Ideas for quality assurance 2001

Anthology of workshop papers, Coventry 15-17.10.2001

ESiB

The National Unions of Students in Europe

Content

Introduction and suggestions

The following paper can be seen as an anthology consisting of four different texts, which can be seen as the outcome of four parallel workshops held in Coventry, UK, October 15-16, 2001 during ESIB:s board-meeting fall 2001.

The focus of the workshops were quality assurance (QA) in higher education (HE), with a certain point in students influence and student perspective. During the workshops the chairpersons found some discussion that was valid for every group. These discussions are here presented as suggestions for the coming work of ESIB.

-Economy, market and commodification of education
There are right now a lot of pressure on the HE from the industry and commerce to fulfil their whish. It's also interest in making education profitable. This might be a conflict and comes to surface inte work with QA. Who should be involved in aiming, planning, implementation and evaluation of QA?

-Responsibility for students
With a growing importance of HE for the society, and demands on democracy in HE, students influence are being stressed. ESIB has been calling upon a increased influence of students, but are students ready to take their responsibility in HE and QA?

-The Evaluation of Evaluation
The evaluation process, which is resultant from integrating quality assurance methods into education policy, must be safe guarded in order to maintain high level of quality. The ideal way for this to be achieved is to have an independent office, based on the structure of the Ombudsman's Office. This persons and their office would be fully independent of institutional and governmental interference and would place a high value on the befit to society of quality within programmes in higher education. The Ombudsman for Quality Assurance in Education would be able to act as an investigator, examining the implementation of the results of the quality assurance evaluation thus ensuring that the system maintains its standards.

-Full Transparency
The success of quality assurance depends heavily on the trust, which is built amongst the actors in education and the wider society. All institutions can only guarantee this and governments undertaking to have a system which evaluates quality assurance independently ensures that the evaluation is published openly. There is a definite need for full disclosure of all results from the quality assurance process so as to allow a true and actuate view of the current level of higher education in relation to the level which society would wish it obtain.

- Innovative role of ESIB and NUS:s promoting quality assurance
In addition to the political role, we suggest, that ESIB together with NUS's takes an active role in promoting concrete means and criteria for quality assurance. This must be promoted primarily in national and HEI levels. ESIB's role can be providing ideas and knowledge, togethe with a forum for discussion for the NUS's. In this paper there are some ideas and suggestions for those measures for a starting point of that discussion.

-Quality Assurance is not a threat
Quality Assurance is a process that is aimed at bringing all the stakeholders in Higher Education together and move towards one goal, the improvement of Quality of Higher Education. The process is a positive not a negative one, rewarding good practices rather than punishing bad ones. Students, as active participants in Education, believe that a destructive and threatening attitude could be detrimental to the process rather than aid its implementation. We need to work together not against each other to improve Higher Education.

3-Quality Assurance, Accreditation and Ranking
Though Quality Assurance and Accreditation do go hand in hand, they are in fact distinct concepts. Quality Assurance and accreditation are in fact intended to ensure that programmes and institutions do provide acceptable standards of education. The danger lies in taking these two concepts a step too far and using them to rank individual institutions. Unfortunately some actors are interpreting an emphasis on QA and accreditation as the go-ahead to make and publish rankings. This change and the needs behind it should be taken in consideration while developing the European QA and accreditation-systems. Diversity, an essential characteristic of the European Higher Education Area, can only be jeopardized by a strict and narrow-minded ranking system. Ranking is not and should not be used as a tool of Quality Assurance and Accreditation. The aim is to improve for the sake of good education and not to improve for the sake of a better rank.

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Introducing Quality Assurance in Higher Education Institutions

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The Introduction of Quality Assurance in Higher Education Institutions is not something that can be applied universally throughout the different institutions of the European Higher Education Area. Conceptions of Quality and Quality Assurance vary from institution to institution according to the policy which particular institutions adopt as well as the social, historical and cultural backgrounds which distinguish the different HEIs.

Setting the standards and objectives

In order to introduce Quality Assurance in a higher education institution one must obviously set the standards and goals which must be worked upon and achieved in order to ensure a good standard of Educational Quality. The obvious question that needs to be asked when setting an objective of improving quality is "What is quality?" Only by answering this question can we then delve into the implementation of Quality Assurance.

What is Quality?

Quality is a very subjective concept, dependent on the individual ideologies which surround it. Indicators of quality, or of what is quality, might not necessarily meet with universal approval. It is sometimes easier in fact to come up with concepts which are not quality rather than satisfactorily defining this variable. Some ideas on quality are tied to conceptions of Higher Education. It has been said that the function of Higher Education Institutions is to recreate society. Where this function is not fulfilled, quality is manifestly absent.

