LEE HARVEY AND BERIT ASKLING

QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Abstract. From having been seen as an implicit element in university learning and teaching, and thus also a natural part of academics' responsibilities, the quality issue emerged in the 1990s as a topic of concern for politicians, institutional leaders, and a variety of other stakeholders. This concern emerged from a 'package' of simultaneous changes affecting higher education, such as the devolution of authority, new public sector management, restrictions on funding, expansion of student numbers and the like; these all were manifested in claims for external quality monitoring. The chapter gives an overview of different purposes of quality monitoring and also different forms of monitoring procedures. The question of the impact of external quality monitoring is also raised and discussed. The authors suggest that the catalytic function of monitoring for internal improvements within institutions ought to be emphasised.

INTRODUCTION

The 1990s has been the decade of quality in higher education. There had been mechanisms for ensuring the quality of higher education for decades prior to the 1990s, including the external examiner system in the UK and other Commonwealth countries, the American system of accreditation, and government ministerial control in much of Europe and elsewhere in the world. The 1990s, though, saw a change in the approach to higher education quality.

The change occurred for many reasons, in part pragmatic and in part ideological. Quality had by tradition been seen as an implicit and natural element of university-level learning and research and an integrated part of academics' professional responsibilities. This changed in the 1990s, with a requirement that higher education institutions should demonstrate, through their institutional leaders and expressed in comparable measures, the quality of its activities. Where institutions were used to see excellence or transformation as the self-evident key indicator of higher education quality, governments now emphasised value-for-money and fitness-for-purpose. In so doing, quality, as an implicit, self-evident property of higher education became transformed into a mechanism of control: an alien process of accountability and compliance that seemed to have no relation to the very essence of higher learning.

The initial introduction of governmental procedures for evaluating quality by focusing on indicators were, however, in the 1990s, gradually followed by the elaboration of more varied monitoring procedures. The governments' eagerness to get a grasp of what happens in the expanding higher education sector and to gain legitimacy for such measures, and at the same time, to encourage the institutions to respond to new challenges by improving their internal capacity for development and change, opened for variation in procedures and methods. The devolution of authority was emphasised and the contradictory elements of improvement and accountability in national arrangements for quality assurance were emphasised. References were made to the responsibilities of the institutions and their staff for monitoring and developing quality.

In this chapter, we shall give an overview of the quality issue, how it started and how it developed into a variety of monitoring procedures and, in addition, awoke a

R. Begg (ed.), The Dialogue between Higher Education Research and Practice, 69–83.

concern for the core missions of higher education, leadership and management, organisational development and, not the least, quality in teaching and student learning.

A POLITICAL CONCERN FOR QUALITY

As higher education expanded in many countries from the mid-1980s, encouraged by governmental concerns about the growth of knowledge-based economies and the role of higher education in being able to compete in a globalised world (DES 1985), their institutions came under the spotlight of new public sector management. More graduates were needed but there was no more public money to pay for them.

New public-sector management (Politt 1993; Bleiklie 1998), introduced at that time, was about improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the public services, in short, ensuring that necessary public services were produced at less cost to the government and hence the taxpayer. Higher education has not been immune from new management dogma. Indeed, there has been a notable retreat by governments from full support for higher education. In some countries, this has meant, for example, reducing student grants and introducing loans, introducing competition between institutions for students and research funds. The rubric of more for less, underpinning new public sector management, became the underpinning quality indicator for higher education in many countries.

Already in 1985, in the United Kingdom (UK), the government had expressed concern about quality in higher and the best way to ensure that there was accountability for the way that public money was spent. The Jarratt Report (CVCP 1985) on university efficiency recommended that the system as a whole should identify and fulfil clear objectives and achieve value for money. It proposed inter alia that performance indicators be developed to cover both inputs and outputs designed for intra- and inter-university comparison.

