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Paper abstracts

The learning paradox in higher education

By Marieke Janssen (University College Ghent)

Learning from the animal kingdom we stipulate that the mission for HEIs that want to survive beyond the 21st century is simply: “how not to be a dinosaur, a frog or a turkey”. By transforming themselves into learning organisations HEIs can adapt in order to fulfil this mission and thus survive all possible futures.

In this paper we first characterise the ideal learning organisation. Secondly we explain the learning paradox and the difficulties for a HEI to become a learning organisation. We then summarise some ideas on how to resolve this learning paradox and we explore how HEIs can learn to learn.

We conclude that there is a growth potential for those HEIs that succeed in bringing their theoretical knowledge into practice within their own organisations and thus transforming themselves into learning organisations. Within EURASHE’s working group “Quality in HE” we agreed on the desirability of further exploring this domain.

How to forecast the future? - Different sources for gathering knowledge about the future needs of employers’ with regard to competences

By Ditte Strandbygaard, Rikke Warming, Vibeke Fahlén (Danish Accreditation Institution) and Merete Munk (University of Southern Denmark)

Graduates must be able to use their degree in the labour market that awaits them when they have completed a higher education study programme. Danish politicians have increasingly focused on this since the beginning of this century. It places great demands on the education institutions' ability to gaze into the future and predict which skills will be required, and on the basis of this, match the right number of graduates with the right competences. This political focus is also reflected in the Danish Accreditation Institution's (AI) criteria, methods and practice.

In the paper session, AI will present an extensive system-wide analysis of the sources education institutions use to gain knowledge about the competence needs of the future in order to ensure relevance of their programmes. The University of Southern Denmark will produce a case on how the institution is working with the assurance of the relevance of new programmes.

Quality Enhancement and Conceptual Underpinnings

By Vidar Gynnild (Norwegian University of Science and Technology)

At regular intervals, quality assurance systems in institutions are assessed by national review panels. Subsequent to the review, a report is produced by the panel members outlining the rationale for their conclusion. Reports are publically accessible and represent an excellent source for research purposes. This study focuses specifically on quality assurance systems that failed to meet the criteria set by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT). Reports for five institutions were examined in search of causes for rejection. In conclusion, reports tend to be descriptive rather than analytical, quality procedures are random and unsystematic, and conclusions are often missing. Conceptual and analytical aspects need to be strengthened, and sadly, there is little, if any, evidence of positive effects. With this as a backdrop, this study also aims to introduce conceptual tools that might possibly be of help for those undertaking quality reviews locally.

The Future of Quality Assurance to and after Yerevan

By Lucien Bollaert (NVAO)

One of the most successful actions of the Bologna Process is said to be QA. Yet, studies made clear that in many HEIs and Bologna countries, internal QA was developed only after or because of external QA.

Four axes can be drawn on which the tendencies of QA can be depicted: the scope of QA, the use of learning outcomes, the standards and last but not least the dimension of quality culture. EQAR's RIQAA report adds the international dimension.

The Yerevan conference and adoption of the revised ESG and European Approach for QA on joint programmes have confirmed those tendencies. Yet, in Yerevan it has also become clear that the EHEA has not been fully or correctly implemented everywhere. Both ministers and researchers have concluded that the European and global context has changed. The question is whether we also need another QA? The paper formulates the future QA dimensions.

On-Site Visit Interviews in External Quality Assurance Procedures – a Linguistic, Empirical Approach

By Fabienne Tissot, Ulla Kleinberger (Zurich University of Applied Sciences) and Stephanie Hering (AAQ)

On-site visit interviews play a crucial role in external quality assurance procedures. Nevertheless, so far there seems to be little empirical research into this, both in linguistics, and in the field of quality assurance research and studies in higher education.

The contexts of these interviews are diverse, complex and demanding; pitfalls and challenges are manifold. In linguistics, and particularly in the field of discourse analysis, a broad range of approaches can be successfully applied to analyse and understand the challenges of these interview situations. In the long term, an in-depth programme of research could potentially provide agencies as well as peers with valuable advice on how to steer the interviews effectively towards constructive conversations and avoid awkward communicative situations.