What is not Quality?

Quality is not tied in with Economic and strictly market oriented functions. The quality of university is not solely dependent on how many people get jobs but one must assess the academic quality from the perspective of academia and not of the labour market.

The mentalities of Quality Assurance

The introduction of Quality Assurance into Higher Education is not something that can be forced. It requires a certain amount of planning and also a certain attitude on the side of students and of HEIs.

Motivation and co-operation

Quality Assurance must be introduced within a framework mentality where the major stakeholders in Education realise that they are there for each other and not against each other. Full co-operation between the students and the teachers must be present in order to ensure the effective implementation of adequate quality assurance procedures. The motivations must be the correct ones, looking at Quality Assurance as a

way to improve the Quality of Education in the Institution and as a goal which both the students and the institution are working towards, hand in hand.

Recognizing roles and levels of Quality Assurance

The different stakeholders must all have their respective roles in the process of Quality Assurance. All sectors affected by Higher Education should be included in a process which evaluates quality and ultimately tries to affect improvements. While the contributions of all the stakeholders must be taken into account in the process one must always make sure that no-one is outside the system and thus the evaluation of Quality should be an effective one which targets all areas of quality and gives recommendations for improvements. No aspects should be above the review of Quality in an HEI. Students, as major stakeholders in Higher Education should be involved in all processes of Quality Assurance and at all levels.

Levels in Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance is a process which is to be found in a number of different levels, be it local, national or international. All the different levels have a role to play in ensuring the smooth flow of the Quality Assurance processes within the European Higher Education Area. On the local level, the individual institutions take part in Quality Assurance through self-evaluations. The concrete changes are also carried out by the individual institutions at this level. On the national level, national agencies or organisations monitor the different institutions and carry out regular evaluations and recommendations in order to make sure that the individual institutions are functioning effectively at a local level. The international level of Quality Assurance is increasingly important in the context of the European Higher Education Area. The international perspective is useful in engendering a feeling whereby all participating countries can rest assured that all other member countries have parity of quality with them.

Quality Assurance – is it a weapon?

The danger with Quality assurance is the threat that institutions or professors might feel when presented with the concept. Students do not consider Quality Assurance as a weapon which they can use against the institutions but rather as a tool that can be used by both students and institutions together to improve the quality of education as a whole. There must be co-ordination with staff associations and student unions in order to ensure transparent procedures that benefit students and protect staff from unfair discrimination.

Student perspectives on a National Quality Assurance Structure

Building the National Structure

A national structure in most cases should be established by law and funded by the state, however it should retain its independence from the government. There should be a transparent and public selection/election of the Board Members comprising nominees from Universities (including both representatives from the administrative sector of University as well as the academic one), student representatives nominated by national unions, representatives of the employers sector at different levels (including professional organisations), nationally relevant organisations (other stakeholders) and lay members (affected by the role of Higher Education in society).

Functions of the National Structure

The national quality assurance structure should allow for the autonomy of the single institutions. Such structure could very effectively be used as a research and information bank, providing institutions and individuals with good and bad practices both nationally and internationally. The role of the Quality

Assurance structure should not be one of policing. Rather it should be more focused on offering advice and consultation to the individual institutions on how to improve the quality of education. As an expert institution in the subject of Quality in higher Education, such structure should also be able to have an influence on government policy on Higher Education.

Methods

Some of the methods which could be used depend on individual institutions. Continuous communication must be ensured between the local and national level through self evaluations and study visits in order to monitor such self evaluation. Student input should be mandatory in all levels of this process. As quality assurance is in fact an ongoing process, this communication must be a constant, providing the individual institutions with the proper feedback and support, through which improvements in quality can take place more effectively. A full audit and evaluation taking place at regular intervals (3-5 years) should ensure effective monitoring of Quality Assurance.

Penalties or Prizes

Students are aware that though penalties are an option in cases of bad or unsatisfactory quality, such penalties often have a very adverse effect on students themselves and remove the aura of co-operation that must accompany implementation of Quality Assurance. The ultimate penalties involve the revocation of licenses to give degrees and possibly ultimately the closing down of a Higher Education Institutions. Considering the effects that such actions would have on graduates from these institutions and current students, such penalties should only be remotely considered in the worst possible case scenarios, where all other options have been extinguished. Quality Assurance should not be about punishing bad quality but providing impetus and incentives for Quality to improve. This can be done by publicising quality improvements and standards achieved and providing "prizes". These tools are more effective promoters of quality and provide the right attitude for promoting good quality Higher Education.

