Fifteen Years of *Quality in Higher Education*

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EDITORIAL

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ABSTRACT   *The review explores 15 years of contributions to* Quality in Higher Education. *In this first part the review focuses on external processes and factors, both national and international. The developments in a wide range of countries are reported and evaluated. The concept of quality should not be detached from purpose and context and quality has political undertones. A key issue for countries more recently introducing quality systems, especially less developed countries, is the transferability of systems established elsewhere in the world. Also apparent is how conceptions of quality assurance that originated in North West Europe and the USA have been the basis of developments around the world and how little variation there is in the methods adopted by quality-assurance agencies. The proliferation of quality-assurance agencies is being followed by a mushrooming of qualifications frameworks and the growing pressure to accredit everything, even if it is a poor means of assuring quality and encouraging improvement. The overall tenor of the contributions was that external quality evaluations are not particularly good at encouraging improvement, especially when they had a strong accountability brief. An essential element in this failure is the apparent dissolution of trust. Another issue is the use of industrial models and TQM in particular, which contributors, on the whole, regarded as of little use in the higher education setting. Although, not surprisingly, some contributions showed that institutional management impacts on quality. However, national performance indicators are viewed with suspicion, especially when they simply measure the easily measurable. Further, ranking systems are critiqued for their validity, methodology and the inadequate information they provide for students.*

Keywords: history of quality; quality assurance; quality improvement; internationalisation; accountability; trust; defining quality; audit; accreditation; national qualifications frameworks; national quality systems; performance indicators; quality revolution

It is now 15 years since the creation of this journal. Reviewing the past 15 years of work in the field of quality is an interesting, as well as worthwhile exercise. It is interesting because quality has so many facets and different perspectives. It is worthwhile because quality

affects everyone in the sector. The period has been one of immense change and development in higher education, all, arguably, connected with quality. Massification, internationalisation and marketisation have been amongst the most fundamental changes in the sector and all have contributed to what Newton has referred to in the pages of this journal as the 'Quality revolution'.

Quality in Higher Education has provided an invaluable forum for discussion of quality as it happened and a review of the history of the journal since its inception allows us to take stock of the key changes and developments in the field. As historians are often keen to point out, we can only see where we are going by exploring where we have come from and it is true in this case. Quality, for it to become part of the lived experience of all stakeholders in higher education, needs to become a fundamental part of what is done in the sector. A genuine culture of quality is necessary. However, there is always a tension between quality as ritual and quality as it is owned by its stakeholders.

Origins

Quality in Higher Education began because it was felt by its founders that there was a need for a forum for discussion on quality. In this, the journal has proved both successful and necessary; as there has been a constant flow of articles. However, the journal was also part of other initiatives. In particular, it began as a result of the *Quality in Higher Education* project, a funded project to explore the meanings of quality in the early 1990s. In addition, the journal has provided a professional publication for the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

A truly international journal

As such, *Quality in Higher Education* was from the first intended as an international forum, rather than as a parochial view from one country. In this, the journal has been spectacularly successful from the outset. Contributions have come from all corners of the globe: from North America, South America, Australasia, South-East Asia, China, Western Europe, Scandinavia, Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Gulf States, Africa and the Asian sub-continent. Naturally, many articles give a perspective from the authors' own countries but they are selected on the basis of their generalisability. In recent years, many other journals in higher education research have followed our lead by demanding that articles have an international appeal.

Diverse contributors

The journal is also diverse in the backgrounds of individual contributors. Contributions have been received and sought from researchers, practitioners and policy-makers, each with different perspectives on quality. *Quality in Higher Education* always aimed at bringing together different groups and its success in doing so has been reflected in the origins of the many articles submitted to the journal since 1995.

Diverse and international readership

The readership of *Quality in Higher Education* is also diverse and international. This diversity has encouraged contributors to write in an accessible way, often lacking in some academic

journals. The quality debate is for everyone working in the higher education sector and should not be made, through the over-use of jargon, exclusive to a small set or even a small group of nations.

The review

The review is indicative and covers some 320 substantive contributions published in the first 15 volumes of *Quality in Higher Education*. It is in two parts: first, external processes and factors, both national and international in this issue; second, internal processes, learning and teaching and a review of the impact of quality assurance in Volume 16, issue 2. Many articles could fall under several of the headings of the review but in the vast majority of cases they are mentioned only once, usually in the major area of their argument. Some are mentioned in passing as they are explored in more detail in the critical review in this volume by Pratasavitskaya and Stensaker.

PART ONE

Defining quality

In a journal devoted to quality in higher education, it might be expected that a number of the contributions focus on the difficulties of defining quality. The opening lengthy editorial (Harvey, 1995a) set out different concepts of quality and standards; a structure developed from Harvey and Green (1993) and further developed in subsequent publications (Harvey, 2006a).

Melrose (1998) identified three paradigms of curriculum evaluation and described them as functional (technical), transactional (naturalistic) and critical (emancipatory). Any model or tool for curriculum evaluation (or evaluation of a programme, course or module) that is developed by an institute or by a group of staff has an underlying philosophy (not always consciously recognised by the group) that can be matched to one or more of these paradigms. Quality in educational programmes has been variously conceptualised as meeting specified standards, being fit for purpose or as transformative. Melrose suggested a link between different concepts of quality and the paradigms of curriculum evaluation that influence the evaluative operations of academics. Readers were enabled to critically review their own evaluative practice against these descriptions and interpretations.

Tam (2001) observed that 'quality' is a highly contested concept and has multiple meanings linked to how higher education is perceived. She analysed ways of thinking about higher education and quality, considered their relevance to the measurement of performance of universities and colleges and explored their implications for the selection of criteria, approaches and methods for the assurance of quality in higher education. Tam also investigated various models of measuring quality including the simple 'production model', which depicts a direct relationship between inputs and outputs; the 'value-added approach', which measures the gain by students before and after they receive higher education; and the 'total quality experience approach', which aims to capture the entire learning experience undergone by students during their years in universities or colleges.

Lomas (2002) used four of Harvey and Green's (1993) five definitions of quality as an analytical framework to examine whether the massification of higher education is bringing about the end of quality. Their small-scale research with a sample of senior managers in higher education institutions in the UK revealed that fitness for purpose and transformation

were the two most appropriate definitions of quality. Problems of measuring quality as transformation have led to difficulties in its practical application.

Idrus (2003) observed that transplanting concepts, ideas and practices into developing countries seems natural as they are unable to create, initiate and disseminate these concepts, ideas and practices. Quality is one of those concepts and it does appear to have some formidable obstacles to acceptance in developing countries. Idrus explored possible paradigm faults as reasons for this negative reaction. It does not seem to be culture alone, for otherwise Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore could not have hoped to be places others look up to when they talk about quality and could not have hoped to become developed nations in their own right. In her paper on quality as politics, Lemaitre (2002) argued that globalisation has become a new way of describing the imposition of cultural, political and economic priorities formerly associated with imperialism. In the analysis of this trend, education in general, and higher education in particular, is usually absent. She explored how globalisation has led to the ideological crystallisation of two contradictory views of higher education. For some, the transformation is so radical that old ways of thinking and doing no longer apply, the sovereignty of states has declined and the market predominates such that cultural autonomy has been virtually annulled. Others contend that these processes have long existed but that what is different is the degree of expansion in the trade and transfer of capital, labour, production, consumption, information and technology. She explored the consequences each has for the definition of quality and outlined how quality had been colonised by consumerism and short-term effectiveness, pointing out the special challenges faced by developing countries.

Saarinen (2005) explored the discursive construction of 'quality' and 'assessment' in Finnish higher education policy from the 1960s onwards to be found in printed text material by the Council of State, the Ministry of Education and the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council. Her text analytical methodology concentrated on the metaphors and actions connected with the words 'quality' and 'assessment'. The theoretical assumption is that the discourse of 'quality' not only describes the developments in Finnish higher education policy but also produces and reproduces perceptions of that policy and of the motivating forces behind it.

Van Kemenade, Pupius and Hardjono (2008) observed that there are lots of definitions of quality. Garvin (1984) discerned five approaches related to business: the transcendental approach; the product-oriented approach; the customer-oriented approach; the manufacturing-oriented approach; and the value-for-money approach. Harvey and Green (1993) offered five interrelated concepts of quality in education: as exceptional; as perfection (or consistency); as fitness for purpose; as value for money; and as transformative. A new definition of quality is needed to explain recent quality issues in higher education. The authors described a quality concept with four constituents: object, standard, subject and values. They derived what they called 'value systems' for quality and quality management: control, continuous improvement, commitment and breakthrough. These value systems, the authors claimed, make it possible to explain some recent developments in quality management in higher education.

