Quality Assurance in Higher Education Teaching

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Objectives

- Consider contemporary views regarding QA & Teaching
- Comment on the generic forms of QA in Europe
- Identify specific areas of focus for QA activity
- What constitutes 'effective' QA in teaching?

The European QA Context: teaching in the university sector

- QA is a priority of the Bologna process in the EHEA
- Recent history: Prague (2001), Berlin (2003), Bergen (2005)
- 'Standards and Action Guidelines for QA in the EHEA' became the agreed reference framework
- Revised in 2015 (Yerevan)

The Scope of QA
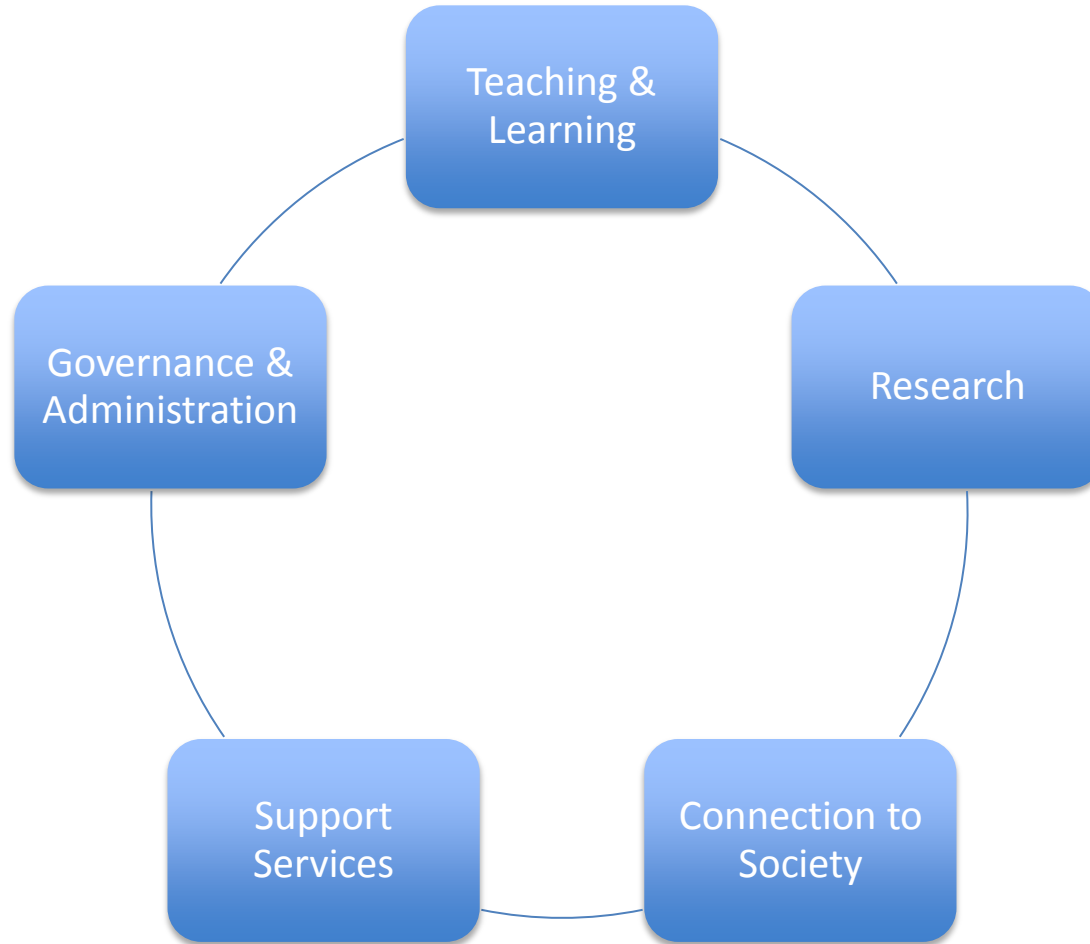
QA and teaching enhancement