QA that innovates education

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Introduction/principles

The fundamental principles that have to be taken into account when designing the system of quality assurance can be divided into three groups:
Effects of quality assurance on the culture within a faculty
Goals of the development caused by the quality assurance procedures
Political decisions on the organisation and the purpose of the quality assurance

Of these, the goals and the affects are strongly interlinked. Without for example safeguards for participants against bad results and some support for diversity, it is impossible to produce motivating quality assurance towards which people in the faculty feel responsibility, and vice-versa.

Effects on culture

The culture within the faculty is one of the most crucial points, if we want the quality assurance to make positive or innovative change in education. The wanted situation is, that the quality assurance is a **motivating part** of their work, which gives them tools for self-reflection and development, not that the teachers try to convince somebody outside of the quality. To make this happen, the quality assurance must be **predictable, understandable** and **voluntary**, and in the other hand it must produce a **sense of responsibility** among all the parties concerned. Also creating a feeling of being a part of **HEI community** is important: quality assurance is a tool to achieve common goals, not to point out one group's problems.

Goals of the development

The quality assurance must be based on individual faculty's/HEI's goals, and thereby it must promote **diversity**. The diversity is based on **autonomy** of units and actors, who are encouraged to **self-competition**, with change to improve being granted. To avoid **negative competition**, there must be **safeguards** for students and staff to ensure, that a somehow bad result from an evaluation does not lead into loss of funding, personnel or other negative cycles. This also promotes abovementioned motivation and sense of responsibility.

Political decisions

There are a couple of important political decisions, that have to be made on a national and international levels, when building a quality assurance system. These questions are not answered here, and the best answers in different countries are probably totally different.

One question is the role of **ranking** and/or **accreditation** within the system: first of all do we want them, and if yes to what extent? Secondly: are they done simultaneously or by the **same body** as the quality assurance?

To achieve effective quality assurance we could want some **similarities** in the HE institutions, especially for some methods to be used. Often these are found in the institutions anyway, i.e. for disciplinary evaluation done to many universities it is good, if the universities have similar divisions of disciplines between the faculties within them. In the other hand, to be effective common university-quality-check –exams for graduates need some similarities in curricula. These similarities limit the autonomy, and the width of these similarities is a political question.

The role of different stakeholder-groups and especially the students is the last of the bigger political questions. **How student-focused** or even student-driven is the quality assurance going to be?

Methods of Quality Assurance:

A method of quality assurance means a concrete means, what to do in a HEI being evaluated, or what to make the university do by itself? The methods are here divided into four categories according to goals and the influencing counterpart. In some instances the categories overlap each other, and some of the methods could be put in more than one category.

The goals sets the question: "where are the models (or benchmarks) for good education found in the evaluation". If they are found from outside the unit being evaluated, for example from another institution or some standards, the method is said to be **comparative**. If the models are found from within the unit, the method is **feedback-based**. This may include analysis of the goals of the unit, discussions or feedback.

The other axis answers the question: "whose point of view leads the evaluation?" In other words, where is the priority, when finding the outcomes of an evaluation? On this basis there are **participatory** methods, which involve more the university staff and students while possible external body is only guiding the process. The other group is **expert-based** methods, in which major input is given by an outside expert.

(some of the methods are explained under the table)