Iacovidou, Gibbs and Zopiatis (2009) reported a case study of a private institution in Cyprus that is developing its understanding of quality through the eyes of two of its key stakeholders, staff and students. This empirical study is nested within the literature that advocates community-wide acceptance of quality assessment structures that reflect the views of the stakeholders. The purpose of the study was to assess quality in a Cypriot university and importance-performance analysis was used to prioritise areas for quality

improvement. The results *inter alia* indicated a mismatch in student and teaching staff perceptions regarding the importance of factors in what constituted quality higher education provision. The key differences were that students considered the programmes and courses of study offered by a higher education institution and the teaching and learning that takes place in the institution as the most important dimensions of quality higher education provision. Teaching staff, though, considered the student support services, the teaching and learning facilities and student examination and assessment as the most important dimensions.

These various contributions point to two things; that analysis of quality should not be detached from purpose and context and that quality has political dimensions and is about more than satisfaction.

External quality assurance processes

The area that attracted most contributions was, not surprisingly, external quality assurance processes. About a quarter of the articles addressed this in one way or another.

Early on, Harker (1995) asked why demands for quality assurance in Western higher education were being made in the 1990s. He argued that postmodernism had created the ambience in which universities are being stripped of their traditional autonomy by external demands for quality assurance; the Lyotardian postmodernist rubric of performativity is consistent with recent trends in international higher education; the rise of performativity is related to the decline of the modernist meta-narrative of rationalism; the extent of the crisis in universities is, at least partially, caused by the decline of this legitimating meta-narrative.

Improvement and accountability

One area of concern was the tension between improvement and accountability. Despite contributions suggesting how a balance could be achieved, the overall tenor of the contributions was that external quality evaluations of whatever type were not particularly good at encouraging improvement, especially when they had a strong accountability brief.

Middlehurst and Woodhouse (1995) addressed the question of whether or not it is desirable, feasible or stable to combine the functions of quality improvement and accountability in national arrangements for quality assurance in higher education. They argued that, while it is possible to specialise a system towards improvement, it is not possible to have a separate system solely for accountability, as it will inevitably overlap into improvement. Improvement and accountability must be conceptually and practically distinct, with separate resourcing. A clear understanding and respect for the separate purposes needs to be developed within both national agencies and institutions. A failure to accommodate different purposes could damage the quality and the integrity of higher education by leading to serious imbalances of power.

Thune (1996) reported the development, during the 1990s, of systematic procedures of evaluation of higher education in several European countries. Accountability and quality improvement, he argued, are often conceived as mutually exclusive goals of evaluation, which are based on different methods related to the ownership of the evaluation system. However, the character of the *process* is different from, and independent of, *control*. He argued that accountability and quality improvement may be combined in a balanced strategy and, in the Danish case, these two perspectives have been synthesised in a dual approach, with an emphasis on improvement.

Using Deming's approach to quality in the industrial sector as a basis for analysis of quality assurance development in the USA, the UK and the Netherlands, Dill (1995) suggested that quality assurance policies are more effective in contributing to improvement when they foster the development of 'social capital', both within and between academic institutions.

Danø and Stensaker (2007) maintained that the role and function of external quality assurance is of great importance for the development of an internal quality culture in higher education. Research has shown that external quality assurance can stimulate but also create obstacles for institutional improvement. To strike a balance between improvement and accountability is, therefore, a key issue. They reviewed developments in eternal quality assurance in the Nordic countries and argued that although external quality assurance during the 1990s could be said to exemplify such a balance, it is questionable whether they have managed to maintain this balance over time, not least considering the introduction of various accreditation schemes in the Nordic countries as well as in the rest of Europe. They pointed to key issues on how external quality assurance could also stimulate a quality culture in the 'age of accreditation'.

An important element of improvement, it is argued, is the follow-up after the evaluation to ensure suggested improvements are put in place. Leeuw (2002) examined the inspectorate process. Many European countries have inspectorates of education and although they differ in some ways, all focus on the quality of education, all undertake evaluations and all strive for improvement in education. He argued that reciprocity between inspectors and institutions is important. Reciprocity includes exchange of information, both what institutions give and what they get back, and transparency of operations. Reciprocity, he argued, reduced the potential for dissembling and game playing because inspectees would lose credibility as trustworthy partners in the evaluation. Reciprocity is about trust and without it inspectorates run the risk of becoming 'trust killers', particularly if they focus too much on their own norms and criteria without discussing them in depth with their inspectees. In practice, only a minority of the 14 European inspectorates examined are involved in a reciprocal relationship with their inspectees. Although no reciprocity is bad for practice, too much reciprocity, he claimed, can harm the independence of inspectorates and may even lead to 'negotiating the truth'.

Despite these analyses, many agencies have failed to develop an appropriate balance, often failing to accommodate improvement and prioritising accountability. An essential element of that is the apparent dissolution of trust: an issue that recurs.

Audit

Quality audit as an approach was examined in several articles. Dill (2000) provided a US perspective on academic audit. He argued that academic audit (first developed in the UK and adapted in Sweden, New Zealand and Hong Kong) was an accountability mechanism that improved the capacity of colleges and universities to independently assure the quality of their academic degrees and student learning. He examined problems in implementing academic audits; including focus; selection and training of audit teams; audit self-studies; conduct of visits; reports; and follow-up. He concluded that audits have: helped initiate development of quality assurance systems within institutions; put the improvement of teaching and learning on institutional agendas; reinforced institutional leaders in their efforts to develop institution-wide quality cultures; provided system-wide information on best practices; and offered visible confirmation to the public that attention is being paid to academic quality assurance.

Woodhouse (2003) claimed that a quality audit checks an organisation's effectiveness in achieving its goals. He described improvements recorded as a result of the activities of the New Zealand Universities Audit Unit and the Australian Universities Quality Agency and argued that external quality audit can augment an institution's ability to improve.

Cheng (2009) explored how academics in a pre-1992 university in England understood their work as a profession. She revealed that academics' professionalism has affected their attitudes towards audit-related quality mechanisms and has resulted in a tension between professional values and the audit. This tension was caused by the perceived bureaucracy of the audit, its time cost and the perception that the audit is a symbol of distrust in the professionalism of academics.

Accreditation

Accreditation was another aspect of quality assurance processes discussed in several articles. This was not, though, a concern early on and the first such article appeared in Volume 7. Haakstad (2001) remarked on how, after a decade, the European debate on higher education seemed to be moving into a new phase, with increased focus on accreditation. There are several reasons for this shift from quality enhancement to quality control but the most important of these may be harmonisation ambitions in Europe and in the general wish to increase international student mobility. He referred to a government-commissioned report on higher education reform in Norway and noted concern about what accreditation may do to the established tradition of constructive and development-oriented evaluations, based on a quality concept that is dynamic and relative rather than fixed and static. Haakstad argued that if one must have accreditation it should be at the institutional not programme level, based on a flexible, but reinforced, audit method.

This wise analysis, however, has subsequently been ignored in much of Europe and there have been costly and unnecessary programme accreditation schemes imposed, primarily by politicians, on the higher education sector in many countries.

Westerheijden (2001) noted that the Bologna Declaration of 1999 not only urged reform into the bachelor–master structure but also wanted transparency by making levels and types of quality of study programmes clear. Although not mentioned explicitly in the Bologna Declaration, in many Western European countries establishing such clarity has been interpreted as introducing programme accreditation instead of, or on top of, existing external quality assurance arrangements. In Europe, there were already accreditation mechanisms in many Central and Eastern European countries after the collapse of Communism. He suggested that rather than Western Europe looking to the USA, it might find useful guidance from Eastern Europe on the issue of accreditation.

Faber and Huisman (2003) examined accreditation and related the European objectives, as stated in the various European initiatives, to the national quality assurance systems of the Netherlands and Denmark. They showed that while the Netherlands saw accreditation as the new cure, solving all problems that higher education is confronted with, Denmark took a different route, paving their path for mutual recognition in accordance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention. As it turned out, accreditation became unworkable in the Netherlands but Denmark did not learn from the experiences of others and adopted an unnecessarily cumbersome, controlling approach to programme accreditation.

Scheele (2004) described accreditation as a 'Licence to kill' and adopted the James Bond metaphor in a perceptive and amusing analysis of accreditation and the dominant 'peer-evaluation' approach. Using a Dutch trial accreditation report he showed that working

methods of the evaluation are emphasised and, although in theory there are consequences, in the event of critical reports, systems in fact aim at improvement rather than sanctions. Heusser (2006) outlined the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education project and noted that significant progress had been achieved in the process of mutual understanding of accreditation organisations and mutual recognition of accreditation procedures.

Equity

Martin (2009) presented the findings of an exploratory research study conducted at the UNESCO Institute for Educational Planning looking at how four countries (Australia, Brazil, India and South Africa) linked external quality assurance systems to equity policies. The project revealed that national equity objectives can be monitored through national external quality assurance frameworks and outlined ways in which this can be done effectively.

National qualifications frameworks

Another development addressed in three papers was the development of national qualifications frameworks.

