Quality: some definitions in the framework
of the Bologna Process

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Quality

Harvey and Green (Harvey & Green, 1993b) have identified five concepts of quality discernible in higher education:

Exceptionality: it focuses on centres of excellence;

Perfection: it looks for consistency;

Fitness for purposes: it compares objectives and achievements;

Value for money: it focuses on accountability;

Transformative: it stresses the empowerment of students or the facilitating of the development of new knowledge.

According to Harvey, the present focus of quality assurance on accountability and input measurements is the reason why quality evaluation has contributed little to any effective transformation of the student learning experience (Harvey, 1995).

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is defined as a planned and systematic review process of an institution or programme to determine that acceptable standards of education, scholarship, and infrastructure are being maintained and enhanced (CHEA 2003).

Usually quality assurance includes expectations that mechanisms of quality control are suitable and effective. In some contexts, such as the United Kingdom, quality control consists of standards set by the institution or other bodies that oversee the awarding of degrees. It is important to distinguish between quality assurance, accreditation validation, quality audit, and subject benchmark statements.

The Bologna Declaration encourages, among other things, the European co-operation in quality assurance of higher education with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies. ENQA is the European Agency who worked in establishing a common framework of reference for quality assurance: Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

ENQA together with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB (2009) E4 Guidelines Standards and Guidelines

for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 3. ed.

<http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_3edition%20(2).pdf>

<http://www.enqa.eu/pubs_esg.lasso>

ENQA Position Paper on Quality Assurance (2009, p. 6) states among priorities:

"External quality assurance processes should pay more attention to qualifications frameworks in general, and to intended learning outcomes in particular, and to the assessment of their actual attainment. Similarly, in the changing context of higher education, those processes should address the recognition of prior learning".

<http://www.enqa.eu/files/ENQA_position_paper%20(3).pdf>

Accreditation

Accreditation is the formal or official external recognition of a (validated) programme. This may be for funding purposes or it may be the registration of the programme as a provider of professional education (which thereby signifies that graduates have attained a level of minimum professional competence). If quality is a highly subjective concept, stress must be placed on the importance of defining the _crediting party_ to know procedures and purposes of evaluation.

Validation

Validation refers to the internal procedures of the institutions which ensure that a programme has fulfilled internal institutional criteria. This process is often an internal one within permitted parameters and usually conforms to explicit guidelines. In some countries the validation for new programmes is not only internal to the institutions but requires an external approval (Government, Professional Associations, others). Most institutions have processes for the periodic review of existing programmes of study and of their constituent modules. Others countries, as for example Italy, have a validation process only at the outset of a new course.

Quality Audit

A test of an institution's quality assurance and control system through a self-evaluation and external review of its programmes, staff, and infrastructure. Designed to provide an assessment of an institution's system of accountability, internal review mechanisms, and effectiveness with an external body confirming that the institution's quality assurance process complies with accepted

standards.

Subject Benchmark

Subject Benchmark provides a reference point with which outcomes can be measured. Subject benchmark statements provide a means for the academic community to describe the nature and characteristics of programmes of a specific subject. They also represent general expectations concerning the standards for the award of qualifications at a given level and articulate the attributes and capabilities that the possessors of such qualifications should be able to demonstrate.

Subject Benchmark statements for LIS are used in the United Kingdom (QAA 2007).

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/statements/Librarianship07.pdf>

LIS Quality indicators

Many of the so-called "standard indicators", mainly specified by LIS professional associations, are actually guidelines, principles or statements of good practice rather than true standards. LIS guidelines cover areas as:

The context of the programme, the institutional support, the relationship with the parent institutions;

Mission, goals and objectives;

Curriculum;

Faculty and staff;

Students and policy and procedures;

IFLA Education and Training Section approved a survey on quality assurance models in LIS programs, aimed at achieving greater transparency of professional qualifications and increasing international cooperation of LIS schools for quality assurance and accreditation.

<http://www.ifla.org/files/set/s23_Report-QA-2005.pdf>

Learning outcomes

All programmes in third level institutions throughout the European Higher Education Area should be (re)written in terms of learning outcomes.

Learning outcomes are used to express what learners are expected to achieve and how they are expected to demonstrate that achievement.

A useful guide: <http://www.bologna.msmt.cz/files/learning-outcomes.pdf>

In the Framework of Bologna Process the design of learning outcomes should use Dublin descriptors

<http://www.tcd.ie/vpcao/academic-development/assets/pdf/dublin_descriptors.pdf>

Learning outcomes are important for recognition and should be related to the European Qualifications framework