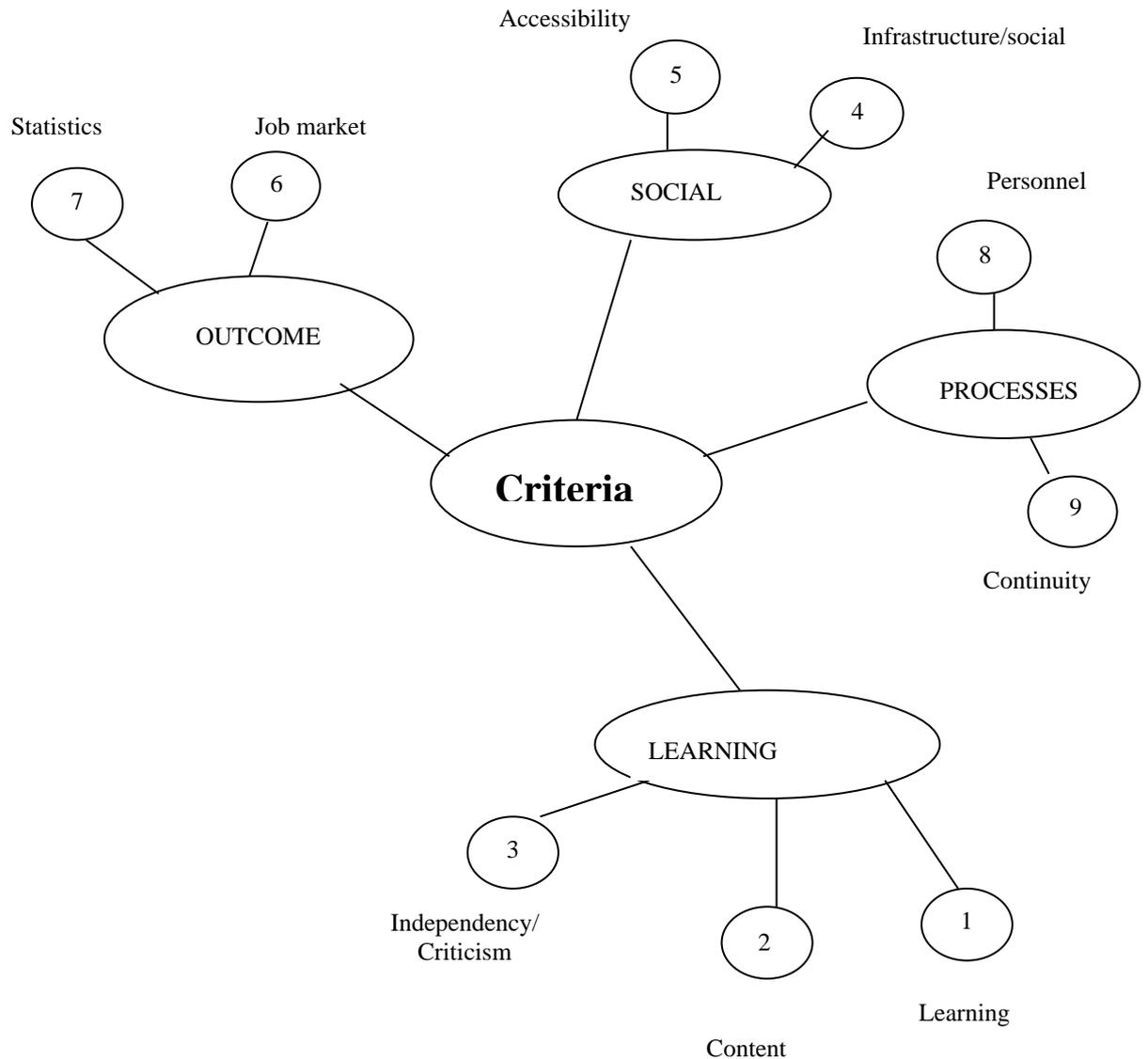| Goals \ Biggest Influence?	Participatory	Expert-based
Comparative	- Professors taking classes in a foreign subject (1) - Degree evaluation exam (2) - Student and teacher mobility experience	- Colleagues evaluation / knowledge of specialist community (3) - Benchmarking of - same subjects - different subjects (interdisciplinary view on working methods) - Universal labour market relevance test program (4) - Statistical analysis (5) - Criteria for top units (6) - Peer review
Feedback-based	- Role-playing game (7) - Interaction (8) - Self-evaluation - Interviews (9) - Questionnaires / Survey (10)	- Spy-evaluation (11) - Auditing plans of the unit vs. reality - In-house scenarios evaluated by outsiders - Review of students' work (12) - Profession descriptions / competence evaluation - Consultancy of employers - Measurements/follow-up (13)

(1) In different disciplines there are traditional ways to do for example teaching, which are rarely thought over. According to some experiences, a visit to a lesson of a totally different discipline may give new ideas for both the lecturer and the visitor.

(2) A degree valuation exam means here an exam made by the graduates for the purpose to compare the teaching and learning. It is not used to assess the student but the faculty, and to give them guidelines for development.

(3) The colleagues both in the same and different HEI:s tend to have much views and suggestion for development on each others work. This silent knowledge could be handled systematically by interviews and/or questionnaires, and thereby taken into productive use.

(4) The test program could include several measurements, focus being on qualitative ones. That is survey on skills and knowledge needed (both concrete and tacit) and after that comparison to HEI's curriculum.

(5) Covering wide range of fields, for example employability, numbers of graduates, number of applicants.

(6) Clearly stated criteria for a top unit, then evaluation in respect to that criteria.

(7) In the role-playing game the roles within HEI would be swapped, and afterwards teachers, students and other staff would give structured feedback to each other.