Leong and Wong (2004) examined issues that have come to the fore in the development of a qualifications framework in Hong Kong. The initial concept of rationalisation of existing qualifications and standardisation of the nomenclature of qualifications may appear straightforward but many problems have arisen. They reported, then unresolved, problems derived from the emergence of private higher education and its quality assurance; the proposal for a single regulatory framework for the sub-degree sector; governmental regulation versus voluntary regulation; the nature and extent of institutional autonomy; and the relationship between foreign qualifications and the qualifications framework.

Blackmur (2004) critiqued the idea of national qualification frameworks (NQFs) as implemented in several countries. He argued that a NQF classification system is a hierarchy and that, in practice, the number of levels is determined on a more-or-less arbitrary basis. The information provided by a NQF to the labour market is meant to serve economising and equity purposes. However, far from informing governments and markets efficiently, a structured, levelled NQF distorts information about qualifications to such an extent that serious consideration needs to be given to abandoning the NQF classification system as a viable instrument of public policy. This conclusion is of special relevance to the Bologna process and associated moves towards the development of a European Qualifications Framework. As an alternative he outlined a 'networked' register of qualifications, which may add value to the processes of describing the attributes of qualifications.

Fernie and Pilcher (2009) noted that arguments for NQFs are compelling and such frameworks are now an international phenomenon. Yet, few studies take a critical perspective and challenge the broad assumptions underpinning NQFs. Focusing on the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF), they pointed to conflicts and tensions regarding the diffusion and use of the SCQF, such as whether all institutions are interpreting it in the same way and, indeed, whether resistance to change has rendered attempts to diffuse the SCQF as potentially naïve. They argued that research into the SCQF needs to address various areas including the political dimension, diffusion and consistency of use. They noted that the politics surrounding the funding of such research may also be problematic

given that most has been evaluative and funded by the SCQF itself, which is not sufficiently critical or independent. This may also be the case with other NQFs. The taken-for-granted assumptions that the SCQF and its diffusion are unproblematic, universally welcomed and benign must be challenged.

Industrial models

Several articles explored the applicability of industrial models to higher education. Most focused on aspects of total quality management (TQM). Harvey (1995b) critiqued the approach and argued that it failed to address fundamental issues of educational quality.

Barrett (1996), focusing on a book by Seymour, which had wide currency in the USA, argued that total quality management was inapplicable to higher education. He critiqued the notion of the student as customer and warned against injudiciously transferring ideas about quality from business to the realm of education, which *inter alia* overlooked political overtones of the term 'Total Quality'. In the same issue, Winchip (1996) explored the possible adaptability of Deming's management philosophy to higher education institutions. Her empirical study suggested that, with limitations, five major Deming themes are adaptable to higher education: purpose; cooperative systems; improvement; leadership; and methods-processes. Moon and Geall (1996), in a Forum piece in the same issue, critiqued what they called two ends of the love–hate spectrum of TQM, attacking both Barretts's and Winchip's contributions as rhetoric devoid of evidence. The former was accused of an overwhelming prejudice about the superiority and relevance of donnish knowledge and the latter for being not so much an exploration of the relevance of TQM for education as an attempt to fit education into TQM. Moon and Geall concluded that it is time to abandon dogmatic positions, prejudical ranting and blind adherence to doctrine. They argued that TQM has been displaced, in higher education, by continuous quality improvement, which is more than a terminological revision. The conceptual change takes the emphasis away from customer, product and the role of management to the ownership and control of an improvement agenda by those, in education, who can effect real change: teaching staff and students. Hansen and Jackson (1996) subsequently suggested that a total quality improvement approach could be applied to the classroom situation, as discussed in Part Two (in Volume 16, issue 2).

De Jager and Nieuwenhuis (2005) focused on the linkages between TQM and the outcomes-based approach in South African higher education. They claimed that quality assurance in some academic programmes is based on the TQM model because of the strong focus on the employers of graduates. Taking a particular view of TQM, they argued that in the TQM approach learners are centralised in the learning process and therefore become effective partners in the process. This matches an outcomes-based approach that is moving away from the textbook and lecturer-centred approach to a learner-centred approach. They concluded that the linkages between TQM and outcomes-based education indicate that there exist common principles related to each.

Houston (2007) argued that TQM is a poor fit with higher education and can only be made to fit by major reshaping either of TQM to a more appropriate methodology (and hence not TQM), or of higher education to an image of organisation that fits TQM. He revisited longstanding concerns about multiple aspects of TQM from a critical systems perspective. He pointed to the importance of purpose, language, values and boundary judgements and images of organisations in the determining the transferability of concepts and methods for quality between organisational types. The language, concepts and tools of

TQM, while superficially attractive, on closer examination do not match the substance of higher education. In a subsequent paper, Houston, Robertson and Prebble (2008) examined the potential of critical systems thinking enacted through Total Systems Intervention to explore quality and to promote improvement in a university academic department. Critical systems approaches, building on commitments to the systems idea, sociological awareness, methodological pluralism and human improvement can help to structure problems as a precursor to problem-solving. Total Systems Intervention was used initially to structure the 'quality problem' for an academic unit within a university in New Zealand from the perspective of internal stakeholders. For staff and student participants, the quality problem related mainly to promoting learning. Analysis and reflection on the problem and local context, drawing on systems methodologies, identified underlying tensions and issues and shaped specific interventions for improvement in learning. A systemic perspective on quality and critical systems approaches are likely to be of value in encouraging debate and promoting different interventions for improving quality.

Lundquist (1996) had earlier reported a study of the possibilities of using the Swedish Quality Award (SQA) in higher education. Results indicated that the SQA (which is similar to the Malcolm Baldridge National Quality Award and to the European Quality Award) could provide an effective way to reach a general picture of an institution and be a basis for further quality improvements.

Management and leadership

Outwith the discussion of industrial models of management, several articles addressed specific issues of management and leadership that impinged on quality.

Middlehurst (1997) argued that external and internal changes affecting higher education require institutions, and the system as a whole, to redefine missions, purposes and practice. Achieving significant change of this kind, however, requires leadership at many levels. She presented six dimensions of leadership that, she claimed, can contribute to the task of reinventing higher education. Atria (2004) examined the mission component of self-evaluation processes. He argued that a highly heterogeneous and diversified system, as in Chile, promotes quite different visions and perceptions of the institutional mission. An analysis of missions showed certain kinds of visions and perceptions produce missions that are impossible. The strategic implication is that institutional missions, to be realistic, must take into account a wider spectrum of possibilities.

Gordon (2002) made a case for effective strategy and leadership in the face of external quality procedures. This, he argued, is preferable to focusing on tactics to deal with the external processs. He argued that a predominately tactical response may succeed but is unlikely to build either an institutional or system-wide culture of quality assurance and continuous improvement. The evidence that has been gained over the past decade of quality assurance in higher education points to the centrality of strategy over tactics and, within the former, the need to align leadership with ownership and internal cultures with quality cultures.

Tam (1999) investigated the notion that managing change involves changing management. For systemic changes to take place, it is essential, she argued, that everybody in the institution should be involved and be empowered to identify their crucial and unique part in the scheme of things. She analysed the notion of empowerment within the framework of transforming higher education for its participants, including students, teachers and leaders. Congruent with the notion of empowerment is the concept of learning organisations. She

envisaged the university as a changing system that required a commitment to continuous improvement and empowerment for all of its members with a spirit of enquiry and continual learning.

Recently, from a Ugandan perspective, Basheka (2009) raised the question of academic freedom and asked to what extent it is a function of effective management systems. Data from a sample of academic staff, university managers, students and policy-makers showed that management significantly contributes to academic freedom in higher educational institutions. In this way, a better-managed institution enhances academic freedom and this consequently impacts on the quality of education.

National systems

A lot of articles reviewed and assessed progress on national quality assurance processes and practices. Within Europe, much of this was done in the context of the Bologna Process.

Europe

United Kingdom.   There were several contributions over the years exploring the development in the UK, which in the 1990s was more concerned with national developments than with the Bologna Process. Elton (1996) reported a forward-looking evaluation of the Welsh system of quality assessment, which emphasised local responsibility for quality improvement. He concluded that external agencies should change from stressing accountability for past performance (through direct assessment) to checking that self-evaluation for improvement is effective. In such a developmental system, based on mutual trust, power is shared between the external agency and the institution. Brown (1998) noted that the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education had given an enlarged and more prominent role to the QAA. He suggested that institutions would be more likely to go along with the National Committee proposals if the report leads to significant additional resources, together with some greater degree of societal support, for higher education. Turnbull, Burton and Mullins (2008) argued that the primary driver for the shift from trust-based to regulatory approaches to quality, which occurred in the early 1990s, was not control but transparency. The aim was to make more explicit the operation and outputs of the UK higher education sector. Despite the emergent emphasis upon ever-greater levels of outcomes-based, criteria-referenced transparency, the principle of 'academic judgement' and the flexibility that this engenders is, the authors claimed, a central and enduring feature of the UK higher education sector which must be accommodated alongside the drive for greater transparency.

