

Quality Assurance

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In search of balancing quality assurance, autonomy, accountability and trust, *Noël Verduyck (Department of Education and Training)*

Negotiating liminality in higher education: formal and informal dimensions of the student experience as facilitators of quality, Dr. Vanessa Rutherford & Dr. Ian Pickup (University College, Cork, Ireland)

In this paper, we shed light on the evolution of a framework for quality within University College Cork, Ireland amid a rapidly changing terrain of higher education globally. We move beyond a culture of compliance and accountability to analyze what happens when students (undergraduate and post graduate) are positioned in the higher education transitional space that requires the crossing of thresholds. A liminal space (Turner, 1969) is a transformative state in the process of learning in which there is an epistemological reformulation of a students' meaning frame and an ontological or subjective shift. This 'betwixt and between space' can be experienced as vulnerable but also as pregnant with opportunities for re-authorship. Drawing on student perspectives and using the anthropological concept of 'liminality' we illustrate how students, with the help of both formal institutional strategies and less formal experiences, negotiate this higher education space. We explore the extent to which innovative strategies create 'safe places' that host ambiguity, where tension is flagged and ameliorated, and which encourage freedom to see and test alternative textings of reality (Brueggemann, 1995). This paper brings together micro student experience in higher education and the theory of threshold concepts and liminality. It provides a lens through which to further explore and develop institutional approaches and sector wide best practice that facilitates and supports a high quality student experience.

Students as Stakeholders in the policy context of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education Institutions, Frauke Logermann (Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies, University of Twente, Netherlands), Prof. Dr. Liudvika Leisyte (Zentrum für Hochschulbildung, TU Dortmund, Germany)

Student participant in higher education governance in Europe in recent years has become more salient as Bologna inspired developments in quality assurance have been increasingly spread across the European countries and universities. The European Standard and Guidelines for Quality Assurance can be seen as one of the major Bologna related documents aimed at furthering the role of students as stakeholders in internal quality assurance processes of higher education institutions (HEIs) (Leisyte and Westerheijden, 2013). Still little is known about students' real position or influence on internal quality assurance processes in European HEIs. To overcome this research gap, this paper examines the role of students as stakeholders in HEIs' internal quality assurance procedures within the policy context of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in two HEIs in two countries. It is the paper is to understand **to what extent are students perceived as stakeholders in internal quality processes at different higher education institutions in the context of ESG?** Specifically, how are students actively involved and influence internal quality assurance at higher education institution? And to what extent do higher education institutions consider the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance regarding student involvement to internal quality processes?

The study is an exploratory comparative case study of one German and one Dutch university faculty which draws on a range of qualitative methodologies, including documentary desk research, empirical data from 8 semi-structured interviews with quality officers and academic staff and a student survey conducted in 2013. To determine students' stakeholder position in HEIs internal quality assurance

procedures this study applies the stakeholder theory of Mitchell et al. (1997), who distinguish between the three different stakeholder types: Latent, Expectant and Definitive Stakeholders.

The findings of this study have revealed that the role of students as stakeholders majorly differs between the studied HE institutions. While students in the Dutch case study enjoy a rather high stakeholder position as weak Definitive stakeholders, students in the German case study have a comparatively low stakeholder position as weak Dependent Stakeholders. In both cases, internal quality assurance systems are majorly in line with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, though higher education institutions' compliance evolves rather unconsciously. Thus, in this study the ESG do not seem to have a major impact on students' role as stakeholders in internal quality assurance.

Defining Quality of Higher Education from the Students' perspective, *Fernando Miguel Galán-Palomares, Blazhe Todorovski, Henni Saarela (European Students' Union)*

It has been a challenging task to define a commonly shared concept for the quality of higher education. The debate about the quality of higher education is often linked to economic indicators such as graduates' employment rates, drawing a picture of the so called ›efficiency‹ of higher education systems. However, stakeholders have had different views on it, balancing in a different way the different purposes of higher education. Nevertheless very little literature has been produced on the understanding of quality from the students' perspective.

This paper aims to have an overview of how quality of higher education could be defined from the students' point of view. Taking a stand from the perceptions and expectations of students about quality, quality assurance, European initiatives and information, from the European-wide survey conducted on the QUEST project, we look to how these perceptions affect the overall discussion on quality assurance in higher education in Europe.