(8) Interaction as a part of everyday life in a HEI can be considered as quality assurance method as itself. It should be promoted by very small but still important methods, such as common events, organisation of the buildings (common tea-rooms, libraries etc.).

(9) Interviews of different members of HEI community and other stakeholders, that are somehow touched.

(10) See (9).

(11) In spy-evaluation peers take part in to lessons and other events as students, without teachers knowing that beforehand.

(12) This method may include outside expert reading exams or thesis, following oral presentations etc., with purpose to evaluate the HEI, not the student.

(13) Measurements or follow-ups should happen some time interval after the actual quality assurance procedure.

Criteria used in quality assurance

For each criteria important questions that should be discussed are the wanted and unwanted effects on the learning and teaching environment. This document doesn't give a complete list of criteria or their effects, but is rather a starting point for a discussion.

Below is a mind map of some relevant criteria, which divides the criteria into nine categories. In addition, per each category there is at least one criterion analysed, giving examples of wanted and unwanted effects on learning and teaching environment, if that criteria is used in quality assurance.

Diagram: Criteria mind map

- Criteria (center)
  - OUTCOME
    - 7 Statistics
    - 6 Job market
  - SOCIAL
    - 5 Accessibility
    - 4 Infrastructure/social
  - PROCESSES
    - 8 Personnel
    - 9 Continuity
  - LEARNING
    - 3 Independency/Criticism
    - 2 Content
    - 1 Learning

1. Teaching and learning methods
area efficiency
innovative education methods vs. equality
contact hours student-lecturers
obligatory updating courses for teachers
working & grading methods appropriate to aim subject
multiple ways to pass a course
establishing the relations between practical and theoretical classes

2. Content of subject
satisfaction rates alumni
practical approach to learning (from employers' point of view)
area specific skills & knowledge, different specialities and content according to where the HEI is situated
up-to-dateness of professionalism

student influence on the programme
"end aim" per subject relevant to field of work/science

3. Independency /Criticism
multidisciplinary freedom of combination
critical approaches (anti-dogmatic)
imbedding in larger picture (we – world)

4. Infrastructure / Social issues
access to common facilities (library, computers, internet, etc.)
funding for (poor) students
representative of society in student/teacher population

5. Accessibility
Transparency/openness of access
comparable grading systems (for accessibility to studying abroad)

6. Job market
graduates unemployment level
employment rate in relevant field of work

7. Outcome statistics
number of applicants to the programme
number/percentage of students continuing studies – e.g. PhD studies
number of graduates

8. Personnel
group therapy for teachers – supporting co-operation. An interview without an interview.
dynamic personnel management

9. Continuity
Adequate response to previous QA reviews

Some examples of how each criterion has wanted and unwanted aspects

To be considered (number of category above) Parameter	Wanted effects	Unwanted effects
1. Multiple ways to pass a course	- Equal change for different types of learners - Helps to schedule individual programme and timetabes - …	- Unequal required level - Students choosing the way to pass, in which they learn the least, that is in which they are already good at - …
1. Contact hours (Please be aware of the principle choice whether you include quantitative	- Chance for constructive learning, for example problem-based learning - …	- Statistics don't guarantee quality - Good and bad circles can be reproduced, as

		number of contact hours depends strongly on money available. - Behaviouristic learning - …
2. Up-to dateness of content	- Practical approach to learning - Ready to follow the evolutions - More interesting and motivating for students - …	- Costs - Teacher workload on wrong things (updating books, not developing teaching) - Forgetting the critical approach - …
3. Critical approach	- Student as a system that renews itself - …	- No deep theoretical understanding of any subject itself, just discussion - …
4. infrastructure: libraries, computers, etc.	- No financial or other discrimination - …	- Misuse for non-study purposes - Expenses - "Forever students" - …
6. Comparability of grading systems	- Supporting mobility - …	- Homogenisation (lack of autonomy) - Too strong steering systems - …
7. No. of graduates (We want a Mammal-University, not a Frog-University)	- Universities put effort in the success of their students - …	- Level of requirements may be lowered - Speed could outweigh knowledge - …
5. Employment rate	- Transferability of skills is high - …	- Education following the market rules of demand in a short cycle - Dependence on (world) economical situation - …
8. Professor choosing procedure, especially student influence	- Groovy atmosphere (team-ability, social skills) - Respect for professors and their quality teaching - …	- Later dependency of the personnel for the ones who chose them - Losing researchers - Professionalism - …