Other contributors focused on the controversial teaching quality-assessment process. McGettrick, Dunnett and Harvey (1997) argued that teaching quality assessment (TQA), introduced in the UK in 1992, was the most systematic and uniformly applied form of external quality monitoring of the educational provision within higher education institutions in the UK, albeit that they focused on the approach to assessment adopted within Scotland. However, Drennan (2001) argued that one of the key aims of TQA was to encourage continuous quality improvement in teaching and learning. Her Scottish study of senior staff, responsible for the management and development of quality in teaching and learning, showed that senior management perceived difficulties in making judgements about the teaching aspect of academic work and were reluctant to promote staff on the basis of teaching performance. The respondents' statements further indicated that this reluctance

was compounded by the continuing tension between teaching and research, in which research-based criteria took precedence over other matters. These findings are in line with previous research in the USA and Australia, which had suggested that the prioritisation of research may have created disincentives to the development of innovative teaching and learning processes. She argued that the TQA, in the UK, has fallen short of its goal of raising the profile of teaching primarily because demands for research output have taken precedence over attempts to improve teaching.

Cook, Butcher and Raeside (2006) reviewed the grades awarded in the subject level review process (TQA) that ran in England between 1995 and 2001. These grades have subsequently been used to sustain most published league tables and are often cited in debates about institutional quality. However, the grades were never subject to any moderation, either at the time of the individual visits or subsequently. Accordingly, there are substantial variations between subjects over time as well as a marked grade inflation. Having controlled for these effects, there was a significant difference between the adjusted and unadjusted scores, which further calls into doubt both the validity of the original process and the uses to which the outputs have subsequently been put. This serves as a warning to other quality assurance agencies that have used or are considering assessing subjects through a review process.

Canning (2005) argued that quality assurance in the UK has maintained a very strong disciplinary bias, as reflected in the TQA. This brings about important challenges in assessing the quality of multidisciplinary courses as well as assessing the quality of the student experience of joint-honours and combined honours degree courses. He used area studies as a critical case of multi/inter-disciplinarity. The benchmark statement for area studies delegates assessment (and thereby disciplinary conventions) to its constituent disciplines rather than taking a multidisciplinary view. He concluded that quality assurance needs to assess teaching and learning from a perspective that reflects the multidisciplinary experience of the student, rather than the disciplinary identity of teaching staff.

Focusing on benchmark statements, Holloway and Francis (2002) had argued that the nature of the 'benchmarking' involved is far removed from benchmarking as recognised outside the higher education sector. They concluded by discussing ways in which higher education could be encouraged to accept the notion of benchmarking as a route to improving processes and continual development. Woolf *et al.* (1999) reported a small-scale project that investigated the potential of using a benchmarking club to establish and compare academic standards. Preliminary conclusions suggested that benchmarking as a process for comparing academic standards across departments to identify best practice could be a valuable tool of quality assurance. However, there must be doubt about the worth of creating academic benchmarks as baselines against which to measure the academic standards of subjects. Bellingham (2008) further reflected on the value of the UK subject benchmark statements for maintaining academic standards. Practitioners' accounts of working with subject benchmark statements suggested that they are of value in the design and validation of new programmes and in internal and external quality assurance processes. Challenges included fears over a 'tick box' compliance culture, complexities of dealing with multidisciplinary programmes and management of the relationship between academic and professional body requirements.

Sweden.   Nilsson and Wahlén (2000) evaluated the Swedish model of quality assurance of higher education in the light of the response of institutions to quality audits as seen in 27 quality audit reports and 19 follow-up interviews. They discussed the relationship

between top-down and bottom-up approaches to internal quality assurance and the need for more professionalisation in quality work. They suggested that, with more professionalisation, limited result-oriented audits could replace the present full-scale institutional audits.

Franke (2002) described the shift in the Swedish national quality evaluation system from improvement-focused quality audits to accountability-focused quality assessments. The new system included sanctions connected to the evaluations, emphasis on follow-ups, a focus on the student perspective and active participation of students. Since this contribution, after a costly process of subject review, the Swedish system is being revised yet again.

Sjölund (2002) analysed the establishment of new universities in Sweden and the role of evaluation in that process. It focuses on two decision-making principles: first, that new universities are established through political decisions; second, the principle that a seat of learning will be granted university status as result of a quality review. She argued that, ultimately, politics proved to be a much stronger force than the quality review.

Lindell and Svensson (2002) investigated attitudes among educational organisations towards the use of system evaluation for quality improvement in Swedish higher education. As an example, they used the evaluation of the pilot project on advanced vocational education (AVE), which was conducted between 1997 and 1999 by a research team at the Luleå Technological University. The telephone enquiry showed that 65% of the respondents thought the system-evaluation model would contribute to renewal.

Norway.   Stensaker (1997) analysed the role external quality assessments have played in the relations between departments, educational institutions and educational authorities in Norway. The assumptions and fears that the assessments would be used by political authorities in connection with ongoing reforms and efficiency experiments at a national level have proven groundless. A study of the process shows that the departments themselves have used the assessments and their results for professional profiling, in the competition for resources, in relation to their own institution and in relation to educational authorities. For the departments, and in part for the institutions, the assessments have contributed to creating new possibilities to influence the higher levels that govern them.

Lycke (2004) more recently explored how quality assurance developed in Norway and how international trends are understood, transposed and adopted in Norwegian higher education. Using data from a review of the expert committee reports from the first five national quality assurance audits in Norwegian higher education, she showed dilemmas inherent in quality assurance. She concluded that dilemmas are dilemmas because they are never quite resolved but require continuous attention. From a study of the reports, it appears that the Norwegian approach to resolve dilemmas is not to settle at one of the poles but rather to try to create mixed models that can balance the opposing needs and values.

The Netherlands.   Jeliazkova (2002) studied the impact of external review reports in Dutch higher education and suggested a model for analysing the way higher education institutions respond to review recommendations. The analysis indicated the conditions under which a system of external quality review can successfully promote quality improvement.

Germany.   El-Hage (1997) summarised the position of significant German higher education institutions in regard to teaching evaluation. Four years later, Berner and Richter (2001)

reported that the 16 German Länder had agreed to the establishment, alongside the traditional course system, of bachelor's and master's degree programmes, to be validated via accreditation agencies approved by a national accreditation council. The authors pointed out that the implementation of accreditation procedures marks a fundamental shift in the relationship between higher education institutions and the state and will, they argued, offer further possibilities for the development and modernisation of the German higher education system in the framework of the European Bologna process.

However, Harris-Huemmert (2008) questioned the fitness for purpose of evaluators of higher education in Germany. More could be done to inspect the inspectors. For evaluations to be effective, evaluators need to have the required skills. Referring to a case study of an evaluation of educational science conducted in Baden-Württemberg in 2003–2004, she explored how experts are selected and concluded that there are no standards for the selection of evaluators of higher education nor are there procedures to gauge their performance; both need to be introduced.

Central and Eastern Europe.   Tomusk (2000) discussed how quality assurance agencies have been established in most Eastern European countries over the past decade. However, at least on the surface, these states continued political control of higher education. However, a more complex interpretation of the situation suggests that although post state-socialist countries present their quality-assurance initiatives as a part of the westernisation programme, they stand in a strong contrast with the 'fitness for the purpose' mantra applied in Western Europe. The signs were that the convergence of East and West may take place not through relating post-state socialist quality-assurance processes more closely to local contexts but by a radical decontextualisation of the Western approaches.

Temple and Billing (2003) considered the decade-long development of intermediary, or buffer, bodies dealing with quality assurance in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe. They explored developments to the context of communist-era centralisation and more recent interventions by international aid agencies. They argued that control, rather than quality enhancement, is the dominating concern of the quality assurance agencies throughout the region. However, agencies need to adopt more flexible notions of quality related to institutional goals.

Hungary.   Szanto (2004) evaluated programme accreditation in Hungary and concluded that one of the main weaknesses was the imperfect adherence to the principle of uniformity of evaluations. Reasons for this were the uneven quality of the performance of visiting committees and that all programmes of a given institution were evaluated at the same time, rather than the same subject in different institutions being evaluated. Rozsnyai (2004) also reviewed the decade in which the Hungarian Accreditation Committee completed the accreditation of all the country's higher education institutions and their programmes and examined planned changes in the process for the next cycle.

Estonia.   Tomusk (1997) provided an overview of developments in external quality assurance in Estonian higher education and argued that despite breaking with the former authoritarian quality-assurance measures of the Soviet Union, the result has been a system that concentrates power at the highest levels and he showed how the procedures were not internalised by the academic community nor were they related to the character of the particular higher education system.

Americas

Central America.   Silva-Trivio and Ramirez-Gatica (2004) reported on the Central American University Higher Council (CSUCA), which incorporates universities from all seven countries. CSUCA addressed evaluation processes orientated to external accountability and to an eventual regional accreditation system. An external review team training model was designed and the authors concluded that the CSUCA model appears to be more expensive than other training but more effective and enriching for participants, host institutions and quality-assurance promotion in the region.