Together with the results of the survey and the literature review, the outcomes of fifteen institutional site visits and around fifty interview sessions with student focus groups, student representatives and university staff and management help us to define a model for pursuing quality, which transcends simply by listing attributes of quality in higher education as they are perceived by students. It was found that these elements are interlinked, forming a progressive process from trust to partnership all the way to ownership. The findings of this work give a new insight on how higher education institutions can successfully implement quality assurance activities and build quality culture.

International Quality Reviews with an EQAR-registered Agency, *Melinda Szabo (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education – EQAR)*

The present study provides a first analysis of higher education institutions' experience with a cross-border quality review (evaluation/audit/accreditation, at programme or institutional level). The paper, based on the results of 13 case-study interviews, paints a comparative picture of the rationale as well as of the benefits and challenges experienced by higher education institutions that had their external quality assessment carried out by a quality assurance agency from another country.

The study explores whether these reviews are embedded in the internationalisation strategy of the institution, how they contribute to the organisation's quality culture and the role played by the national legislative framework as inhibiting or facilitating factors for such reviews.

The paper complements these case studies with a macro level analysis on the national openness of European Higher Education Area (EHEA) countries to quality assurance agencies working across borders, based on substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) attested by its listing in the European Quality Assurance Register for higher education (EQAR). The macro level analysis looks at the commitment taken by EHEA Ministers to "allow EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements".

Forms in Search of Substance: Quality and Evaluation in Romanian Universities, Koen Geven
(European University Institute, Florence), Adina Maricut (Central European University, Budapest)

Romania's integration into the European Union is fraught with cultural stereotypes. One dominant narrative is that the country creates 'forms without substance': meaningless institutions without adequate personnel or intellectual capital. In this paper, we investigate whether this popular stereotype adequately describes higher education reforms in recent years. We ask "what is the meaning of 'quality' in the reforms of Romanian universities?" We present our findings based on an analysis of policy documents and 186 semi-structured interviews with administrators, professors and students in 5 universities. The results show that people in universities have engaged in a process of interpretation and negotiation with the new quality standards. They are 'forms in search of substance', as meaning is created within and around the new institutional structures. We argue that 'quality' has come to mean 'scoring high in evaluations'. This is not without problems for the actors in universities; the evaluation standards contain many contradictions, while evaluations themselves have important limitations. Such findings reflect earlier studies on the 'audit culture' in university life.

Quality games in higher education; the cases of Romania and Switzerland, Gorga Adriana
(University of Lausanne, Switzerland)

While the discourse on quality of higher education is increasingly rising during the last years, by ignoring the frequent criticism against it (Houston & Paewai 2013), the concept of quality of education remains elusive. Wherever we look the quality of higher education, as response of universities to their social role or as procedure the society use to transform its universities, this "umbrella term" (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2004) takes its advantage from the ambiguities. To talk about the same thing - quality of higher education - does not necessarily means that the essence of the thing becomes the same.

The quality of higher education enjoys a first symbolic use which serves to support the university predetermined positions in society. Quality is considered as a response of the university, as a vehicle for meaning, for multiple significances and guarantor of the high level social and cognitive development (Furter, 1983 ; Fry, 1995; Nordvall & Braxton, 1996). This kind of quality excludes any definition because what the university offers to society can only be quality. Such a way of thinking is part of a quality "substantialist design" (Bailly & Chatel 2004) or essentialist view point (Perellon 2003). This intrinsic

quality is what Neave (1994) considered that during centuries of existence of the university in Europe, it has never left the university. The origins of this understanding of quality in higher education are to be found in the rationality of academic work. This implies that it is the university privilege and responsibility to assess the values of solutions and choose epistemological and human data adequately. The quality of academic work states itself as an ethical use of reason, an ethical use of personal freedom, an ethical use of criticism and of questioning, an ethical use of rationality and of confrontation (Patry 1975).

