strategic management and linked to resource allocation

In *Chapter 3* Lemaitre argues that IQA provides the tools to implement quality management in a HEI. Through IQA, data is collected to evaluate higher education services, such as educational provision and research, and also governance and management. However, in order to drive effective decision-making for change, IQA must be part of the overall strategic planning and resource allocation cycle. This means that the goal of quality improvement must also be at the heart of strategic planning, which in turn means that quality has to be defined. According to Lemaitre, quality is best understood as fitness for purpose, with the understanding that the purpose in question is appropriate for higher education in a particular national context.

Lemaitre draws on the results from research conducted in Latin America by CINDA, which found that educational planning offices were often not informed of the results of QA exercises conducted in HEIs, and that there was a disconnect between planning and QA units. Consequently, she proposes that IQA should be considered as an integral part of a HEI's overall strategic management. Data collected and evaluation conducted as part of IQA needs to focus on those factors that determine the quality of the higher education provision. Aligning time-frames for the implementation of QA tools to allow for the timely availability of information is crucial.

IQA needs to be based on a transformational approach to teaching and learning

It is often argued that the most important outcome of IQA is the development of a 'quality culture', meaning a collective and shared understanding of what quality is and how it can be enhanced. In *Chapter 4*, Harvey presents a more complex perspective on the relationship between QA, the development of a quality culture, and quality enhancement. In line with Dill (*Chapter 1*), he argues that quality teaching and learning are the main responsibilities of the HEI. This requires the 'participation, ownership, commitment, effective interaction and teaching and learning between all stakeholders' (quoting Jawad *et al.*, 2015). Harvey warns against a simplistic view of IQA as a set of procedures and tools which automatically lead to the development of a quality culture and quality improvement. IQA understood in this way will often produce a so-called 'culture of compliance', but its impact on quality enhancement will be very low. In order to be effective, the development of a quality culture must be embedded in the particular organizational culture of a HEI.

According to Harvey, quality culture should be understood as an environment which promotes the development of transformative learning and research. Quality enhancement needs to be based on the constructivist approach, which conceptualizes learning as a social interaction between teachers and learners. IQA, therefore, must engage academic teachers in a self-reflective process about their professional practices and give them 'ownership' rather than disempowering them.

IQA needs to be designed to enable and encourage such reflective development. This, in his view, enables a 'regenerative quality culture' which stands the best chance of supporting quality improvement.

These findings, relevant to both national and institutional policy-makers, should help IQA to become an effective lever for change. From the outset, this publication has taken the position that IQA in higher education is not an aim in itself but rather a means to achieve other, broader outcomes of higher education. It has emphasized the linkages between IQA and quality improvement in teaching and learning, the enhancement of the employability of graduates, the improvement of the capacity for strategic management, and the development of a quality culture. It might have dwelt on the fact that IQA has emerged from a managerialist approach to higher education governance, promoting a power shift from academics to administrators, which has indeed been the case in many countries. But what it demonstrates instead is that IQA can clearly be viewed differently, namely as an opportunity for collegial debate on academic quality, and that this perspective creates the opportunity to build the internal cooperative relationships needed to support it.

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Inquiries about the Institute should be addressed to:
The Office of the Director, International Institute for Educational Planning,
7–9 rue Eugène Delacroix, 75116 Paris, France

The Book

This publication resulted from the IIEP Policy Forum, 'Higher Education Quality and Employability: How Internal Quality Assurance Can Contribute', held in Xiamen, China, in 2016, in collaboration with the Chinese Higher Education Evaluation Centre and the University of Xiamen. Experts discussed how IQA can enhance teaching and learning outcomes, employability, management and quality culture. This book presents the papers from the event, as well as a synthesis of policy recommendations.

The Contributors

John Brennan is an Emeritus Professor of Higher Education Research at the UK Open University. For nearly 20 years he directed its Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, where he led and participated in national and international projects on graduate employment, quality assurance, universities, and social transformation.

David D. Dill is a Professor Emeritus of Public Policy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH). He has published on higher education policy, research policy, and the governance and management of higher education. He has served as a policy advisor and academic quality assessor for governments, agencies and universities in many countries.

Lee Harvey is a quality advisor to institutions around the world. His area of expertise extends to employability, diversity, quality, funding, learning and teaching and student feedback issues. He has published on higher education quality assurance in international journals, books and compendiums.

Maria-José Lemaitre, a sociologist with graduate studies in education, is the current Executive Director of CINDA, a network of universities in Latin America and Europe. She is a former president of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education (INQAAHE) and of the Iberoamerican Network of Quality Assurance (RIACES).

Michaela Martin is a Programme Specialist at the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP-UNESCO), Paris, where she is in charge of research on external and internal quality assurance in higher education and training activities in the area of higher education policy and planning.

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