Brazil.   In the first volume, Amaral (1995) compared the situation in Brazil and Portugal. He argued that a general trend up to that point had been expansion associated with funding restrictions, reduced centralised government control and increased university autonomy and self-regulation. This was accompanied by the development of evaluation systems. He argued that universities in Portugal and Brazil faced similar changes but they were able to implement successfully a strategy of starting their own evaluation procedures before the governments were capable of taking decisions about the evaluation systems. In this way they had significant starting advantage when subsequently negotiating the national evaluation system with the Ministry.

Bertolin and Leite (2008) reported on the expansion of private institutions in Brazil and consequent rapid expansion in the number of students registered. However, the impact of such policies on the quality of the higher education system in the country is still unknown. Their longitudinal study indicated that marketisation policies did not promote an improvement of quality or the maximisation of the social benefits of higher education. In the period studied, no clear evidence of improvement in relevance, diversity, equity and effectiveness were found in the Brazilian higher education system.

United States.   Arden (1996), in a forum piece, indicted that more transparency was needed on the part of regional accrediting agencies because they act too much *in camera*; the make-up of the visiting teams is too incestuous; and it is difficult for the public to discover very much about the judgements rendered.

Ewell (2002) explored the balance between making evaluations useful for institutions and fulfilling accountancy requirements. He acknowledged that funding authorities, potential clients and other stakeholders must all be able to count on the integrity of the process and of the judgements it renders. This, in turn, requires clear and understandable standards, rigorously applied with results communicated to the public in accessible ways. However, for the institution to learn something from the process they need to have confidence, which means reviews that are conducted *in camera*. Ewell argued that the issue is not a simple one of transparency but of the use of the review data. He suggested that this means that the organisation's leaders have accepted an implied bargain that they will abide by what the data show, even if doing so may go against their own inclinations. This also means that quality-assurance agencies need to keep external reviews focused on the right things; which for Ewell was learning and teaching.

Dika and Janosik (2003) explained that trustees play a primary role in ensuring quality and effectiveness in higher education in the USA. However, research on selection, training and effectiveness of public higher education governing boards was limited. They surveyed state higher education executive officers and state governors and identified selection criteria and personal attributes as well as training programmes and governors' perceptions of the success of boards.

Asia

India.   Madan (1996) reported that in India, monitoring of the performance of educational institutions is a matter of increasing significance: more so for distance learning. He argued that the chief aim of programme evaluation for distance learning is to make the learners more active and responsive to what they learn and how they learn. He explored a feasible, rational framework of programme evaluation for quality assessment in distance learning.

Stella (2004) pointed out that India has the second largest system of higher education in the world, with 322 university-level institutions and more than 13,000 colleges catering for 8 million students. Developing a national quality-assurance mechanism and making the process operational have been formidable tasks. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has moved from the phase of rejection by academia to the present phase of appreciation. Analysis conducted by NAAC in 2001 on the first 100 accredited institutions revealed that most of the accredited institutions had acted on the recommendations of the peer-team report and had made significant changes in pedagogy, management and administration. Experience of 10 years showed that, in spite of the explanation that institutional uniqueness would be a factor in the assessment, institutions began copying the top-bracket institutions. The manuals developed by NAAC to facilitate the preparation of the self-study report offered a generic format for data collection but institutions adopted these without question. There was some concern that this might lead to a decrease in diversity among institutions and create more homogeneity. However, one of the criteria for assessment, namely, 'healthy practices', is expected to promote the diversity of institutional practices.

Pillai and Srinivas (2006) argued that NAAC has been able to make its assessment and accreditation process acceptable to the institutions and academia through an intensive awareness campaign and academic interactions. They showed that a decade's performance of NAAC has earned a lot of goodwill and appreciation from the academic community. Simultaneously, it also suggests the need for incessant effort on NAAC's part to strengthen and fine-tune its process and procedure.

Sri Lanka.   Munasinghe and Jayawardena (1999) justified a need for a continuous quality improvement programme for higher education institutes in Sri Lanka. Based on an industry survey, they highlighted the general weaknesses of curricula in Sri Lankan universities and suggested a model for addressing the weaknesses and for continuously improving quality.

Maldives.   Houston and Maniku (2005) examined divergent views about transferability of external quality assurance models. They reviewed quality assurance models from developing countries, including the model adopted in the Maldivian higher education system, which is characterised by its small size and scale of operation. They concluded that small, emerging higher education systems contemplating the adoption of 'best practice' prescriptions for external quality assurance activities should consider carefully the fit of those prescriptions to the local environment rather than taking for granted the appropriateness of generic models. This transferability theme recurs in other national developments, as discussed below.

Hong Kong.   Massy (1997) and later Massy and French (2001) described the dynamics of the Teaching and Learning Quality Process Review (TLQPR), which was rooted in academic audit principles. However, the reviews covered more aspects of education quality work than was typical in earlier audit implementations elsewhere. They reported good and bad

practices unearthed during the site visits and concluded by discussing lessons learned from the TLQPR experience and the way forward toward a second round of reviews.

Jones and De Saram (2005) analysed the TLQPR from the perspective of academic staff in one university in Hong Kong. They suggested four changes. First, focus on a 'lean' philosophy and an associated examination of the extent to which (essentially administrative) system requirements are 'adding value' to the fundamental aims of achieving quality in teaching and learning outcomes. Second, build adaptability into the system by giving staff the maximum flexibility to translate a minimal set of overall requirements into activities. Third, tolerate staff and groups who 'break rules' in rational and well-intended ways to optimise intended outcomes. Fourth, develop a culture of trust between staff and management.

Vietnam. Nguyen, Oliver and Priddy (2009) analysed the development of accreditation standards and processes in Vietnam, demonstrating the cross-national influences from the US accreditation model. A synthesis of the entire Vietnam accreditation process and its implications led to recommendations for future policies and procedures.

Taiwan. Su (1995) argued, following an evaluation, in Taiwan of a trial departmental evaluation project, that a suitably modified approach would be preferable to evaluations carried out by the ministry of education. Thus an independent formal organisation with its own quality monitoring system should be established. Hawthorne (1996) argued that decision-making on higher education in Taiwan is changing from centralised-autocratic to centralised-consultative, thus making it more inclusive. Her data showed five areas in which decision-making had changed: three involved financial issues, one involved personnel and one involved curriculum modification. This has a positive impact on quality as more people can be involved in the process of improvement.

Australasia

New Zealand. Meade and Woodhouse (2000) reported the review of the New Zealand Academic Audit Unit by an independent group with an analogous composition to the Academic Audit Unit's audit panels. The Review Panel concluded that the quality-assurance procedures, including self-review, have been a major stimulus for introduction of effective quality systems. Trust and mutual respect has been established and there are promising signs that universities are beyond compliance. They thought there was a sense of optimism that the relationship between the Academic Audit Unit and the universities will become more robust, enabling a climate of critical evaluation and reform to prevail. As other New Zealand-based papers reported elsewhere in this review show, the relationship still has elements of suspicion.

Africa

Nigeria. Udom (1996) highlighted the major features of accreditation in Nigeria and examined the criteria used in the accreditation exercise, concluding with the problems and prospects of accreditation in Nigerian universities.

Botswana. Hopkin and Lee (2001) focused on how to improve quality in dependent institutions in developing contexts, using the University of Botswana as a case study. They provided reasons for placing greater emphasis on quality assurance, notably institutional

development and programme review. Exploring various alternatives they proposed a synthetic model that could be used in Botswana. The suggested approach was not radical but grounded in current practice. They also explored the appropriateness of this model to other small 'developing' countries. They concluded by emphasising the importance of basing any system of affiliation firmly in the context in which it is located. In a later paper, Hopkin (2004) used the Affiliations Unit of the University of Botswana as a case study to explore how the operational milieu of an external quality-assurance agency (EQAA) impacts on its role and function. This milieu includes: the size of the country; the role of a hegemonic university; the macro- and micro-political context; personnel factors in a developmental context; and external pressures. He argued that, whilst higher education systems differ greatly from country to country, they can be placed within certain broad categories: 'mature' systems; 'evolving' systems; and 'embryonic' systems. He suggested that the less mature the higher education system is, the easier it is to install integrated quality assurance processes and measures.

South Africa.   Developments in South Africa have been extensively reported and analysed in *Quality in Higher Education*.

   Strydom and Lategan (1998) examined the developing South African quality assurance activities in light of the global requirement that higher education institutions be accountable and reflect value for money in all their activities. A subsequent paper, by Hay and Strydom (2000) reported the proposal of the National Commission on Higher Education that South African higher education funding should be based on programmes and not on institutions. As a result, all higher education institutions are in the process of getting programmes registered on the National Qualifications Framework to be accredited by the South African Qualifications Framework Authority. In future, institutions will increasingly have to prove the quality of their programmes and the authors argued that programme self-evaluation is a prerequisite. Strydom and Strydom (2004) subsequently provided perspectives on the unique challenges and opportunities facing the national auditing and accreditation system in South African higher education. They undertook an in-depth analysis of the policy developments, mandates and functions of the system and its impact, challenges and debates about future directions. Strydom, Zulu and Murray (2004) investigated the relationships or tensions between quality, culture and change as a result of the introduction of quality assurance systems in higher education institutions in South Africa.