The Green paper (DES 1985) subsequently indicated the government's concern that higher education should contribute more effectively to the improvement of the performance of the economy. It suggested performance indicators such as 'the success of students in obtaining jobs, their relative salaries, and their reported performance in employment, and by reference to the international standing of our academic qualifications'. In addition, it paved the way for comparative judgements by external agencies. However, the Green Paper also stressed that the primary responsibility for preserving and enhancing quality rested with each institution, a principle from which nearly 20 years of quality initiatives in the UK has never wavered, whatever the practice. The Green Paper recommended that systems for monitoring and controlling quality should be explicit and open in the interests of accountability.

In the Netherlands, during the same period, there were significant changes in the structure and governance of higher education. The government's policy was explicit in Higher Education: Autonomy and Quality (Ministry for Education and Science 1985). The statement suggested that the existing administrative and legislative framework was no longer optimal to meet future demand. The central proposal was to increase the autonomy of the institutions by abolishing centralised regulations and introducing retrospective quality control. The intention was to allow the system to respond quickly and flexibly to market needs. In return for greater autonomy, institutions would be expected to develop their own systems of quality control and assurance that would demonstrate accountability for the use of public funds. (Goedegebuure et al. 1990).

France, one of the other early European pioneers of external quality monitoring introduced the Comité National d'Evaluation (CNE) to oversee quality assurance within institutions. CNE, an independent body set up by Act of Parliament in 1985, was mandated to evaluate higher education establishments and the value of the public service tasks that they provide (Staropoli 1991; Neave 1991).

In Australia, interest in quality in higher education also emerged in the mid-1980s. A Green Paper from 1985 stated that 'financial discretion in the hands of the institutions must be balanced with accountability'. It made it clear that funding would be allocated on output and performance with 'funding based in part on performance measures'. Institutions were asked to consider appropriate funding-linked indicators (Teather 1990). The subsequent White Paper (1988) Higher Education, A Policy Statement introduced a new funding mechanism and removed the binary divide between universities and colleges of advanced education.

The United States of America (USA), with its federal system and mixed public and private higher education sector, also expressed official concern about the quality of higher education. In the past, academics had expressed concerns about the standards of courses but, by the mid-1980s, government groups were taking an interest (Millard 1991). The National Institute of Education (SGCEAHE 1984) report Involvement in Learning: Realising the Potential of American Higher Education called for greater student involvement in the learning process and for more focus on the outcomes of the process.

In the USA, individual states are responsible for their own planning and funding and they have responded to the quality and standards concerns in a various ways, including the introduction of state-wide and state-mandated tests, more stringent entry requirements, financial incentives for curriculum innovation and outcomes assessment and linking state funding to institutional outcomes performance.

Germany has been the one country in Europe that has significantly resisted the headlong rush to external quality monitoring. Despite reported public concerns about the quality of German higher education in the mid-1980s, notably the duration of studies (which has been higher in Germany than most other European countries) and concern about the quality of teaching and learning, there has been little progress on the imposition of external review. The federal system and the legal constitution of universities has meant that Länder ministers for education have done little more than exert gentle pressure on the institutions to sort the problems out for themselves.

Thus, it has been evident from the start that quality has been used as a vehicle for delivering policy requirements within available resources. On the one hand, it operates as a mechanism to encourage change but it also operates to legitimate policy-driven change, which includes making higher education more relevant to social and economic needs, widening access, expanding numbers and usually doing it with a decreasing unit cost. External quality monitoring (EQM) became the predominant operational mechanism through which quality is used to legitimate policy (Harvey & Knight 1996).

THE DEVOLUTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Degree of government control, extent of devolved responsibility, funding systems and the overall structure and internal organisation of higher education vary from one country to the next. Nonetheless there has been a convergence in all systems towards a dominant model of delegated accountability using a fairly standardised review

methodology (Figure 1). The systems that have traditionally espoused a market approach and those that have been influenced by the traditional British system of autonomous institutions supported by the state are finding their autonomy being eroded by government-backed requirements to demonstrate accountability and value for money (Bauer and Kogan 1995). Where central control was, or continues to be, exerted over higher education, for example in China, Eastern Europe, South America and Scandinavia, there has been increasing delegated responsibility for quality but at the price of being required to be accountable and open to scrutiny. Thus, in those countries where a new accountable autonomy is being granted, self-assessment is seen as indicative of the shift to self-governance. In those countries where universities have traditionally been autonomous, self-evaluation is seen as not only politically pragmatic but a necessary vehicle to ensure the institution focuses its attention on quality issues.