'At the heart of all quality assurance activities are the twin purposes of *accountability* and *enhancement*. Taken together, these create trust in the higher education institution's performance. A successfully implemented quality assurance system will provide information to assure the higher education institution and the public of the quality of the higher education institution's activities (accountability) as well as provide advice and recommendations on how it might improve what it is doing (enhancement). Quality assurance and quality enhancement are thus inter-related. They can support the development of a *quality culture* that is embraced by all: from the students and academic staff to the institutional leadership and management'

(ESG, 2015)

Areas of specific focus

- treating students with fairness, dignity and respect
- providing all students with opportunities to learn
- informing students about relevant matters
- having transparent and robust policies and processes
- exercising responsible governance
- ensuring sufficient external scrutiny
- supporting staff effectively

(QAA, 2015)

QA characteristics/dimensions

- Internal (institutional)
- External (national)
- European / International

QA rationale/purpose

- common framework for quality assurance systems for learning and teaching
- supporting mutual professional trust
- facilitating recognition and mobility within and across national borders

(after ESG, 2005)

Thus identical processes are involved in IQA and much as EQA, namely, the gathering, evaluating, reviewing and using the same information or data. Both systems take into consideration for assessing quality, the triptych: *input* (the students; the curriculum; the staff; the facilities; the infrastructures and the resources), *processes* (teaching/ learning; teacher-student relationship; student support in learning; evaluation, research, administration/governance) and *output* (employable students?). Both systems are criterion- based, i.e., the evaluation they tackle is built on a number of criteria that comprise intent and a standard to measure the degree of realization of the intent. Finally, both IQA and EQA possess the same qualities: transparency and realism.

(Miliani, 2013)

'consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself'

(Berlin Communiqué, 2003)

Characteristics of effective QA

- Closely linked to institutional strategies

- Grounded in effective internal decision making processes and structures

- Context sensitive: take into account different organisational/disciplinary cultures

- Not punitive but developmental

- Reflect institutional autonomy and self-confidence

- They reflect commitment of institution to its staff and students

Institution-wide QA policy for Teaching

- Component of a continuous improvement cycle

- Supports development of a 'quality culture'

- Reflects links to research

- Defines the responsibilities of all stakeholders

- Transparent, accessible and reviewed

- Clearly articulated institutional roles

Teaching Programmes

- designed with objectives linked to institutional strategy
- explicitly described learning outcomes;
- involve students and other stakeholders in their design
- Informed by external expertise
- reflect the four purposes of higher education of the Council of Europe (cf. Scope and Concepts);
- designed to enable smooth student progression;
- define the expected student workload (e.g. in ECTS)
- include well-structured placement opportunities where appropriate;8
- subject to a formal institutional approval process

Focus on student-centred approaches in Teaching & Learning

- respects and attends to student diversity to enabling flexible learning
- utilises different modes of delivery, as appropriate
- uses a variety of pedagogical methods
- regularly reviews & evaluates curricula and teaching practices
- encourages learner-autonomy
- incorporates adequate guidance and support
- promotes mutual respect between learner & teacher relationship
- Includes appropriate procedures for dealing with student complaints.

Assessment

- assessors are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and receive support in developing their own skills in this field;
- criteria and method of assessment (including marking) are published in advance;
- assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved.
- students are given feedback that enables them to extend their learning
- assessment should be undertaken by more than one examiner
- provision for outside scrutiny (independent external examiner)
- regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances;
- assessment is consistent and carried out in accordance with stated procedures;
- a formal procedure for student appeals is in place.

Key questions

- How do we enable students to become active partners in quality assessment in T&L?

- How do we engage staff in the shared goal of enhancing quality in T&L?

- How are QA in T&L linked to the decision making processes at all institutional levels?

- How do we achieve a balance between centralised and de-centralised approaches in QA?

References

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