An additional and different strand of the debate about the nature of quality in higher education has an instrumental perspective. The quality of university becomes a method, a procedure adapted to generalized use in higher education policies, in university governance, in the management of academic professors, etc. Not until any quality user - student, administrative maker or political decision-maker - thinks in terms of his/her understanding of quality of higher education that the responses, about what really is the quality of university, start to be formulated. This second way of thinking about quality in higher education includes a "conventional analysis" (Bailly et Chatel 2004) of higher education and of research and refers to a realistic, pragmatic and operational concern (Perellon, 2003). Now quality has a plural definition. Several "qualities" of higher education compete with each other. For Brennan and all. (1992) there would be as many definition of quality in higher education that stakeholders. In this context, the quality of higher education is expressed as operational structures and procedures that maintain the university mission and role inside the society (Neave, 2003).

This second dimension of quality will be discussed in this paper (without forgetting that the first dimension provides the acceptability for the second). I am wondering why, despite a common incentive to use quality as a resource for action in higher education, made in the context of the Bologna process, countries and universities are responding by different quality devices and quality management systems. To what extent does the quality assurance makes higher education systems more homogenous or, conversely, grows wider their differences ?

The objective of this paper is to explain the commonalities and differences in the responses of two European higher education systems to the same incentives to change due to the Bologna reform. More specifically this paper focuses on the transformations leading to the establishment of quality assurance systems in the Swiss and Romanian universities. The comparison shows that the tradition of academic autonomy, institutional structures and characteristics of quality assurance as an instrument of control in higher education are the most important explanatory factors for similarities and differences with respect to the implementation of quality assurance in higher education systems.

The investigation of the cases discussed in this paper is based on secondary literature related to the implementation of the Bologna reform in Switzerland and Romania. I also conducted interviews with Swiss and Romanian actors, responsible for quality issues at the government and university level. In total 36 interviews (20 in Switzerland and 16 in Romania, conducted between 2007 and 2008) inform this analysis.

Implementing internal quality assurance in doctoral education, *Thomas Jorgensen (Council for Doctoral Education, European University Association), Chiara Lauritano (Doctoral School, Politecnico di Torino, Italy), prof. Flavio Canavero (Doctoral School, Politecnico di Torino, Italy), Martina van de Sand (Dahlem Research School, Free University Berlin, Germany)*

Doctoral education has experienced a decade of thorough reforms since the inclusion of the third cycle in the Bologna Process in 2003. Following the Salzburg Principles, universities have taken new institutional responsibilities in an area that in the past was largely left to a semi-private relation between supervisors and supervisees. Although the Bologna Process has worked as a catalyst to begin this process, universities have implemented reforms differently in the research based third cycle than in the first two, teaching based, cycles. The article will look at these reforms through the perspective of internal quality assurance to demonstrate how universities 1) have established institutional structures - doctoral schools - for strategic management, monitoring and enhancement of doctoral education, 2) have set up doctorate-specific procedures in order to meet the particular requirements of quality assurance for training for and through research.

The article presents two case studies from different European HE systems: first from the Politecnico di Torino in Italy, which has established its doctoral school at the central level in order to articulate and manage the strategic priorities for doctoral education for the institution as a whole, while at the same time taking institutional responsibility for daily management and for the individual doctoral candidates within the single doctoral programmes.

The second case study is from the Free University of Berlin in Germany, which has implemented a system of internal quality assurance through development of core standards both in terms of quantifiable issues such as time to degree as well as common guidelines for supervision and taught elements in the doctoral programmes. These core standards also function as an internal means to accredit and re-accredit doctoral programmes internally. The case study shows that even of these standards are not necessarily applicable to the whole institution, they contribute to a university-wide quality culture.

These examples demonstrate the level of sophistication of the reforms within doctoral education. They also show how the third cycle is different from the first two cycles and therefore needs different instruments to ensure quality of provision.

In search of balancing quality assurance, autonomy, accountability and trust, *Noël Vercruyse (Department of Education and Training)*

In this paper I explore a new perspective to address the issue of combining quality assurance and accountability in higher education through a more integrated overarching approach of both. The new perspective will also enhance transparency and trust while respecting the autonomy of the institutions and the diversity and containing the administrative burden and the financial costs. My starting point are the concerns expressed by the higher education institutions about the burden of the quality assurance system. Thereafter I have explored the trends in quality assurance and the growing demands for accountability and more evidence-based transparency of the diversity. I have also identified the characteristics of a 'good' accountability scheme and of 'good' accountability processes. Finally I conclude with a new integrated approach to quality and accountability in higher education.