9. Adequate response to previous QA reviews	- Continuing enhancement of quality - …	- Adopting wrong data, too literate interpretation - …

Finally

Students, when complaining about conservatism of professors should not forget that they can also be unbelievably conservative. Conservatism is often a barrier to improvement, evolution and innovation – stay open-minded and critical.
Involving Students, teachers and decision-makers in QA

Involving Students, teachers and decision-makers in QA

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The focus in this part of the paper is the process of Quality Assurance (QA). A process which will be divided in four different steps: Aiming, planning, implementation and evaluation. All this steps are crucial factors to a successful process of QA. The definition of QA can be found in ESIB's policy paper on QA, and that might be good to remember reading this part of the paper. The focus will not be on "what" but "how" things can be done and "who" should be involved.

There is no effort in this part of the paper find a final solution to the problems and possibilities in involving Students, teachers and decision-makers in QA. You can rather see this as an effort to make an inventory of what can be done in the four steps in the process of QA. This is a discussion about different models, mainly discussing the local perspective, but some issues can be addressed both in a national and international way.

This part will be divided into four subparts all connected to the four steps presented above. Each subpart will then be divided as follows: a) Who should be involved? b) How can it be done? c) Good and bad examples (sorted out in the workshop).

Aiming

Aiming is the process where the goals are being created. "What are the goals for our QA?" is a relevant question for an example.

Who should be involved?

The workshop discussed flexible guidelines as a start. The discussion was mainly about the problem in creating goals which was suitable for everyone. That might be a mission impossible, and maybe not even good to the QA.

The workshop also discussed that the aiming cannot entirely be made on a local level. It has to be done both on a national and international arena. Although the group focused a little bit more on the national level, they all agreed that the goals had to fin ways to be accepted in the local universities, or else there would be risk of failure in the following steps of QA.

The groups to be involved were a topic for discussion. Students (NUS in different countries) were a natural answer to the question in the heading. The group then mentioned central government and local governments (if these exist), the institutions of higher education and industry and commerce. Both the government and the industry… were questioned. The government because it was not always the government had honest and democratic intention with the higher education (HE). The industry and the commerce was a topic in the discussion while that interest in HE might jeopardize the autonomy of the academy, and the freedom of the democratic and non commercial university. One line in the discussion stressed that the fitness for employment should not at all be in the consideration.

Very little of the aiming seemed then to be done on the local level according to the workshops discussion concerning "who" that should be involved. The discussion about "how" came to show some more local touch of the aiming-process. It also showed ways to create legitimacy for the results of all the aiming. The discussion also showed the importance of being humble to each country's tradition and system.

How can it be done?

One smaller group discussed this issue and presented a proposal how the aiming could be done. The proposal focused on the creation of a committee, a national one which at least had been started by the

government (some participants of the workshop thought that it was OK if the government also controlled the committee). The committee should be responsible for setting the goals for QA in a particular nation.

The following groups shall be part of the committee: a) Students representatives from the NUS, both graduate and postgraduate b) Representatives from the universities, both state and private c) Government representatives d) industry and the commerce e) Trade unions and professional associations.

The task that has to be carried out by the committee is numerous. First this committee should bring all interests of the HE together in a consultative process setting goals for HE. Secondly this group should set up a structure of an agency (or what it is to be called), which is responsible for planning and implementation of the QA. The workshop was not united in if this agency should be a local or a national agency. The solution to the problem was that the workshop meant it depended on which country that the agency was supposed to be operating in. But there were openings to the possibility of local agencies. Third the committee should evaluate the whole process of aiming, planning, implementation and evaluation. Some in the workshop thought that this might be a problem, see below (Evaluation) for that discussion.

Good and bad examples

The good thing about the process of aiming is that it's easy to get both internal and external interests interested (well of course can this also be a problem). The workshop was in many ways convinced that it was in the aiming process that these two powers could meet and have a fruitful discussion. Many of the participants had been a part of interesting work upon aiming.

Some of the participants had very bad experiences from aiming, especially concerning industry and the commerce. Sometimes these different groups achieved too much power, and with a very short horizon they created stupid goals. As for example the hype about IT, which made many students exams useless.

Planning

This part of the process is where you try to find out a plan for reaching your goals, a plan which purpose is to make the goals reality through implementation.

Who should be involved?

The process of planning is more of a local issue, based on a work made by at first hand students and teachers. The student influence is crucial to process of planning the QA at a local level, and the local student union should play a big role in act QA.

How can it be done?