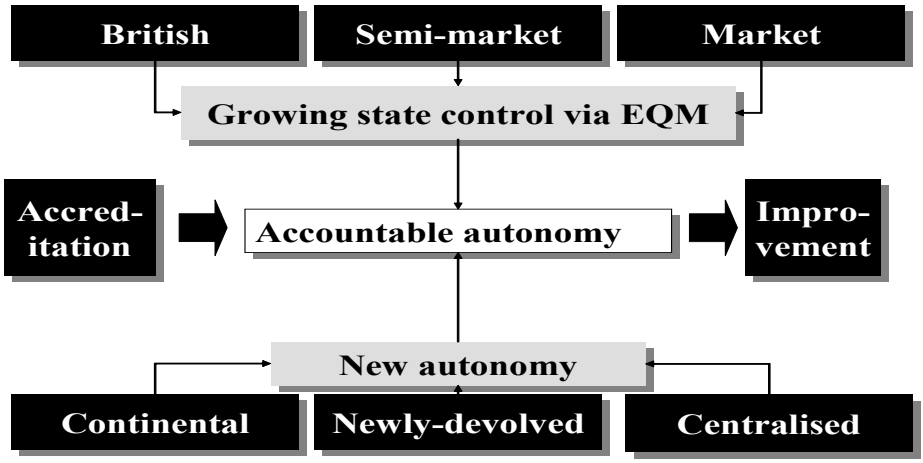

Figure 1. Delegated accountability (adapted from Harvey and Knight, 1996).

The convergence to accountable autonomy is reflected in a widespread methodology. Most EQM agencies make use of various combinations of three basic data collection tools, self-assessment, peer review and performance indicators, followed by a public report, usually containing recommendations (Green and Harvey 1994; Frazer 1995).

The widespread use of this approach is as much about political pragmatism as it is about the efficacy of the research methodology, or improvement impact. In those countries where a new accountable autonomy is being granted, self-assessment is seen as indicative of the shift to self-governance. In those settings where universities have traditionally been autonomous, or academics have been free from close scrutiny, self-evaluation is seen as necessary to lessen the 'inspectorial' element of review. A process of self-evaluation 'checked' by peer review in one way or another is the norm in countries as diverse as the USA, Brazil, Britain, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Australia, South Africa, and China. In most countries self-evaluation, while guided by an indicative framework, is mediated by reference to the mission of the institution, to

allow for diversity within the system. Peer review usually includes a visit by a group of 'respected' academic peers to the institution being evaluated. Most countries outside the British Isles have not included direct observation of the teaching situation as part of peer evaluation.

PURPOSES OF QUALITY MONITORING

External monitoring has a variety of objects of attention, foci and purposes. For example, the main object of the quality monitoring process may be the provider, which tends to be the case with institutional review. However, attention may be on the output of a programme of study or the medium of delivery, especially if the programme is delivered unconventionally. In some instances the learner rather than the provider may be the primary object of the review, although this is not common (Figure 2).

The focus may or may not be confined to the learning interface or it may encompass the governance and regulation of an institution. If the focus is on the learning, it might be directed at the curriculum, particularly design, organisation, assessment, support and learning infrastructure. Alternatively, the focus might be on the learner, rather than the programme, or simply on the validity of the qualification, as tends to be the case in some professional accreditation of programmes.

