Quality Assurance of Distance Education for Whom?

Balancing the Needs of Diverse Stakeholders in an Increasingly Complex Tertiary Education Landscape

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Overview

- Higher Education Landscape
- Quality Challenges in the Developing World
- Quality Assurance of Higher Education
- Challenges in Quality Assurance of Distance Education
- Understanding the Interests of Stakeholders
- The Sustainability Challenge– Continuous Improvement
Higher Education Landscape

- Unstable global financial system
- Growing costs of HE
- Fundamental flaws in the funding model
Higher Education Landscape

- Continued criticism from employers
- Graduates are not prepared for the workplace
- Innovation and Critical Thinking Skills are lacking
- Saturated job market – Qualification Inflation
Higher Education Landscape

- Greater Complexity of HE
- Privatization / For-Profit HE
- Competition from Open and Distance Education
- MOOCs
- Diversification
- Diploma Mills
Complexity and Diversification

- New Providers – Business Models
- New Technologies –
  - Learning Platforms
  - Enterprise Wide Data/Document Management Systems
  - Social Media & Apps
- Student Demographics
- Open Universities
- Open ED. Resources
- MOOCs
‘Brick and Mortar’ Higher Education is Slow to Respond

Are Quality Assurance Agencies up to the Challenges?
Quantitative Increases and Quality Decline?

- Democratization & ‘Massification’ of Higher Education—Role of Distance Education
- greater accessibility
- lower per unit costs
- the rapid growth of private providers
  - foreign programmes
  - distance learning
  - in response to the increasing demand
- #’s of qualified academic staff?
  - Appropriate Curriculum?
For-Profit Distance Education

**HIGHER QUALITY**
- Flexible & Student Focused
- Efficiency through Technology
- Greater competition
- Geared to employer needs

**LOWER QUALITY**
- Profit incentive
- ‘Off-the-shelf’ programmes
- Isolated Learner
- Fraudulent institutions
Quality is a complex and elusive concept

It is mostly noticed by its absence

It is difficult to quantify/to measure

No scale or instrument available – so we need to measure something else …
Quality

- Exceptional
  - Distinctive learner
  - Excellence
  - Highest standards

- Perfection / Consistency
  - TQM
  - Zero Defects
  - Get it right the 1st time

- Fitness for Purpose
  - Quality relates to Institutional Purpose
  - Customer Specified Mission

- Value for money
  - Efficiency / Effectiveness

- Transformation
  - Enhancing & empowering the student / staff
  - Democratization
Seven purposes for QA in higher education

1. ensuring accountability
2. improving the quality of educational
3. stimulating competition within and between institutions
4. assigning institutional status
5. verifying the quality of new institutions
6. transfer of authority between the state and institutions
7. facilitating international comparisons

Brennan (1999)
Quality is a **Perception** that needs to be **Verified**

- Formative or Summative Evaluation
- Input Evaluation
- Process Evaluation
- Output Evaluation
- Impact Evaluation

- Each approach is based on a different Purpose
Definition of ‘Quality’ in Distance Education has been debated

- ...to be par with that of face-to-face education?

- is DE so distinctive that it requires separate methods of assessment?

- has DE surpassed traditional HE in some ways?

There is NO UNIVERSAL definition of Quality in DE
Main Approaches by EQAAs to QA of DE

**EQAA – External Quality Assurance Agencies**

1. Same criteria and procedures for all types of educational provisions

2. Similar criteria but different procedures and/or evidence for DE during the evaluation process

3. Different QA procedures and criteria

4. Some EQAA’s have yet to determine its position or is in the process of developing QA procedures and criteria
For many EQAAs the accreditation of DE is very new

QA purpose, policy framework, methods and instruments need to be ‘tailored’ to each country’s particular circumstances

the different QA approaches described reflect the differences in cultures, expectations, stages of development and even Politics
EQAAAs should consider

- incorporating quality assurance of DE into their overall QA frameworks

- Guidelines for ODL Providers help establish expectations

- need to focus on cross-border/transnational HE

- the views of students and other stakeholders
Important Stakeholders in DE

- Students
- Government
- Employers
- Community Groups
- Broader Public
- Foreign students
- Other Foreign stakeholders
Some Specifics in Evaluating DE...

- How to assess Student/Staff Ratio
- What Criteria are used for Assessment and Accreditation?
- What Benchmarks and indicators are suitable for ODE?
- Defining ODE boundaries
- Who will assess?
Some Specifics in Evaluating DE...

- Determining Cost Effectiveness
- Appropriate Media
- Appropriate type and level of Student Support
- Suitable levels of Retention
- Training of Staff and Technical Support
- Procedures for Student Assessment
  - Possibility for Fraud
  - SKILLS Technical Competencies
  - Students with Special needs
External Quality Assurance

3 Pillars:

1. Peer Evaluation

2. Visitation

3. Quality Assurance Status
   - Accreditation – Provisional, Conditional…
   - Registration
   - Approval
   - Recognition
Accreditation of DE

- May be Institutional or Programme/ Specialized
- Are Specialized Accrediting Bodies up to the Challenge of DE?
- Process as well as a Status

...comprehensive, examining the mission, resources, and procedures of a HEI or programme (Dill, 2000)

...the output of an accreditation is a yes/no decision, though gradations are also possible (Woodhouse, 1999)
Evidence / Data examined in External QA

- Self Study Report
- Site Visit – Interviews, professional observations, document reviews, classroom observations
- Surveys initiated by the EQAA – students, employers
- Performance Indicators – statics, financial indicators, ratios
  - Specific Evidence for DE needs to be Examined and Benchmarks agreed
Outcomes of External QA mechanisms

- Report – External Evaluator / Site visit

- Follow-up procedures – aimed at recommendations for improvement (not common enough)

- Linking QA to funding
EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

INQAAHE + Regional Networks

INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Self Study

Programme Reviews

Quality Enhancement

Performance Standards

Quality Culture

Performance Indicators

GOVERNMENT

Institutional Research

International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

Specialized Accrediting Bodies

Law, Medicine, Eng., Teacher Ed.

Accrediting Bodies

Quality Audits
Are Goals Sustainable?

- Human Capital Development
- Work Ready Graduates
- Equality/Equity
- Widening Access
- Social Demand

- SUSTAINABILITY
- Quality
- Government Revenue
- Support from Other Sectors
Is a Balance an Ideal or Realistic?

Human Capital Development
- Work Ready Graduates
- Equality/Equity
- Widening Access
- Social Demand

SUSTAINABILITY
- QUALITY
- Government Revenue
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Is a Balance an Ideal or Realistic?

Government
- Work Ready Graduates
- Equality/Equity
- Widening Access
- Social Demand

Students
- Flexibility, Accessibility, Autonomy….
- Recognised Qualifications
- Low Cost

Social Demand

Widening Access

Equality/Equity

Work Ready Graduates

Recognised Qualifications

Low Cost

Flexibility, Accessibility, Autonomy….
Is a Balance an Ideal or Realistic?

**HE / DE Providers**
- High Quality / Ranking
- Reduced costs
- Access to Funding
- Large Student Numbers

**Students**
- Flexibility, Accessibility, Autonomy….
- Recognised Qualifications
- Low Cost
Thank you