In this paper we present the preliminary results of a pilot study that was conducted by the ZHAW Department of Applied Linguistics in cooperation with the Swiss Agency of Accreditation and Quality Assurance (AAQ).

A new model for external review of quality in a diverse higher education area

By Orla Lynch (QQI)

In 2013 QQI commissioned the 'Review of Reviews' to take stock of Irish legacy review models and make proposals for the features of a new QQI model. QQI has now published (June, 2015) a White Paper presenting a comprehensive model for reviews. The key innovative features of the new model for review are: multiple objectives (including effectiveness, accountability and enhancement) and multiple dimensions (institution, system and thematic); differentiation between cyclical and 'for cause' reviews and initial and subsequent reviews; the close integration of continuous and periodic engagements for reviews; the use of data (metrics) as well as narrative sources of evidence; the development of a Quality Profile for institutions.

This paper outlines the features of the review model and the rationale for their development.

The transition to a level playing field in English Quality Assurance: does one size fit all?

By Paul Hazell (QAA)

The United Kingdom's quality assurance framework for higher education has been characterised by policy continuity over the last 20 years. But far reaching and significant reforms to the funding of undergraduate education have increased the pace and scale of marketisation and competition. This has placed the regulation of higher education centre stage.

Common approaches to quality assurance, for all providers delivering English higher education, enable the performance of different types of provider to be analysed via QAA's external quality reviews.

This paper considers the learning from a common review method and assesses whether this is appropriate for all providers. The findings for England raise issues which may be relevant for other countries and policy contexts.

Cross-Border External Quality Assurance: Practical Experiences and Recommendations

By Michael Hofer (University of Vienna), Christine Fahringer (University of Innsbruck), Christine Abele (University of Konstanz), Susanne Klöpping (University of Stuttgart), Thomas Rothenfluh, Anita Klöti (University of Zurich) and Olivier Binet (University of Basel)

We present findings on practical experiences with national and cross-border external quality assurance procedures made by six universities in Germany, Austria and Switzerland working with the same Swiss quality assurance agency from 2012-2015. This paper is based on joint analyses undertaken by the quality managers responsible for internally coordinating the external quality assurance procedure in each institution involved. The aim of the contribution is to discuss the impact of external quality assurance on internal quality assurance and to make recommendations from which both higher education institutions and agencies may benefit. For the analysis we used the purposes and principles of the revised version of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

Zen and the art of risk assessment: what are the implications of a system of risk- based quality assurance for higher education in England?

By Alex Griffiths (King's College, London) and Elizabeth Halford (QAA)

This paper considers how centrally available and comprehensive quantitative data can be used as an indication of risk in a risk-based system of quality assurance, as currently implemented in England. This consideration is set within the policy context of expanding higher education and the introduction of a new system of funding undergraduate education through student loans for tuition fees in 2012.

Utilising machine learning techniques this paper demonstrates that the best model utilises three indicators relating to applications, staffing and finance. The paper concludes that the ability of data to predict the outcome of QAA reviews, and hence help prioritise them, is extremely limited.

Challenges and Barriers to Assessing and Recognising Excellence in (Professional) Higher Education

By Alexandre Wipf (EURASHE), Carol Hall (University of Nottingham), Linda Messas (Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen), Lars Ebert (The European League of Institutes of the Arts) and Regitze Sparre Kristensen (SPACE Network for Business Studies and Languages)

After 10 years of intensive developments in European quality assurance and in the year of the adoption of the revised European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) this paper will ask whether excellence is the way forward and how to address excellence in (professional) higher education.

We will present the experience gathered in pilot assessments of excellence in institutions offering professional higher education and explore approaches to recognising their claim for excellence. We will examine the genesis of the tested quality framework for excellence and assessment methodology. We will reflect on the successes and challenges of the pilots and outline the possible way forward to recognise excellence.

The paper is built on the activities of the PHExcel project (Testing the feasibility of a quality label for professional higher education excellence) by EURASHE, AEC, ELIA, SPACE, The University of Nottingham with FINE, Jagiellonian University and KIC-Malta.