There are a variety of specific purposes of quality monitoring, which fall under four broad headings: accountability, control, compliance and improvement. (Figure 2):

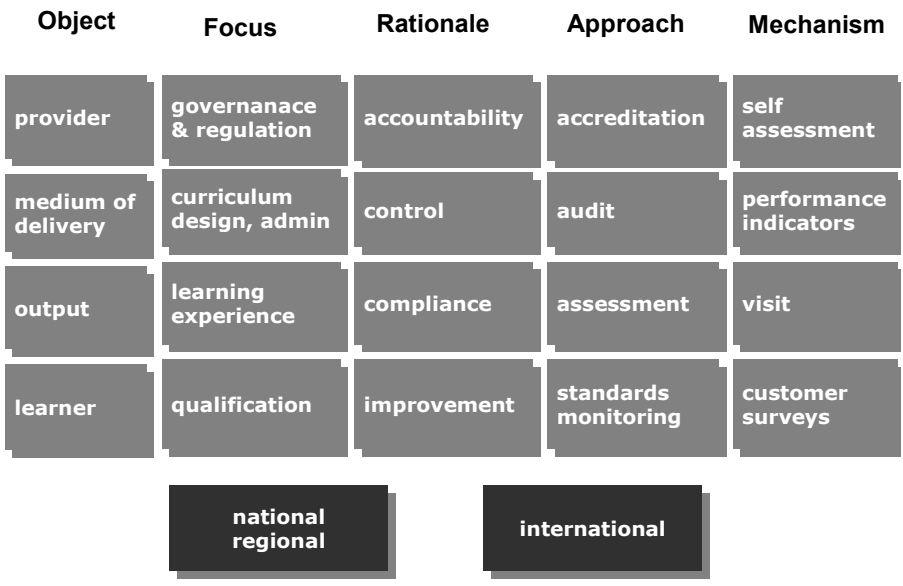

Figure 2. Object, focus, rationale, approach and mechanisms for external evaluation.

Accountability

Accountability has been the dominant underlying rationale for introducing quality evaluation. In countries where university autonomy is traditional or based on the market, there has been a growing demand for explicit accountability. Conversely, in countries where higher education has been controlled, accountability is the price of increased autonomy. Accountability is required because of the cost of massification, the need to account for and prioritise public expenditure and hence the pressure to ensure value for both private and public monies. There is also a more general pressure; to identify clear lines of accountability within higher education systems.

A second aspect of accountability is to students: assurance that the programme of study is organised and run properly and that an appropriate educational experience is both promised and delivered. In some cases, quality evaluation aims to ensure that students receive comparable 'service' — quantity and quality of teaching, study facilities, learning support, pastoral support, equality of opportunity and so on. Evaluations can be used to monitor whether students are getting the level of service that they have been promised or a minimum national level of service.

A third accountability purpose is the generation of public information about the quality of institutions and programmes. This might be information for funders that can be used, for example, to aid funding allocation decisions. It may be information for users, such as prospective students and graduate recruiters, that helps inform choice. However, to date, there is little evidence to suggest that students or employers make much use of information that results from quality monitoring evaluations.

Control

There are two elements to the control function of quality. First, is the desire of governments to control the higher education system in various ways, such as to restrict unrestrained growth, which is often done via financial controls but which also now includes using the outcomes of quality monitoring to encourage or restrict expansion.

Second, is a more generic control of the status and standing of higher education. External review is used to ensure that the principles and practices of higher education are not being eroded or flouted, thereby undermining the intrinsic quality of university-level education and research. Globalisation and the internationalisation of higher education, new forms of delivery and an increasingly unrestricted market are all features of a landscape that seems to be out of control. This has resulted in international as well as national attempts to control higher education.

The control aspect of quality evaluation specifically addresses the comparability of standards, that is the standard or level of student academic or professional achievement, nationally and internationally. Attempts have been made to 'benchmark' academic standards including: externally set and marked examinations; specification of the content of syllabuses; (threshold) descriptors of outcomes; external examiners to ensure inter-institutional comparability of awards. The use of external examiners, for example, is well established in some countries as a means of making comparisons between programmes within subject disciplines.