   Jacobs (1998) reported on the establishment of the Certification Council for Technikon Education (SERTEC), which resulted from repeated requests by technikons to government, over a period of two decades, for greater autonomy in relation to examinations and certification. In the case of the technikons, external quality assurance has supported increased autonomy. However, the development of a unifying qualifications framework in South Africa has resulted in one body responsible for quality assurance in universities and technikons. Genis (2002) identified tensions between institutional quality assurance approaches in technikons and the approach of the external accreditation body. Smout and Stephenson (2002) critically examined the challenges facing South Africa's newly established sector-wide external quality agency, the Higher Education Quality Committee.

   In the wake of the introduction of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) in South Africa, Luckett (2007) explored stakeholder opinion on the HEQC's proposals for institutional audit and programme accreditation. Given that quality assurance in South Africa has been conceived as a means of furthering the state's 'transformation agenda' for

higher education, different, and sometimes conflicting, approaches to quality assurance exist in the higher education community. The study showed that opinions were shaped more strongly by the respondents' position in the social structure (apartheid-defined class and race position) than by their social role (academic, manager, quality assurance manager) in the policy-making process.

Botha, Favish and Stephenson (2008) continued this theme, noting that transformation imperatives have informed the approach of the HEQC to the audits. They examined the audits undertaken by the HEQC of three public higher education institutions in 2005: the University of Cape Town, the University of Stellenbosch and Rhodes University. They analysed the results of the internal feedback surveys as well as the recommendations contained in the HEQC's audit reports, with particular reference to the goals of the HEQC's audit framework. They concluded that, although each institution approached the audit in different, context-specific ways, the institutional experience of the audit process and its initial outcomes were remarkably similar. Quinn and Boughey (2009) examined the idea that quality assurance has been one of the levers that has supposed to bring about the transformation necessary for a more equitable South African higher education system. Using a case study of an institutional audit at one historically white, elite South African university they concluded that the South African audit methodology *per se* is unlikely to bring about the change necessary because of its tendency to focus on the mechanistic implementation of recommendations.

Singh, Lange and Naidoo (2004) reported on the HEQC evaluation of all MBA programmes offered in the country by South African as well as foreign higher education institutions. They outlined the rationale for evaluating the MBA, the process and methodology that were followed and the follow-up steps that are being taken by the HEQC beyond the accreditation process (including the preparation of an analytical report on the State of MBA Provision in South Africa). The article concluded with reflections on some of the political, methodological and educational issues relating not only to the MBA but to quality assurance in a developing country. Blackmur (2005) criticised the withdrawal of accreditation of 15 MBA degrees and argued that the decision had significant implications for students, graduates, the labour market, the international credibility of national higher education quality assurance systems and for international trade in higher education. In particular, he showed that the council had intervened to regulate decisions historically made by universities, including, for example, the particular research method to be used by universities in MBA programmes. Further, the evaluation did not attempt to assess labour market judgements of MBA quality. Such significant deficiencies, he argued, mislead potential students and other stakeholders. In a subsequent contribution, Blackmur (2006) further argued that the council did not observe the internationally recognised principles and processes of efficient regulation. The regulation of MBAs, he argued, was a paradigm case of failure in public policy construction and implementation. The consequences may extend beyond those immediately affected by the decision to withdraw accreditation and would impact adversely on South Africa's regulatory reputation.

Middle East and Gulf

A key issue to emerge from the experiences of countries more recently introducing quality systems, especially less developed countries, is the transferability of systems established elsewhere in the world. This was evident, for example in the Middle East and Gulf regions.

Turkey.   Billing and Thomas (2000) explored the transfer of quality assurance systems from one country to another via the experience of pilot project aimed at establishing a UK-style quality-assurance system in Turkish universities. A convergence between systems was observed and evidence from an associated international conference indicated that the purposes of external quality assessment are becoming more clearly defined. However, there emerged significant cultural, structural, political and technical issues that affected the transfer of the UK system to the Turkish situation and which have wider implications for the international transferability of quality assurance and assessment systems between nations.

Mizikaci (2003) presented an overview of the current quality management and accreditation situation of Turkish higher education, with its focus on reform and improvement, and proposed a framework for the adaptation of quality systems in Turkey.

Iran.   Bazargan (1999) explored quality assessment in medical education in Iran and argued that, although a sporadic activity, recent attempts at self-evaluation of higher medical education have brought a positive attitude towards continuous quality improvement. Bazargan (2007) noted that a model that combines collegial self-evaluation and external quality assessment was introduced in Iran in 1996 and that subsequent efforts had been made toward establishing a quality management and assurance system. He examined the problems of organising internal and external evaluation in developing countries and argued for economic reasons that there is an urgent need to make quality the major element of higher education systems. He elaborated the challenges facing the development of quality management and assurance systems in Iran.

United Arab Emirates (UAE).   Burden-Leahy (2005) reviewed the situation in the UAE via a case study, which 'imported' various quality practices. She set out the issues surrounding the implementation of appropriate quality assurance mechanisms for an institution in a developing country that relies on expatriate staff on short-term contracts from a multitude of educational systems and backgrounds.

Arab States special issue

In 2009, there was a special issue of *Quality in Higher Education* that focused on Arab countries in the Gulf States and the Middle East, which was also published in Arabic. The issue was born out of a British Council's Excellence in Higher Education project (Morgan & D'Andrea, 2009).

The rapid growth in the number of post-secondary institutions in Saudi Arabia over the last few years necessitated the creation of the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment in 2004. Darandari, Al-Qahtani, Allen, Al-Yafi, Al-Sudairi and Catapang (2009) reported the development of a new three-stage quality assurance and accreditation system that benefited from the international expertise via the British Council through the Excellence in Higher Education Project. It included a national qualifications framework that specifies generic standards of learning outcomes and supporting materials such as key performance indicators, student surveys, self-evaluation scales, templates for programme plans and reports and handbooks detailing quality assurance processes.

Carroll, Razvi, Goodliffe and Al-Habsi (2009) reported developments in Oman's public and private higher education sector, which includes local and foreign programmes developed through their respective quality-assurance systems. They reported the ongoing

changes in infrastructural policies and frameworks, institutional and programme standards and quality-assurance processes. They noted, from experience, that methods used to develop national frameworks and processes are, in themselves, vital factors in the success of those frameworks and processes. Benchmarking and consultation have been effective when complemented with training and support strategies, sourced internationally.

Kaghed and Dezaye (2009) reported two different strategies that have been implemented in Iraq to improve quality assurance in the higher education sector. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research conducted a pilot study at the University of Babylon, which included training of senior academic staff and quality reviewers. The university's goal is to become a pioneer in quality assurance in Iraq. The other strategy was implemented in the Kurdistan Region Governorate, where a team of reviewers from Exeter University, UK conducted an initial evaluation of quality practices. Following this review, ministry staff were sent to the UK to be trained as quality reviewers and will ultimately lead the programme in the Kurdistan Region Governorate.

Al-Alawi, Al-Kaabi, Rashdan and Al-Khaleefa (2009) reported on the creation of a national Quality Assurance Authority in Bahrain, using University of Bahrain as a case study of good practices. The aim was to improve higher education in Bahrain and maintain international standards in order ensure its reputation outside the country. In Kuwait, as in other rapidly developing higher education systems, one major area of concern is ensuring the quality of education offered by private providers. Similarly, Attiyah and Khalifa (2009) reviewed the history of Qatar University and the small but important steps it has taken to address quality assurance and enhancement. They described the Qatar University Reform Plan, which aims to continually improve the quality of instructional and educational services and promote administrative efficiency at the university.

Al-Atiqi and Alharbi (2009) explored how Kuwait has developed a system of quality management of the country's private higher education sector and Rawazik and Carroll (2009) described how the UAE has developed an innovative model of free zones to meet its increasing education needs, which places the onus on transnational providers in Dubai having to prove that overseas provision situated in Dubai appropriately replicates nationally quality-assured provision in the originating country. Anaam, Alhammadi and Kwairan (2009) showed that no formal mechanisms for quality assurance and accreditation processes have been fully developed within higher education institutions in Yemen. However, the efforts of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR) have resulted in increased awareness among universities' officials, academic staff and administrators about the quality concepts, quality standards and the quality assurance system.

Jackson (2009) concluded the special issue by noting the importance that is attached to the quality of higher education provision across the region. Ensuring that students are offered high quality educational experiences and achieve awards that reflect international standards was emphasised. The contributions also illustrated the value of a collective regional approach to quality assurance.