Does quality assurance reflect the social dimension of higher education?

By Anca Prisacariu (University of Helsinki), Emilia Todorova (ICS Learn) and Mahsood Shah (University of Newcastle, Australia)

Given the ten years since the introduction of the ESG and the five years since the formal launch of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), quality assurance of higher education has gained significant prominence on the public and political agendas. The focus has so far been on core areas including research and education, while importance is now emerging in internationalisation and support functions. With increased diversity of the student population, questions are asked about whether traditional quality assurance frameworks are innovative and morally just in assessing higher education activities. The present paper analyses how various higher education quality assurance frameworks in different countries across the globe address the development and prioritisation of the social dimension across the higher education sector. The paper argues the need for governments and institutions worldwide to recognise the importance of the social dimension of higher education across the world, and the need for quality assurance frameworks to be innovative in this regard.

How to support quality through international activities - Case studies from the field of higher music education

By Martin Prchal (Royal Conservatoire, University of the Arts, The Hague) and Linda Messas (Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen)

One of the main concepts of the ESG is that they are European. Nevertheless, even if they provide a framework for quality assurance in the entire EHEA, the ESG also apply to quality assurance activities with a very limited international scope. In their Part 1, the word ‘international’ hardly features and no reference is made towards the promotion of internationalisation activities (e.g. staff mobility or international benchmarking) as tools to support quality assurance.

By providing examples from the field of higher music education, this article shows concrete ways in which quality assurance can be supported by international activities. After claiming that quality is only achieved through a focus on standards as well as on educational quality, the paper presents international activities which can help institutions to improve in these two areas, and ends by introducing an international approach to external quality assurance addressing both standards and educational quality.

Big (and small) data meets quality assurance

By Anna Prades, Maribel Quirós, Maria Giné and Lorena Bernáldez (AQU Catalunya)

Evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, is at the core of every assessment process. New technology has given us an unprecedented opportunity to tackle both structured and unstructured data, yet barriers remain that restrict our ability to take advantage of this scenario. As a result, data often falls short of triggering change. One reason for this is the over-abundance of information. In this paper, we present and discuss a case study for the assessment of research and teaching quality in university departments. The study illustrates how AQU Catalunya is changing the way it presents quantitative data, benchmarking clusters of indicators to foster debate about the results. Finally, we look to the future, discussing what resources will be required if we wish to explore every opportunity the new data era can offer to quality assurance.

A Tribute to transversal expertise: What is the contribution of non-disciplinary experts to evaluation committees in academic programme evaluation in French-speaking Belgium?

By Denis Berthiaume (University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland), Audrey Van Ouytsel and Caty Duykaerts (AEQES)

Expert evaluation of study programmes has been a common feature of quality assurance systems in Europe and worldwide. In general, expert committees are formed of disciplinary or professional specialists who examine said programmes with a “peer review” approach. In the French part of Belgium, expert committees have included, for several years now, three other types of experts, namely education, quality management and student experts. Their contribution has been significant in the process of programme evaluation but empirical evidence was needed to understand the nature and value of their contribution better. This exploratory research project thus examines the contribution of “transversal” experts. A variety of data collection and analysis procedures have been used to gather evidence that takes into consideration the experience of both “transversal” and “non-transversal” experts. Results point to five areas of contribution for “transversal” experts. These five areas raise further questions as regards the composition of expert panels.

Evolution of the QA Culture at one university

By David O'Sullivan (National University of Ireland, Galway)

Quality Assurance (QA) at one university has evolved significantly over the past 15 years in keeping with emerging European standards, reported best practices and structured feedback from key stakeholder groups. In 2001, the QA process was focussed primarily on peer review and involved extensive information reporting. It was characterised largely as a defensive process that struggled to convince various stakeholder groups that QA provided value. In 2015, peer review is now just one element of a broader QA process that is significantly leaner, evidence based and focussed around enhancement. This extended QA process now incorporates a variety of activities including benchmarking, annual operational planning, controlled policies and procedures and performance measurement. The QA culture has evolved to become a significant agent of quality enhancement and is broadly endorsed by key stakeholder groups. This paper presents the evolution of the QA culture at one large university that has contributed to a steady rise in the university's world ranking.