Compliance

External quality monitoring also encourages compliance to emerging or existing government policy. There is growing governmental pressure for the university sector to be more responsive to value-for-money concerns, more relevant to social and economic needs, and engage in widening access. In addition there is pressure to ensure comparability of provision and procedures, within and between institutions, including international comparisons.

There are other stakeholders who seek compliance through quality monitoring, notably professional or regulatory bodies who may use quality monitoring to check that their preferences or policies are being acknowledged or implemented.

At its simplest level, quality monitoring has encouraged, or even forced, compliance in the production of information, be it statistical data, prospectuses, or course documents. Such compliance means that taken-for-granted practices and procedures have had to be confronted and clearly documented. 'It represents the minimum required shift from an entirely producer-oriented approach to higher education to one that acknowledges the rights of other stakeholders to minimum information and a degree of "service".' (Harvey 1998: 241).

Improvement

Most systems of external review claim to encourage improvement. Despite the rhetoric, improvement has been a secondary feature of most systems, especially when first established. In some rare cases, such as the Swedish audits, improvement was designed in from the outset through the identification of improvement projects and evaluating their effectiveness. Compliance and accountability have been the dominant purposes and any improvement element has been secondary. As systems move into second or third phases, the improvement element has been given more attention (Figure 1).

The most effective improvement occurs when external processes mesh with internal improvement activities. In the main, external processes tend to effect improvement at the organisational level and may encourage better use of and investment in infrastructure. It is more difficult for external review to engage with the learning-teaching interface. In essence, quality review should encourage continuous improvement of the learning and teaching process, but evidence to date suggests otherwise.

The improvement function of quality monitoring procedures is to encourage institutions to reflect upon their practices and to develop what they do. Evaluation needs to be designed to encourage a process of continuous improvement of the learning process and the range of outcomes. Arguably, the assessment of value-added is at the core of any improvement-oriented, value-for-money and transformative approach to quality.

DIFFERENT FORMS FOR DIFFERENT PURPOSES

External quality monitoring takes several forms, ranging from accreditation and institutional audit, through subject assessment and standards monitoring to customer

surveys. They have varied objects, foci and purposes and relate to different notions of quality and standards.

Accreditation

Accreditation is the establishment or revalidation of the status, legitimacy or appropriateness of an institution, programme (i.e. composite of modules) or module of study. It has been described as a public statement that a certain threshold of quality is passed (Campbell et al. 2000; Kristoffersen, Sursock & Westerheijden 1998). The formal public recognition embodied in accreditation is seen as being based on agreed, pre-defined standards or criteria (El-Khawas 1998; Sursock 2000). Accreditation, thus has two nuances: first, the 'abstract notion of a formal authorising power', enacted via official decisions about recognition and, second, the quality label that institutions or programmes may acquire through certain accreditation procedures' (Haakstad 2001: 77). Accreditation is thus of an institution or of a programme of study. Programme accreditation may be academic accreditation or professional accreditation, that is, accreditation of professional competence to practice. Accreditation is a binary state, either a programme or an institution is accredited, or it is not (Haakstad 2001: 77).
Accreditation tends to focus on inputs such as resources, curricula and staffing. Sometimes it addresses the teaching process but rarely explores outcomes such as the graduate abilities and employability. The exceptions are some of the professional programme accreditations undertaken in the UK or US (Harvey & Mason 1995; Westerheijden 2001).

In principal, rather than the input-process-output focus, accreditation might be based on recognition that the institution has in place appropriate control and monitoring processes to ensure satisfactory quality and standards. However, identifying appropriate mechanisms is normally viewed as an auditing function (see below) distinct from, but possibly contributing to, a formal process of accreditation of an institution. The same approach could, if the audit is subject focussed, also be used to validate or accredit programmes.

