



## Developments in Quality Assurance since the mid-1990s

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# The five main drivers of quality, and the related debates

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- Massification of higher education
  - and the debate about elite vs. mass HE
- Academic drift/hollow collegiality
  - and the debate about research vs. education
- New governance schemes/NPM
  - and the debate about standardisation vs. The uniqueness of HE
- Globalization/Internationalization/Bologna
  - and the Europe vs the nation state debate
- Universities and the knowledge society
  - and whether universities are institutions or industry

## A short history on QA: Phase 1 – Design

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- In the early 1990 much focus on how to design and organise QA-systems at the national level
  - Openess to various approaches (including private sector techniques TQM, ISO)
  - How should we define quality?
- What should be the purpose of QA?
  - Control vs Improvement
  - Should QA be linked to funding
- Who should be in charge of QA
  - Ministeries, an agency or the sector itself?

## A short history on QA: Phase 2 - Methodology

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- Late 1990/early 2000 an increasing interest in methods
  - The "general model": managing agent, self-assessment, external evaluation, report/public access to results
- Expansion in the number and types of methods used at the national level
  - Accreditation
  - Audit
  - Assessment
- The European/international dimension
  - ENQA, ESG, various developmental projects

## A short history on QA: Phase 3 – The Human Factor

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- Currently, we have started to ask questions of why QA doesn't work (in line with our expectations...?)
  - What is the evidence of impact?
  - Especially considering the new competition from rankings and various indicator based systems
- Greater interest in the functioning of QA at the institutional level
  - leadership and follow-up issues
- How to stimulate involvement and engagement of staff and students in QA

# What is the impact of two decades of QA?

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- Power
- Professionalisation
- Public relations
- Permeability

- Quality processes support institutional leadership – and institutional centralisation (and responsibility...)
- Quality processes triggers debates about the institutional identity (who are we, what should we do?)
- Quality processes has implied, at least in principle, a more legitimate role for students, but also for external stakeholders in higher education (broadening the definitions of quality)

- Quality processes triggers formalisation (what some term bureaucracy (but also professionalisation/"organisational learning")
- Quality processes stimulates new forms of academic and administrative cooperation (leading sometimes to improved mutual understanding)
- Quality processes, through the establishment of systems and routines, eliminated much of the anxiety surrounding these processes (without altering much of the strategic behaviour related to such processes)

- Quality processes help higher education institutions to articulate what they do (improving the external understanding of higher education)
- Quality processes have contributed to promote the importance of teaching and learning (balancing the continuing interest in research)
- Quality processes help defend the sector against alternative ways of trying to define quality (performance indicator systems, rankings, etc)

- Quality processes have "demystified" higher education (producing more information about the sector than ever before)
- Quality processes, and the information produces by these processes, have led to more informed decision-making processes
- Quality processes contributes to integrate the various dimensions of higher education (coupling personnel data, resource allocation, etc.)

## Where are we today?

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- Complex and diverse effects a result of a process characterised more by "add ons", not "elimination"
- An emerging paradox - two contradictory agendas:
  - accreditation (the control/accountability agenda)
  - "quality culture" (the improvement/enhancement agenda)
- Are we in a period searching for more integration, simplicity and meaning?

# Is "Quality Culture" the answer?

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- What is culture:
  - Numerous definitions
  - Meaning changed over time
- However, a widespread understanding is that culture is: "shared, learned and symbolic", "precedes any individual", and is "embedding knowledge, explanation, interpretation and understanding"
- But is culture something we "are" or something we "have"?
  - Isn't it "organic"?
  - Can we design it?

# Is "Quality Culture" the answer?

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- Quality in HE usually associated with a "fitness-for-purpose" or a "value-for-money" approach
- Recently more interest in quality as "excellence" (and "transformation")
  - Lisbon-agenda
  - EUAs "Quality Culture" project
- Is "Quality Culture" related to ideology and politics, and just another way to "modernize" the sector?
- How can/should we handle issues related to diversity and subcultures?

# Is there a constructive approach to "Quality Culture"?

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- There is a need for a theory-based and a more empirically-oriented approach
- We need to understand quality culture not as "the answer", but as a tool for asking questions:
  - who are we.....(increase self-understanding and organisational dialogue)
  - linking culture and structure (QA-systems, procedures, but also teaching and learning schemes, how they are set-up and the mode of delivery)
- Many quality assurance systems still "empty" – there is a need to link quality and strategy

## Some closing reflections

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- How can we create systems that allow for creativity, personal engagement and local initiatives?
- The relationship between teaching and learning and quality assurance still needs to be strengthened
- Perhaps it is time we go back and discuss some of the basic issues relates to quality assurance
  - purpose
  - design