Conclusion on the development of quality assurance processes

Looking into the future, Woodhouse (1998) had suggested that rapid changes in the sector means that quality agencies should be highly flexible, cost-effective but not intrusive. Issues that will need to be responded to include new approaches to panel visits, assessing virtual universities, benchmarking, mutual recognition of national agencies and the possibility of an international quality-assurance agency. Harvey (1996), in an editorial, had posited a new

model of university, the federal omniversity, and a quality system that placed primary responsibility for setting standards and monitoring quality with the institution.

Throughout the 15 years there has been a clear tension between quality assurance as a bureaucratic and administrative task and the improvement of the quality of academic endeavours. It is a tension that quality-assurance regimes have rarely, if ever, got to grips with. This has led to ongoing problems of engaging academics, discussed in Part Two. Also apparent is how conceptions of quality assurance that originated in North West Europe and the US have been the basis of developments around the world and how little variation there is in the methods adopted by quality assurance agencies. The proliferation of quality assurance agencies is being followed by a mushrooming of qualifications frameworks and the growing pressure to accredit everything, even though that is a poor means of assuring quality and encouraging improvement.

Performance, funding and the market

Performance indicators

A few contributions focused on the use of performance indicators as quality instruments. Ewell (1999) explored how and whether institutional performance measures can be beneficially used in making resource allocation decisions. He analysed different kinds of information-driven funding approaches and proposed several policy trade-offs that must be taken into consideration in designing information-driven approaches to resource allocation. He concluded that only easily verifiable 'hard' statistics should be used in classic performance funding approaches, though data such as surveys and the use of good practices by institutions may indirectly inform longer-term resource investments.

Yorke (1995) had examined developments in the use of performance indicators in several countries. He argued for the use of indicators designed to support the enhancement of quality in higher education, which may need to be 'softer' than the statistical measures (themselves not perfectly 'hard') used for the purposes of accountability. In a subsequent paper, Yorke (1998) stated that performance indicators are well-established in the language of accountability in higher education and are used to serve a variety of political and micropolitical ends. However, the speed of their implementation has not been matched by equivalent progress in the development of their technical qualities, particularly in the general area of the development of students. He analysed the validity and robustness of a selection of student-related indicators (including their vulnerability to manipulation) and cautioned about the use of such indicators in policy arenas.

Barrie and Ginns (2007) also critiqued the use of student survey-derived teaching performance indicators, which grew out of a new government policy in Australia in 2005, linked to the distribution of many millions of dollars of funding. Universities are thus understandably keen to enhance their performance on such measures. However, the strategies by which universities might achieve these improvements are not always readily apparent and there is a real possibility that reactive responses, based on opinion rather than evidence will result. They examined how student survey measures of 'quality' at the subjects level could link to national performance indicators and, importantly, the organisational issues affecting how such information is interpreted and acted upon, to usefully inform curriculum and teaching improvement.

Busch, Fallan and Pettersen (1998) examined differences in performance indicators of job satisfaction, self-efficacy, goal commitment and organisational commitment among

teaching staff in the college sector in Norway. Variations in performance indicators between the faculties of nursing, teacher education, engineering and business administration were discussed and the managerial implications indicated.

Employability is another area that has been linked to performance indicators. Little (2001) reported findings from a European survey of graduate employment and showed the difficulty of trying to make international comparisons of higher education's contribution to graduate employability. Further, comparison within the UK is also problematic and evidence is provided of the impact on employability of factors outside higher education institutions' control. The conclusion is that employability figures are not trustworthy indicators of higher education quality. Morley (2001) similarly cast doubts on the value of graduate employment statistics as a performance indicator especially as they ignore gender, race, social class and disability. Warn and Tranter (2001), in the same special issue, argued that a generic competency model could be used (at least in Australia) to define the desired outcomes of post-compulsory education.

Rodgers (2008) suggested that the desire, in the UK, to enhance the quality of the services provided by higher education institutions has led to the development of a series of benchmarking performance indicators. He explored whether similar indicators could be developed for use as tools in the management of quality within students' unions and identified potential benchmarks.

The overall view was that national performance indicators are viewed with suspicion, especially when they simply measure the easily measurable, rather than being carefully designed to evaluate the underlying issue.

Funding

The link between funding and quality is another contentious area. Yorke (1996) argued that, as it has typically been used, performance-based funding had limitations that may not encourage the fullest development of the quality of academic programmes. He considered different approaches to special-purpose funding and proposed that well-thought out incentive funding could enhance academic programmes. In principle, he argued, the framing of incentive funding and the criteria to be met could be agreed between the funder and the potential recipients in such a way as to acknowledge institutional diversity.

Barnetson (1999) described Alberta's trial introduction of performance-based funding in its universities, colleges and technical institutes, which was a substantial departure from previous Canadian practice. He outlined several conceptual and technical deficiencies in the pilot process.

Hämäläinen and Moitus (1999) reported the introduction, in 1994, of a novel funding policy in Finland. High-quality units were rewarded with performance-based funding by the Ministry of Education through special appropriations based on their performance in research, artistic activities and exceptional and innovative excellence in the methods of teaching and learning.

From a different perspective, Baba and Tanaka (1997) examined the financial structure of higher education in Japan. There had been a rapid expansion in higher education but government funding had not adjusted properly to the expansion. Private institutions enrolled about 75% of the total number of students but even students at national institutions had to pay tuition fees. So the financial burden of tuition fees has fallen very heavily on family budgets and the authors argued for an increase in government financing for higher education institutions in Japan to reduce the fiscal burden on family budgets.

In the main, funding has only a peripheral link to quality assurance, especially where it relate to learning and teaching.

Marketisation and consumerism

Ritzer (1996) argued that students can be viewed as consumers of educational services and universities can be seen as means of educational consumption. Universities thus have much to learn from the new means of consumption such as credit cards, fast-food restaurants, megamalls and cybermalls. Equating postmodernism with the consumer society, Ritzer explored what a postmodern 'McUniversity' might look like.

Lindsay and Rodgers (1998) noted that from 1979, in the UK the Conservative government had attempted to increase efficiency and customer satisfaction in all areas of the public sector by introducing market-orientated reforms. They examined this process in higher education and argued that, as it was linked to rapid expansion, rather than it leading to institutions that have a marketing orientation it has in fact led to institutions developing a selling orientation. They suggested changes that would be needed in order to develop a marketing orientation.

Cooper (2007) was concerned by how, in the UK and elsewhere, higher education was increasingly and controversially being construed, especially within political discourse, as a marketised commodity service to paying customers. Drawing upon economic theory and ethnographic fieldwork, Cooper considered issues surrounding quality mechanisms in relation to quality uncertainty and informational asymmetry. He examined the effects of these upon both students as 'buyers' and institutions as 'sellers'. He critiqued the shortcomings of emerging mechanisms such as league tables and concluded with suggestions as to how both students and higher education providers might wrest back control over such mechanisms and work towards the diminution of quality uncertainty and informational asymmetry.

Harris and Fallows (2002) reported how the University of Luton trialled the operation of a summer semester as an integral part of its teaching year. They explored whether a market demand existed for higher education delivered in the summer from students who would not otherwise participate. Teaching over the summer is, potentially, one of the ways in which resources can be released to help meet the government's widening participation target. There was a demand, particularly from mature students, although it is likely to be small. Second, the evidence from assessment grades and surveys of both staff and students, is that the student experience was different but the performance of students was slightly better; students and staff valued the more personal contact allowed by smaller class sizes and surveys of student satisfaction revealed a positive disposition towards study in the summer. Finally, the authors had expected resistance from academic staff but a significant and increasing number of staff were prepared to work during the summer on a voluntary basis, the managerial *quid pro quo* being time off for vacations and scholarly activity at other times. Such flexibility was more problematic for those with school-aged children.

The marketing of higher education doesn't come easily despite the ubiquitous marketing departments in universities, which seems to clash with academic values and perspectives. The rhetoric of students as consumers does not sit comfortably. Most marketing efforts appear to be selling what already exists rather than responding in any radical way to market demand, which is just as well given the fickleness of passing fads in higher education.

International issues

The Bologna process

A few papers have focused directly on the Bologna process and its impact on quality assurance processes across Europe. Westerheijden (2001), as noted above, argued that the Bologna process was aimed at making European higher education more transparent and encouraging the development of clearer quality-assurance processes. Van Der Wende and Westerheijden (2001) showed why and how the link between internationalisation and quality assurance has been established in recent years by looking at developments that suggest convergence between the two. The authors emphasised the implications of wider international developments on Europe as a whole and elaborated the implications of the Bologna Declaration for quality assurance. Ala-Vähälä and Saarinen (2009) argued that the ENQA's development into its current status as a European-level policy maker is to a great extent a result of the European Union's policy of supporting European-level cooperation and transparency in the field of quality assurance. There has also, noted Asderaki (2009), been something of a demonisation of the Bologna process in some European countries but, arguably, it is this that has led to the establishment, by law, of quality-assurance systems across Europe.