At the institutional level, accreditation effectively provides a licence to operate. It is usually based on an evaluation of whether the institution meets specified minimum (input) standards such as staff qualifications, research activities, student intake and learning resources. It might also be based on an estimation of the potential for the institution to produce graduates that meet explicit or implicit academic standard or professional competence. In Europe, institutional accreditation or revalidation is usually undertaken by national bodies, either government departments or government-initiated agencies or quangos that make formal judgements on recognition. In the United States, accreditation is a self-regulatory process of recognition of institutional viability by non-governmental regional voluntary associations (Petersen 1995). Institutional accreditation, especially initial recognition, tends to be more prominent in countries with a significant private higher education provision, such as those in the Americas and Eastern Europe.

Audit

Audit is the process of checking to ensure externally- or internally-specified practices and procedures are in place. Audits might establish the existence of such procedures or may attempt to audit their effectiveness. Audit might be of specific aspects of provision but is usually pitched at an institutional level.

Normally, audits check whether procedures are in place to assure quality or standards of higher education. This usually requires an institution to specify its internal quality-monitoring procedures, including identification of responsibilities and intra-institutional communication and co-ordination of practices. Audits do not usually attempt to evaluate the institution as such, just to ensure that the institution has clearly-defined internal quality monitoring procedures linked to effective action. This approach, which probably started in Britain (HEQC DQA 1993), has been developed in New Zealand (NZUAAU 1997) and Sweden (NAHE 1996; 1997), and is often considered as having the potential of meeting many of the expectations of external control at the same time as it might support improvement (Dill 2000). In Sweden, the approach to audit undertaken by the National Agency was to focus on the stated improvement agendas of institutions and explore the efficacy of improvement projects and the approach appears to have aided the development of quality awareness and quality work in the institutions, taking the notion of 'the learning organisation' as its point of departure (Askling 1997; 1998).

The current proposal in the UK is to strengthen audit by enabling it to 'drill-down', that is, take a closer look at specific aspects of audit or particular areas where audit might suggest anomalies (QAA 2002). This is very similar to drilling down in financial auditing.

Assessment

Quality assessments set out to measure the level of quality of inputs, processes and, sometimes, outputs. This may be a judgment of the overall quality of an institution or programme or of specified component elements. In France, for example, the Comité National d'Évaluation (CNE) evaluates each institution holistically (Staropoli 1991; Ribier 1995).[1] Measurement may be against externally-set criteria (both implicit and explicit), against internally-specified objectives or missions, or a mutually agreed set of criteria. Many assessments are supposedly of fitness for purpose and thus institutions or programmes are assessed against mission-based criteria. In practice, there is a set of overarching expectations and the mission-based variability operates within narrow tolerances. Assessment might include a complex grading system or might be based on a simple satisfactory/non-satisfactory dichotomy.

Assessment may also 'benchmark'[2] against other institutions, national norms or against oneself over time. Benchmarks tend to be quantifiable and restricted to measurable items, including the presence or absence of an element of service or a facility. Currently, benchmarking tends to be a voluntary activity engaged in by institutions.

Assessment may focus on inputs (such as teaching staff, learning resources) or process (such as teaching, learning, support services) or outcomes (such as students academic standards of achievement or professional competence, employment rates, student perception of their learning). Assessment evidence includes statistical

indicators, observation, direct evaluation of research outputs, student and graduate views, employer views, student performance, self-assessment and other documentation, discussion and interviews with teachers, students and managers, and perceptions of other agencies, such as professional bodies.

Standards monitoring

In systems that have made use of external examiners, external monitoring of standards predates external quality monitoring by many years. External examiners are, or have been, used to monitor standards on postgraduate or undergraduate degrees in the UK, Denmark, Ireland, New Zealand, Malaysia, Brunei, India, Malawi, Hong Kong and in the technikons in South Africa (Silver 1993; Warren Piper 1994). In some professional areas, the external control on standards by regulatory or professional bodies has been a much more important factor than quality monitoring as the former is often linked to professional accreditation and the awarding of a licence to practice.

Standards monitoring has two main focuses: first, academic standards of a programme of study, identified by the academic work produced by students; second, standards of professional competence identified through the ability or potential to undertake professional practice.