However the discussion showed two weaknesses with the results above. Maybe it's not enough working only on the local level and with two groups of actors (something that was pointed out in the discussion upon the process of aiming)? There might be a point in having a more central group working with the planning, just as stressed above concerning the agency. The agency might be a solution to the problem of a local focus on planning QA. Maybe can a more central group (agency) consisting of students and teachers (+ other important actors such as the local community) make the basic planning and a local group a more specific planning of QA. All in communication with a national committee (also the government) and international actors such as ESIB, rectors conferences, Bologna-declaration and it's process, etc.

The structure of planning must in the local perspective is upheld by the university administration, so the planning can be an open and continuous process. It's also important that the planning is a written product so you always can correct and evaluate along the way.

Good and bad examples

Very often is the planning made with different treaties among students, university, local community, industry and the commerce, etc. on what's to be done. That is for many student unions a security in the work with QA. Many Student unions also finds the solutions where common bodies for planning are being made. It gives the process of planning a good status and the importance it deserves.

Sadly enough there is a problem in the time aspect of planning. Very rarely is planning given the time it needs to become an instrument of QA. Very often universities are rushing from aiming to implementation without further notice. It's also a problem that central agencies very often miss the local perspective. The planning is being made over the heads of people on the local level, which causes trouble in the phase of implementation.

Implementation

The step of implementation is where the planning is setting sails to reach a new and better harbour.

Who should be involved?

Mainly you can say that the groups involved in the planning also should be an active partner in fulfilling the goals. The implementation is a very local concern, although it might be interesting with national and international overviews.

How can it be done?

A main focus should be on not creating new bodies for implementation. The implementation should be done in the organs that already are operating on a local level (course, program, institution, faculty and university). Let the existing bodies be responsible for the implementation of the QA. Of course are students a part in all this places for implementation.

Good and bad examples

In some countries are students a legal part of the decisions made in the institutes of higher education, which is good. The bad examples concerning the implementation are sadly in majority. Teachers avoiding student's perspective and influence. Negative solidarity among the employees in HE. Very often the implementation also depends on person and not on structure or rules and recommendations.

Evaluation

Even though QA is all about evaluation, the evaluation itself needs to evaluate. This fact is often forgotten and sometimes non existent. That is a big problem in all different systems today.

Who should be involved?

Almost every group mentioned in the other phases of QA must be represented, but now it's getting real interesting if there are any new groups which might be interested in evaluating the process of QA. One big actor that not been discussed is the society as a whole. What did we get for our money? Here is a real possibility for the taxpayers to get their influence on public money being used. In this process the Student unions also can work as external blowtorches, not as participants.

How can it be done?

There can be visualised two types of evaluation of the evaluation. One thing that was suggested in the above, a committee with responsibility not only for aiming but for evaluation. This committee constitutes of many different groups, and that is good. But are such a group also capable of making evaluation of it's own goals etc. Maybe not. Some suggestions stress for a new organisation not connected in any way to the ordinary system of QA, but then we also lose the gains of knowing our own system from the inside. Probably the fact is that both of these functions are needed today in the HE.

Good and bad examples

It's very hard to find any good examples of evaluation being made on evaluation. The lack of that work strikes you hard when you think about it, and this is a key-issue for the future of QA in HE. This might be a forthcoming challenge for ESIB.

"Integrating Quality Assurance into Education Policy"

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Incentives and disincentives of Quality Assurance integration into Education policy

Having established the varying levels of Quality Assurance that members of the group had experienced in their own country and the differing methods that are been used to develop quality assurance with-in the various states of Europe, the group next focused on the question as to why universities, governments and students would want to see the idea of quality assurance advanced and what we see as the advantages and the possible disadvantages for higher education for developing quality assurance.

- Improving Education

The first point that was raised by the group was that quality assurance can be an excellent method of ensuring that the whole higher education system continues to develop. This applies in terms of resources, research and teaching. In this way quality assurance could ensure that the boundaries of higher education are continuously pushed for the benefit of society.

- Cost Effective

This point was raised and provoked some interesting debate. It was suggested that quality assurance would allow for better running of education on a cost basis, on the grounds that it would point to areas, which are under resourced. Evaluation can be used as tool to allows changes to programmes and ensure their success.

- Accountability

One of the major effects of a good accreditation system would be to show a transparent form of responsibility and accountability for both the development of new programmes and the re-development of existing ones, in order to for fill the recommendation of the evaluation.

- Universities and Change

Quality assurance and in particular the student evaluation of programmes and institutions are appropriate method for encouraging higher education institutions to change. This change should take place in the areas of programme development on the basis of demands and requirements of society and in particular those of the students and future students.