What do the indicators tell?

By Jon Haakstad (NOKUT)

Input factors have always been an important element in the evaluation of education. Another approach is to highlight outcomes, and yet a third to listen to the students' assessment of course and programme quality. Ideally, correspondences between these three perspectives should make up a logical picture; performance indicators on factors like intake, input and outcome, plus the students' appreciation of quality, should present a consistent body of information that allows us to make reasonable assessments of the quality of provision. But to what extent do we actually find these correspondences and this consistency in the data? In other words: Can we rely on the indicators that we refer to so often in our quality discussions? A study of certain key data for all Norwegian BA and MA programmes in biology, political science and nursing suggests that performance indicators tell us much about performance but may give less indication of quality.

Using ESG 2015 to develop a national quality culture for further and higher education in a post-colonial micro-state: Malta

By Sandro Spiteri (National Commission for Further and Higher Education, Malta)

In July 2015 Malta inaugurated its National QA Framework for Further and Higher Education to foster a comprehensive quality culture in the sector. This is the first QA framework within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) that covers further, higher and adult formal educational provision. The Framework is based on the 2015 version of ESG, enriched with EQAVET elements. This synthesis was possible because of Malta's characteristics as a post-colonial micro-state.

As part of this process a number of tools and procedures were developed, institutions were upskilled in both internal and external QA, prospective peer and student evaluators were trained, and the first three pilot external quality audits have been carried out. The support of ENQA and the ESU were instrumental in this.

This paper will discuss how Malta's characteristics informed the development of Malta's QA Framework, and how the Framework itself was developed and implemented.

Accreditation outcomes 2010-2015: which programmes fall short of expectations and why *By Cristina Sin (CIPES), Orlanda Tavares and Alberto Amaral (A3ES)*

The paper analyses the main outcomes of programme accreditation in Portugal further to the operations of the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education, which were initiated in 2009. Tracking the evolution of study programmes, the paper found that out of the initial 5262 programmes on offer in 2009/10, 40% have been either discontinued or not accredited as of July 2015. The analysis revealed differences between the private and the public sector, with a higher proportion of closure in the former. It also revealed differences by disciplinary area. For Law, the discipline with highest percentage of non-accredited programmes, the main reason for non-accreditation lay in the programmes' lack of compliance with legal requirements regarding teaching staff qualifications and full-time employment. The blurred identity of programmes, undifferentiated between university and polytechnic sectors, and curricular incoherence were other important reasons for non-accreditation.

Self-evaluation as an effective tool in establishing quality management at the University of Helsinki

By Aimo Virtanen and Nina Aremo (University of Helsinki)

The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) is the organisation responsible for quality assessment in Finland. The University of Helsinki (UH) passed an international audit performed in 2014–2015.

The most important document produced as a part of the audit process is the self-evaluation report. It was prepared in eight workshops, with 15 to 25 members taking part in each.

The self-evaluation was documented according to the guidelines of FINEEC, including both a descriptive and an evaluative part.

The biggest challenges during the process included

- Describing issues honestly without being false or too positive
- Noticing problems and searching for solutions
- Using the input from the workshops in the most beneficial way
- Constructing a realistic picture of the University and its units and activities

The self-evaluation helped the audit team to find the University's strengths and make recommendations for further development.

The value of prognostics in quality assurance: Using student and graduate monitoring data for strategy development

By Karl Ledermüller and Oliver Vettori (Vienna University of Economics and Business)

From a conceptual point of view, quality assurance tends to be oriented towards the presence or the past rather than the future (ex post approach). This paper strongly advocates the need to make use of quality assurance instruments and processes as a means of forecasting future developments and thus to contribute to strategic and proactive decision-making. Presenting the case of a complex Student and Graduate Panel Monitoring – a framework of integrated surveys for students and graduates at different stages in the student life-cycle that is also combined with other data sources – the authors show how quality assurance instruments can be used for predictive purposes, provided that they are constructed in a specific way.