Standards monitoring may specify standards that are appropriate or it may endeavour to ensure that standards are at appropriate levels, possibly by checking or even grading student work or performance. Standards monitoring may also attempt to ensure comparability of standards across the sector or across specific subject disciplines. External examiners inevitably make comparisons between programmes within subject disciplines, even if it is based on limited experience. Sometimes they grade directly but usually standards are inferred by scrutiny of a sample of work or by monitoring award statistics. Where there are, for example, externally-set and marked examinations, this can also be used to compare (or benchmark) standards. Some professional bodies in the UK set examinations linked to recognition of practice (Harvey & Mason 1995) and the provão in Brazil is an example of subject-based national examination designed to monitor standards.

A further purpose of standards monitoring is to enable the development of national and international systems of credit accumulation and transfer. Credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) has been in place in some countries for many years and is designed to ensure flexibility and responsiveness to student requirements and increased mobility. However, few students really take advantage of CAT schemes beyond the crediting of a single term or semester of study as an exchange student with a recognised partner institution or via a formal programme, such as ERASMUS in the EU. Furthermore, many CAT schemes function better in theory than they do when put to practical test and some students can find themselves disadvantaged when using them as they find that aspects of their study are not acknowledged.

Customer surveys

Sometimes quality review includes participant or 'client' satisfaction with service provision (at institutional, programme or module level), in which case feedback from students, graduates or employers enhance the normal process of self-assessment, statistical indicators and peer review, as, for example, in the assessments made by the

Danish Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Higher Education (Thune 1993).[3] Measurement of 'customer' opinions (satisfaction) such as the Student Satisfaction Survey at UCE (Harvey, 2001) and the Student Barometer at Lund University (Lund University 1997) are used as annual indicators of service provision and inform management decision-making.

IMPACT OF QUALITY MONITORING

The exposé of different external monitoring procedures in previous sections indicate that the quality issue affects the institutions in many ways. Thus, external monitoring, in itself a response to changes that are exerting great direct and indirect impact on institutions, may act as catalysts rather than having a direct impact (Askling 1997). Devolution of authority, new missions and obligations, new categories of students are changes that have contributed to the governments' keen interest in evaluation and monitoring and have evidently, irrespective of the introduction of evaluation and monitoring, introduced new tasks and also framed the space of action for institutions and their staff.

New Public Management and self-regulation, as alternatives to former models of state regulation, have brought about an array of normative models of institutional governance such as corporate enterprise, entrepreneurial university, adaptive university and learning university. The models are examples of efforts to find a proper balance between internal (academic) influence and external (corporate or market dominated) influences, between organisational stability and flexibility, all in order to maximise the capacity for institutional development within a frame of state control. In all of them, quality monitoring plays an important role (Askling & Henkel 1988).

In many countries, the institutional leadership has strengthened and the qualifications required for strategic academic leadership are identified. Universities today are complex organisations in a period of constant change and need leaders who can turn complexity into meaning by providing sense and transparency in situations characterised by confusion (Askling & Stensaker 2002). The internal 'architecture' of institutions and also the relative balance between providers, sponsors and clients must, it is argued, be taken into account when forming the expectations on academic leadership and institutional management (Middlehurst 1999).

A more pronounced task differentiation in universities and the development of a new collegiality are logical consequences when the quality of students' learning experiences are threatened by increase in student number, decline in funding and the array of additional tasks (Elton 1996). New ways of learning in higher education have been explored (Bowden & Marton 1998; Elton 1996; 1999) and there is a growing concern about university teachers' professional development and their responsibility for quality in learning and knowledge production. The establishment of centres for teaching and learning, and the allocation of special funding for improvement-oriented developmental work, are two measures that have been taken in many countries on a national level or by individual institutions.

Experiences tell us that student learning is mostly affected by curriculum, organisation and technological change but this is itself more directly affected by professional bodies, teacher development and integrating new forms of communication and flexible course structure, which in turn are more likely to be market driven than

initiated as a result of quality assurance. In effect, it seems that quality monitoring is bringing up the rear, checking on changes rather than being a major factor in change.