- Quality assurance and Economics

The discussion focused on the possible drawbacks of education one of which related back to the early issue of cost effectiveness. If quality assurance is not administered in such a way as to focus on the academic and sociologically values it leads to an overly market driven system of education. Only those courses which quality assurance defined as "useful" in economic terms would be developed due to high return for institutions and government alike. This is not in the interest of society and must be strongly opposed.
Higher education should not be driven by the demands of the labour market instead it should encompass programmes that endeavour to benefits society. Quality assurance is needed to promote these programmes. This will lead to students and graduates who are well rounded upon completion of there studies. Working with quality assurance can help to achieve this by "amongst other" things highlighting the good practices, which are needed in teaching methods.

- Quality and Quantity

A distinction between qualitative and quantative methods of quality assurance must be made. There should be extreme caution voiced at the use of quantitative methods. These may lead to the development of a production based education system, which may allow its standards to be lowered.

- Mobility and Quality Assurance

In an international context the obvious advantage of Quality Assurance for institutions and students is the promoting of mobility and recognition of qualifications. This is seen as the most attractive reason for developing the broad idea of international validation of quality assurance systems. That education and the standards that are achieved by those participating in higher education are transferable both within academia and the "labour market". Mobility is therefore developed with the help of good national systems of quality assurance.

- Defining the quality assurance

It was noted that a generic European or international system of quality assurance would not be practicable as different countries have different requirements and the autonomy of higher education institutions would also be brought into question. However, there is a need for some degree of recognition between national Q.A systems to allow the ease of understanding, of the level of attainment of the graduate.

- Giving information about QA

There should be full disclosure of all results of the quality assurance procedure undertaken by the institutions. This will allow students and future students to have clear understanding of what to expect from programmes they study.

The level of integration of Quality Assurance, into Education policy and the possible methods for doing this.

The next question which was put to the group was that of the level at which the integration should take place and what methods which would be the best for achieving this. The discussion focused on QA evaluation methods, emphasised the value of a positive attitude to QA and the different approaches that must be taken to quality assurance. The discussion ended by examining the difference between institutional quality assurance and academic quality assurance as well as looking at some of the principles involved and the practical implication of these.

- Combination of different QA evaluation methods:

Evaluation by students, while very important, is not the only method that can be used within quality assurance. There are several data sources, which should be used in combination to allow full integration. These include:
1. Peer review
2. Resource evaluation
3. Internal evaluation
4. External evaluation
5. Evaluation by students

- The Carrot approach:

The method for quality assurance to be accepted at all levels within higher education is to focus on the positive outcomes. Quality Assurance should not have a direct effect on the level of funding. Funding should instead be linked to the accreditation process. The reason given for the adoption of quality assurance system by an institution is that, an institution that fulfilled its duty under the evaluation would receive accreditation, which would enforce its self-democratisation and the autonomy of the institution. The methods in which the results of quality assurance evaluation are to be used are also important. The process that was discussed was that of internal department analyse and self-improvement followed by an institutional improvement. It is very important that quality assurance be brought to institutions in a non-threaten manner, but instead focus on the examination of the present state of education and to outline the required future developments of education within the institution.

- Institutional vs. Academic

The difference between the quality assurance evaluation methods for the institution and the academic programme was discussed next. The results of the discussion were that the Academic evaluation should allow a clear understanding of:

1. The aim of the course in terms of knowledge gained
2. The aim of the course in terms of critical thinking (sociological value)
3. The methods by which the aims are achieved

The institutional evaluation is different in that it should address for instance the following areas and point to the development of the same:

1. The support to staff
2. The level of resources
3. The evaluation of institutional services

An effective quality assurance evaluation should also lead to the following overall outcomes. These are, that the guidelines for development can be set at an institutional level without external inference. That it will be possible to recognise programmes in the same subject sector, in different institutions and countries. This will be of particular use to students, future students in order to obtain the qualification they want. Furthermore, recognise international qualifications .

Finally the requirements for productive quality assurance evaluation and accreditation depend on the following factors:

1. Student representation in the target setting process.
2. Evaluation by students
3. Internal evaluation
4. External evaluation
5. An appeal, follow up or re-evaluation process.

With regards to point five in the above, the idea of an independent Ombudsman's Office for Quality Assurance was addressed. This office should be independent from the institutions and government and will undertake evaluation and any necessary action on complaints about the quality assurance evaluation within institutions. This will be particularly useful as a method of encouraging institution to progress quickly in problem areas and allow student and others to complain anonymously.