

# *Quality in Higher Education: what have we learnt?*

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# Introductory

- Don Westerheijden and *Quality in Higher Education (QHE)*;
- *QHE* – a central forum on quality in HE;
- Interesting and worthwhile discussions;
- *QHE* – tells a story of tensions and relationships?

# International & vs Parochial

- *QHE* – an international journal;
- Intentional – international forum, learning from each other (Westerheijden, 2001);
- Contributions have come from all corners of the globe;
- Local studies selected on the basis of their generalisability;
- Link between Internationalisation and QA (Van der Wende & Westerheijden, 2001).

# Improvement and Accountability

- Tension: improvement and accountability;
- Suggestions how a balance can be achieved;
- QA: no indication how to enhance or improve teaching and learning (Newton, 2010);
- External QA not good at encouraging improvement, especially when they had a strong accountability brief (Harvey, 2020).

# Quality assurance & the assessment of pedagogy

- Does QA actually affect learning?
- QA assessing processes rather than teaching or learning;
- Focus on student satisfaction/engagement surveys – little direct influence on pedagogical practice;
- Focus on ranking – no direct influence.



# Academic resistance: ritual and burden

- Artificiality of QA processes in HE;
- A burdensome extra?
- A ritualistic performance? 'Feeding the beast' (Newton, 2000).
- Academic resistance;
- 'name and shame'  $\leftrightarrow$  integrated educational development;
- No real link: quality of academics' work and QA processes.

# Defining Quality

- Consistent concern of *QHE*;
- A highly contested concept (Newton, 2010; Tam, 2001);
- Depends on perspective – Harvey & Green's (1993) aspects;
- QA a profession(?) but not a discipline;
- Analysis of quality should not be detached from purpose and context (Harvey, 2010);
- Quality has political dimensions;
- Quality is about more than satisfaction.

# Defining quality in HE

Exception

Perfection

Fitness for  
Purpose

Value for  
money

Transformation





# A Quality Revolution?

- Newton (2002) talked about 'Quality Revolution';
- 'Progress' to QA? An historicist approach?
- Definition of 'revolution': QA 'regime' and 'social transformation' in SA context (Luckett, 2010);
- Saarinen(2010) – not from the academics but the administration;
- Academic community reacted to, rather than acted to achieve (Saarinen, 2010).

# Impact of QA?

- Few evaluations of impact of QA;
- Ambiguous impact on student experience;
- QA – patchy development;
- Growth in performance;
- Decline in trust?
- Expansion of processes;
- Does QA bring assurance?

# QA & the Open Society?

- Many contributions highlight tensions and threats to academic freedom;
- QA does not align with academics' work and students experience in HE;
- 'Decoupling' QA from work of academics (Huisman & Westerheijden, 2008);
- Theme of distrust: academics  $\rightleftharpoons$  QA
- Voice of the academic community has become more subdued (Saarinen, 2010).

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