Delegates at The End of Quality? international seminar in Birmingham 2002 expressed considerable doubt about the efficiency of most external quality monitoring.

> Apart from the excessive cost to the exchequer of external systems, the internal costs of monitoring, in some countries, are enormous and in no way reflect the value gained from the process. Not only does external quality monitoring fail, in many systems, to engage with the internal improvement, its periodic and dramaturgical manifestations do not readily help inform change management in institutions. (Harvey 2002).

Furthermore, Westerheijden (2001), for example, argues that national accreditation arrangements work towards national uniformity rather than diversity. External quality monitoring actually inhibits innovation because of the application of conservative or rigid evaluation criteria. Impact of monitoring leads to uniformity and not to diversity and flexibility.

More damaging than lack of innovation and conformity, is the temporary rather than permanent nature of review-inspired improvements. There is considerable anecdotal evidence that the initial impact fades away quickly, especially if there is no significant connection between internal and external processes. External monitoring must interact with internal quality systems: the real benefits are products of the external-internal dialogue. The issue is how to embed changes that result from quality monitoring processes. The more the process is one of complying with external requirements the less the lasting internal benefits. This whole process is exacerbated by links to funding, which drives institutions to conceal weaknesses rather than engage in self-evaluation and improvement.

Copenhagen Business School is an example of an institution that has changed dramatically in a decade from a didactic teaching institution to a learning-oriented university (Kristensen 1997). There has been a significant cultural change but this has been facilitated by physical changes including new buildings and new technology, changes to course organisation linked to changing student numbers and finance, committed and secure senior management with vision and energy to drive internal changes, and a new generation of innovative staff. External quality monitoring has had some role in this, but in rather complex ways.

Thus, there is little or no evidence of clear impact of quality monitoring on learning (Harvey 2002). The structure and organisation of external quality monitoring is not compatible with empowering staff and students to enhance the learning situation. Indeed, research suggests that other factors entirely outweigh the impact of external quality monitoring on student learning. Horsburgh, (1998: 23) for example, mapped the dialectical interrelationship between the factors that impact on degree programmes and the student experience of learning. She suggests that there are far more important factors impacting on innovation in learning than external quality monitoring.

CONCLUSION

External quality monitoring of higher education has grown throughout the 1990s. Yet, while experience grows, there is no commensurate growth in evaluation of the impact of monitoring quality. On the contrary, evaluation of all these external monitoring procedures, mentioned in this chapter, appears to be a rather ad hoc process. In many countries, governments have introduced and changed models of external quality

monitoring without have anything else that value-loaded expectations as ground for their decisions.

One obvious reason is that there been considerable change in the higher education over the last decade driven by factors other than quality monitoring. Technological changes, massification, pressure for closer links to employment, general reduction in funding per head and internationalisation have been far more significant than quality review.

However, whether an example of impact or not, internal quality work has mushroomed. Individual researchers within the research fields of teaching and learning and didactics have inspired each others and also challenged university teachers to make powerful contributions to improve university teaching. In many cases they have also paved the way for the establishment of centres of teaching and learning. The have contributed in turning the quality issue, originally imposed by governments, into something that apparently is empowering teachers and students.

We agree with the delegates at The End of Quality? seminar, in arguing that the primary purpose of quality monitoring bureaucracies should be to act as catalysts for internal improvement within institutions. This role requires dialogue and advice as part of the monitoring procedure and the renewal of a trusting relationship between external body and institutions. There must be an emphasis on dialogue and support in EQM to give room for continuous improvement and process-driven quality improvements. Such processes will generate their own performance indicators, which will be owned by institutions and will measure real improvement (Harvey 2002).

NOTES

[1] CNE does not in any way accredit the institution.

[2] Benchmarking is, currently, a widely applied term although its use is far from consistent. The use by QAA in Britain is closer to the specification of a national curriculum than it is to the notion of direct comparative measurement.

[3] The Danish Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Higher Education is now part of the Danish Evaluation Institute with a broader brief.

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