Students: full partners of institutional quality at the University of Lausanne

By Sophie Fuhrmann, Mélanie Glayre and Véronique Kobel (University of Lausanne)

Student participation in internal quality processes is one of the fundamental values underpinning the quality system at the University of Lausanne (UNIL). This participation does not stop at their involvement as beneficiaries of the processes: students are involved in steering them too.

This article will demonstrate that the value of student participation at all levels of institutional quality processes is not just wishful thinking enshrined in the texts describing the institutional processes, but can actually be seen in practice with the students showing a genuine willingness to be involved. Students are, in fact, present, they play a role, participate and appreciate being able to do so, at every stage in the processes.

Eight Challenges for Institutions who Wish to Handle Teaching Competence as a Strategic Quality Goal

By Martin G. Erikson (University of Borås)

Teaching competence is often discussed in relation to rewards of present day achievements, rather than in terms of strategic long-term quality. A call for a shift towards a long-term quality perspective on teaching competence is presented, and eight challenges, which have to be met in such a process, are identified. These challenges concern the active responsibility of institutional management and the professoriate; promoting demands of highest academic standards for educational specialists; selecting an appropriate time-frame, and relevant concepts (with a particular focus on the excellence-concept). Further, the challenges include the teachers' understanding of their disciplines, of educational theories and of research methods relevant for evaluating educational results. The final challenge concerns programmes for rewarding teachers. Taken together, these challenges present features, which are suggested to promote a quality culture where teaching competence is seen as a long-term quality goal.

Comparing internal influential factors affecting accreditation processes in Dutch and Dutch-Caribbean universities: enablers and barriers

By Sharine A. Isabella (University of Curaçao) and Don F. Westerheijden CHEPS, University of Twente)

Obtaining accredited status is of great importance for programmes offered in universities, regardless of their scale, location and developmental status. However, there are few studies on this in small universities in the global south. During 2009–2014 a study was conducted on internal influential factors affecting progress and outcomes of accreditation processes in Dutch-Caribbean universities, compared with two Dutch higher education institutions. In this paper findings are presented based on a qualitative multiple case study of accreditation processes in the University of Curaçao contrasted with Utrecht University and HZ University for Applied Science in the Netherlands. The commitment of internal and external stakeholders is a universal enabler, but some other internal factors had different effects in Curaçao and the Netherlands. These findings shed light on the enablers and barriers affecting accreditation processes and how to address the challenges encountered, particularly in small universities.

15 Years Student Accreditation Pool in Germany: Achievements, Failures and Future Challenges

By Thomas Bach (German Student Accreditation Pool)

Student participation on equal terms as partners in higher education quality assurance was a novel concept in the year 2000. Since its founding in 2000, the German Student Accreditation Pool (GSAP) has been established as a central body for student participation in QA. The GSAP has trained over 1200 students, participated in over 4000 programme accreditations and 30 accreditation bodies, and handles frequent discussions and interview requests. Representing over 2 million students with different expectations about quality assurance, a substantial lack of funding and the natural fact of limited time and experience of students in managing complex structures raised more than once questions about the future existence of the GSAP. New and ongoing challenges include the decentralisation of accreditation in Germany, cross border activities of accreditation agencies, ensuring the participation of students with diverse backgrounds, QA for the GSAP itself and sustainability in processes and funding of the GSAP.

Ten Years of Quality Assurance with Students' Eyes – Taking Stock and Providing an Outlook

By Beate Tremel and Asnate Kažoka (ESU)

2015 is not only the 10th anniversary of the ESG and EQAF, but with the Ministerial Conference, it is also the time for a new edition of the European Students' Union's survey "Bologna with Student Eyes". This paper aims to give an overview of the students' view of the developments that have taken place in the past ten years and provides some detailed insights from the 2015 survey's part about quality assurance. It furthermore identifies the most burning issues for students when it comes to future enhancement of quality assurance in higher education and provides recommendations about how to further improve students' involvement in quality assurance and how to support national student unions in their work on quality assurance for policy makers, higher education institutions and agencies, with student-centred learning being one of the most crucial issues for students in the next years.
