Impact of Quality Evaluation

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Overview

• Explore impact issues
• Quality processes and how they relate to conceptions of quality
• Evaluations/critique of external quality processes
• Evidence, methodology and politics of quality
• Conclusion: Are we making progress?
Quality evaluation

‘Evaluation’ is an umbrella term for all forms of quality monitoring, assessment, audit, legitimation, endorsement or accreditation. It also includes standards monitoring.
Impact?
Concerns

At the INQAAHE Conference in Santiago (1999), opening keynote, I expressed concern about:

- the impact that quality processes have on higher education;
- the extent and nature of (independent) evaluation of external quality evaluation.
Impact

- More work for all involved in external evaluation (return on effort?).
- More documentation (but better?, for whom?).
- More information (right sort?).
- Clearer vision (for managers?).
- Greater accountability (about what and to whom?)
- More compliance.
**Impact (2)**

- Better regulation of the sector?
- More efficient institutions?
- More accessible? (open access, fees?)
- Better research?
- Better teaching?
- Improved standards of student attainment?
Quality processes and link to quality?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Standards</th>
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Exceptional quality of academic standards

Emphasis on summative assessment of knowledge and, implicitly, some ‘higher-level’ skills. Implicit normative gold-standard against which to measure academic performance. Elitist presupposition that there is a need to maintain pockets of high quality and standards.

Quality evaluation processes include standards monitoring, e.g. external examiners, reputational indicators (league tables), employer recruitment preferences, research evaluations (RAE). Accreditation also acts as a background monitor of the exceptional quality of academic standards.
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**Evaluation (external)**

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<td>programme</td>
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<td>Focus</td>
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<td>Rationale</td>
<td>accountability</td>
<td>control</td>
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<td>improvement</td>
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<td>Methods</td>
<td>self-</td>
<td>PIs</td>
<td>peer review</td>
<td>inspection</td>
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<td>assessment</td>
<td>stakeholder surveys</td>
<td>direct intervention</td>
<td>proxy delegate</td>
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Methods of improvement:
- accountability
- compliance
- self-assessment
- peer review
- proxy
- document analysis
- stakeholder surveys
- direct intervention

Approach to maintaining standards:
- inspection
- internal audit
- external audit
- accreditation
- accreditation PIs
- self-assessment
- proxy
- delegate

Rationale for maintaining standards:
- control
- regulation
- financial viability & processes
- compliance
- accountability
- financial viability & processes
- external assessment
Quality

- traditional
- perfection
- fitness for purpose
- value for money
- transformation

Standards

- Standards monitoring
- Accreditation
- Assessment (L or R)
- Audit/institutional PIs
- Customer surveys/feedback

Value added:

- empowerment of the learner
Transformative learning

- Accepting
- Engaging/Questioning
- Rote
- Understanding
- Reconceptualising

CRQ
Nature of evaluation
Evaluation of evaluators

Evaluation of evaluators is mostly unsystematic. Two broad types:

1. Opinion, predictive or theoretical analyses using existing (anecdotal) data [OLD].

2. Analyses that are based on systematic data collection [NEW].
Evaluators

1. Self-evaluation.

2. External evaluations initiated internally — sometimes using consultants as ‘friendly’ advisors.

3. Independent evaluations initiated and undertaken by an individual, research centre or organisation, as one-off studies or as part of a research programme into HE policy.
Purposes

A. Feasibility studies, evaluations of pilots or modifications to an existing process.

B. Evaluations of effectiveness of quality process (ability to deliver the ‘underlying rationale’).

C. Fundamental review of impact on the sector.
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Evidence, methodology and politics of quality
Evidence

- **Statistics**
  - Dubious provenance
  - Convenience measures
  - Poorly operationalised
  - Conceptually invalid

- **Verbal/written testimony**
  - Action
  - Intention
  - Opinion

Beware ‘facts’
Facts

- Naïve objectivism
- Theory-related nature of observation
- Evidence linked to theory
- Clear epistemology -- or at least a clear link to a specified concept of quality
  - (fitness for purpose as an escape clause)
Epistemology

- Positivism
  - explanations: cause and effect
- Phenomenology
  - interpretation: meanings
- Critical (dialectical)
  - understanding, situated
Methodology

• Causes
  – inferred
  – data as objective, unambiguous
  – statistical relationships

• Meanings
  – ‘customers’, ‘choice’
  – data as indicative; surface scrutiny (linked to expectation)
• Dialectical understandings
  - context dependent: historical, structural
  - totalistic
  - abstraction
  - data deconstruction/reconstruction
    • semiotic; critical hermeneutic; structuralist; dialectical processes.
Politics of quality

The ‘politics of quality’ refers to the macro and micro agendas that accompany the introduction of quality monitoring procedures. ... Alvesson & Willmott, (1996, p. 11), suggest that the achievement of quality in higher education ‘is essentially political in origin’. The politics, though, are concealed behind a facade .... Thus, any evaluation of evaluation systems needs to unravel the politics of quality. Equally, there is also a need, as in any social science, to explore the values and political agendas of researchers as well as those who commissioned the research.
Do we

• seriously evaluate the evidence we use and the nature of the epistemological enterprise in which we are engaged?

• use naïve models of impact?

• confuse effectiveness of process with impact on the sector?

• Continue to ignore the politics?

• really address the affect on student learning?
Factors impacting on the student experience of learning

Source: Adapted from Horsburgh, 1999, p. 22
Thank you

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