The European Dimension of Quality Assurance

Bologna Seminar

Conclusions and Recommendations to BFUG

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My background

- Lecturer in Bioprocess Engineering in the School of Biotechnology (at Dublin City University (1984-2001)
- Director of Quality Promotion, DCU (2001-2005)
- Chief Executive, Irish Universities Quality Board (2005-present)
- Chief Executive, National Qualificaitons Authirty of Ireland (2010-present)
- Chief Executive, Higher Educaiton and Training Awards Council (2011-present)

- A Failed academic!

What is the European Dimension

of QA

There is no shared understanding of what this phrase means

Speaker on behalf of Federal Ministry of Education & Research

- Need highly-qualified staff to be comparable to US, UK, Australia
  - o the top 3 countries in THE "system-strength" league table – all have a long and strong tradition of autonomous HE institutions

- Need to engage in dialogue outside of Europe

Dr Hendriks
Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of FDR

- Correspondence needed between ESG and Qualifications Frameworks

- MAP ESG project welcome

- Quality as minimum standards

- Quality seals as gradations of excellence

Prof Serrano Velarde
Heidelberg University

Is QA a European Profession?

Is it professionalisation for the sake of "credibility"?

- Professionlisation/managerialism (within universities used as pejorative terms)

- Perceptions/examples of "Failed academics"

  - QA professionals
  - Heads of Department
  - Deans of Faculties
  - Rectors

Professor Serrano Velarde's talk

- Politicisation and formalisation of QA

- Emergence of professional standards

- Monopoly of service

Professor Serrano Valerde's talk

- Problematic acceptance of QA by the Academic Community – threat to academic freedom

- Academics look at outsiders (such as QA agencies) as the bad guys

What is the alternative to QA regulation?

"Democracy is the worst form of government …

except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time"

Winston Churchill

Remember who started Accreditation

- Origins of accreditation – US

- Country united by a flag, an anthem and a mutual hatred of the federal Government

- Accreditation set up by associations and universities to protect and restrict access to the "club"

Professor Serrano Velarde's talk

- **Strong power asymmetries**

ESG 3.6 independence (most difficult standard to fulfil)

An agency will need to demonstrate:

- Its operational independence from HEIs and government is guaranteed in official documentation

- The definition and operation of (the Agency's) procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its QA processes are undertaken autonomously and independently form government, higher education institutions and organs of political influence

Robin van Ijperen's talk

- A European Dimension to Quality Assurance is required

- A (real) European Dimension to Quality Assurance (linked to the goals of Bologna) is required (by the European Commission)

Recommendation of EU Report
on Progress in QA

- Make ESG more coherent with Bologna Framework (3 cycles, ECTS, Diploma supplement)

- Stimulate cross border QA

- More examples of joint degrees and quality seals needed

Recommendations from 4 Working Groups

WG1 – QA and Mutual Recognition of Degrees

- Lisbon Recognition Convention is not well known at HEIs
- The NARICs should be more active in promoting the LRC and good practices
- The credential evaluation of the HEIs should increase their co-operation
- Later in the year, a "European Recognition Manual" will be available
- There is a need for national registers ("whitelists") with information about programmes, learning outcomes, accreditations etc.

WG2 – Trans National Education

- QA agencies doing TNE should apply ESG and UNESCO code of Good Practice
- Problem of recognition of TNE by host country and country of awarding body
- Importance of QA agencies and awarding bodies should get involved with host country
- Paucity of data on evaluating the impact that TNE makes in host countries
- Link ESG better to qualifications frameworks (EHEA/EQF)
- TNE no longer a one-way process between developed and developing world

WG3 – QA of Joint Programmes

- It is complicated to have a joint procedure satisfying all national requirements
- Possible but not easy
- Should we be starting from a true European thinking of a joint programme rather than from national standpoints?
- How can we ease recognition for QA decisions across borders (recognise decisions of EQAR listed agencies, for example?)
- ECA – mutual recognition?

WG 4 – European Standards for Quality

- International developments in the field of QA offer opportunities to gain experience for agencies and HEIs
- Experts' practice in QA procedures (for disciplines)
- Enhance ESG towards subject-specific features of education
    - o Music – consider individual relation between teacher and student
    - o Engineering - consider professional aspects not only academic)

Conclusions and
Recommendations to BFUG

QA is not the only game in town

- QA is just one tool
- QA and Rankings – need both
- Also need to develop National Qualifications Frameworks referenced against:
  - EHEA 3 cycle Framework and
  - EQF – lifelong Learning Framework

Common elements of Qualifications Frameworks
- Learning Outcomes - based on competence, knowledge and skills – Dublin descriptors)
- Other bits are tools and instrument-based (ECTS, Diploma supplement etc.)

Multi-dimensional Ranking Tools

- Muhammed Ali – called the "Undisputed" World Heavyweight Boxing Champion

- Multi-dimensional ranking systems:
  - WBC
  - WBF
  - WBO
  - WBA
  - IBC
  - IBF
  - IBO
  - IBF

- Do we know now who is "the Greatest"?

EQAR – the Register

Was the Register created to regulate access to a European Market ?

The 2005 ESG report to the Ministers had "as a major proposal the creation of a register of recognised external quality assurance agencies operating in higher education within Europe".

EQAR – the Register

"This proposal is in essence a response to expectations that there is likely soon to be an increase of quality assurance bodies keen to make a profit from the values of a recognition or accreditation label.

Experience elsewhere has shown that it is difficult to control such enterprises, but Europe has a possibly unique opportunity to exercise practical management of this new market, not in order to protect the interests of already established agencies, but to make sure that the benefits of quality assurance are not diminished by the activities of disreputable practitioners."

European Standards and Guidelines

Is ESG a constitution based on founding principles

OR

a toolkit or box of instruments (3 cycles, ECTS, Diploma Supplement)

Basic Principles about QA in the EHEA

- Providers of HE have the primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance

- There should be encouragement of a culture of quality within higher education institutions

- Quality assurance for accountability purposes is fully compatible with quality assurance for enhancement purposes

- Processes used should not stifle diversity and innovation

- The quality of academic programmes need to be developed and improved for students and other beneficiaries of higher education across the EHEA

Basic Principles about QA in the EHEA

- The interests of society in the quality and standards of higher education need to be safeguarded

- There need to be efficient and effective organisational structures within which those academic programmes can be provided ad supported

- Processes should be developed through which higher education institutions can demonstrate their accountability, including accountability for the investment of public and private money

- Institutions should be able to demonstrate their quality as home and internationally

- Transparency and the use of external expertise in QA processes are important

Other ways of achieving European Dimension other than ESG

- The stocktaking exercise is a very useful process for measuring the success of national systems in implementing the Bologna action lines
- QA is just one area of stock-taking
- Progress in the European (and other) dimension of QA has been achieved outside ESG
  - Use of international experts in governance of QA agencies
  - Use of international experts on evaluation panels
  - Inclusion of students in membership of panels
  - Inclusion of student in the governance of QA agencies

Final local personal example of European Dimension in QA

- Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) – Institutional Review of Irish Universities (IRIU) has involved so far (only 4 universities have been reviewed to date)

  o academic experts
  o QA experts
  o Stakeholders
  o Students from

- England, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Scotland, Sweden, Switzerland, Wales and

- Australia, USA