Ursin, Huusko, Aittola, Kiviniemi and Muhonen (2008) analysed the impact of the Bologna process on quality assessment in Finnish and Italian universities. The data consisted of interviews conducted in Finland and Italy. The results suggested that: evaluation and quality assurance were primarily seen in connection with the educational provision of the university; although the respondents were familiar with evaluation, they were unsure about the procedures and effects of quality assurance in their unit; and despite the harmonising aim of the Bologna process, evaluation and quality assurance appeared to maintain distinct cultural and institutional features.

Transnational

The quality of transnational provision is a growing concern. *Quality in Higher Education* has published several items on this issue; the first in 1999.

Walker (1999), in the wake of expressed fears about the quality of UK offshore collaborative arrangements, pointed out that there are many kinds of arrangements that have grown up over the years, which posed potential threats to quality that have not been addressed in the literature. Using, as an example, a project that was commercially successful but educationally and professionally hazardous, she concluded that international partnerships require constant vigilance. Problems include: culturally determined operational practices; partner eligibility; commercial and educational conflict; roles, responsibilities and accountability; quality of promotional information; and university autonomy. Craft (2004) offered a risk-assessment tool, developed at the University of Greenwich, UK, to provide greater consistency and rigour in the evaluation of new proposals for the collaborative provision of higher education awards. Eleven factors combine to offer a preliminary assessment of risk levels, without prejudice to more detailed risk/benefit analyses.

Dixon and Scott (2003) also flagged up issues with offshore provision encountered by a Western Australian university. A professional development workshop series was established to enhance the teaching and learning skills of, mainly Singaporean, lecturers working in partner institutions. Evaluation of the programme suggested that it was welcomed and had enhanced participants' presentation, planning and organisational skills and had

encouraged the establishment of optimal learning environments and appropriate teacher characteristics. In short, offshore staff need the same development opportunities as those provided onshore.

Dunworth (2008), on the basis of a study of Australian overseas provision of transnational English-language teaching programmes, recommended full consultation with representatives of all stakeholder groups prior to the development of a new programme. Further, good practice demands that both the home and overseas partners familiarise themselves with the cultural and educational milieu in which the programme takes place. Finally, if a programme is to be successful it needs to be adequately resourced.

Castle and Kelly (2004) also argued that the burgeoning offshore education presented quality assurance challenges and the University of Wollongong's response is a clear policy to only provide degrees offshore that are also offered on campus. Given the centrality of quality assurance to higher education in Australia, the paralleling of courses on campus and offshore expedites and eases the transfer of transparent and accountable quality assurance processes to offshore delivery. Similarly, from the side of an importer, Gift, Leo-Rhynie and Moniquette (2006) noted that the presence of transnational education providers in the West Indies highlighted the importance of a regional accreditation system that will not only monitor the quality assurance programmes of foreign providers and ensure the equivalence of programmes but will facilitate the seamless movement of students and academics, the transferability of credits and the preservation of intellectual property rights. Additionally, they argued, the English-speaking Caribbean must not just import transnational education but also export it. In this respect, quality assurance procedures will prove to be the key to success.

Stella and Gnanam (2005) tried to balance the enthusiastic views of trade promoters and the sceptical reflections of traditional academics about cross-border education. They argued that the strong criticisms of the academics are sometimes based on false understandings and the views of trade promoters are sometimes based on optimistic overestimations. They argued, in the case of India, that a quality assurance system will ensure that low quality cross-border education provision is kept out, which may make the market in India less appealing. The national quality assurance agencies have to address the situation that India is both a provider and a recipient of cross-border education. Government policy is to facilitate cross-border education operators without compromising the interests of the nation, national culture and stakeholder interests.

The INQAAHE meeting at The Hague in May 2006 addressed the issue of transnational education and Woodhouse (2006) reported that the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), in auditing a university's academic activities, would review overseas activities and operations through partners, both at home and abroad. However, as institutions proliferate campuses and other operations, the number of sites increases beyond what it is reasonable for an external review panel to visit. Therefore, AUQA adopted a risk-assessment approach to determine the nature of a university's overseas operations and whether the AUQA audit panel should visit. Overall, he argued that, provided there is goodwill, collaboration and the right structures are in place, transnational education is of benefit to both the exporting and importing countries. This view was also echoed by Cheung (2006), who argued that there is intrinsic value in transnational education and that there are ways to identify the possible pitfalls and overcome them. Quality assurance provides a platform for mutual trust and mutual cooperation. Further, international cooperation and INQAAHE are indispensable parts of collective effort to ensure quality.

Stella (2006) provided the background and outcome of discussions of a workshop, during The Hague meeting, on the joint UNESCO–OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in

Cross-border Higher Education. There was strong support for equivalence of programmes, albeit adapted to local cultural contexts. Further, the quality assurance agency of the provider country should be prepared to assure that the institution's international offerings fit within the total mission of the institution, are provided legally, include any necessary support for effective learning and result in a credential that is valid both in the home and host countries. Blackmur (2007) provided a critique of the UNESCO–OECD Guidelines, arguing that the guidelines have been defined without any consideration of the potential net benefits, which could be negative, associated with their implementation. Blackmur objects, *inter alia*, to the leeway that regulators have under the Guidelines to decide whether cross-border provision meets 'cultural needs'. This opens a Pandora's box of possibilities for those who seek to exercise control over all aspects of higher education for whatever reasons, including their own ideological preferences.

Codes of practice and international networks

In addition to codes relating to transnational provision, there are various codes relating to good practice for quality assurance. Aelterman (2006) explained that the aim of quality assurance codes of practice and guidelines is, in theory, to give a clear indication to stake-holders, governments, financers, partners and the public at large about the various course providers and the level of education they offer. He compared six different quality assurance codes of practice and guidelines (using the INQAAHE guidelines as a baseline). He concluded that there appears to be considerable transparency and comparability between the codes of the major international networks of quality assurance agencies.

Morse (2006) outlined the nature and importance of the INQAAHE *Guidelines of Good Practice.* She showed how they could be used and enhanced, and argued for coordination of the INQAAHE guidelines with those produced by international, regional, national and other agencies.

Hopbach (2006) presented preliminary findings from the application of the *European Standards and Guidelines* (ESG) to the accreditation criteria and the review of three German accreditation agencies undertaken by the German Accreditation Council. Three lessons emerged: guidelines should concentrate on principles that can be applied to different forms of quality assurance; integrating regional or international standards or guidelines into existing sets of criteria or standards fosters mutual understanding or even convergence; and attempts to make guidelines comprehensive and extend procedural principles of quality assurance have important side effects on higher education systems.

Umemiya (2008) maintained that the acceleration of globalisation has led to more collaborative efforts among quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions for international and regional quality assurance as 'globalisation' of higher education accelerates. The driving force behind the development of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) University Network is the desire to reduce the economic gap within the region, create a single market and internationalise higher education. This has resulted in a strong need to improve the quality of higher education and to foster harmonisation of higher education systems. Hinaga (2004) had earlier explored the role of the Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA) in the Asia-Pacific region and argued that it could contribute to networking by acting as one of a number of hub agencies and by contributing to developing a common evaluation process.

Harvey (2004) reviewed the various struggles for control of a supra-national external quality monitoring agency . The different types of supranational quality processes were

outlined and the question raised as to who benefits from the extension of quality monitoring beyond national (and sub-national) boundaries. In the same year, Kristoffersen and Lindeberg (2004) presented the experiences from a pilot project on mutual recognition between quality assurance agencies in the Nordic countries. The background of the project was the need to advance internationalisation of quality assurance of higher education and to allow for the differences in national approaches. They focused on strengths and weaknesses of the method employed and the pros and cons of using mutual recognition as an international evaluative procedure, compared with other approaches.

Woodhouse (2004) traced the growth in the number of quality assurance agencies in higher education over 20 years. Initially, staff of these agencies were largely amateurs in the field and little theory or experience existed for the agencies to draw upon. He recalled that in 1991, agencies worldwide associated together in an International Network for mutual advice and support. Since then, the practice of quality assurance has developed the characteristics of a profession and agencies have turned their attention to the quality of their own operations. The International Network of agencies has addressed the question: 'what makes a good quality assurance agency?' This action was timely, because the increase in globalisation increased the need for agencies to interact across national boundaries and, to do this effectively, they must have confidence in each other's judgements.

International office

A dozen years ago, Lambrech (1998) pointed out that management of an international relations or international programmes office differs from that of other university offices in that it adds the need to deal with multicultural factors such as differences in language, culture, customs, university structure, procedures, grading systems, legal systems, value systems and non-verbal means of communication. These factors require the international relations manager to have a wide-based cultural background as well as enormous diplomatic tact and flexibility. He outlined strategic planning objectives and internal quality assurance processes, as they applied to the international office in a European context.

Ranking

Bowden (2000) remarked on the burgeoning of university league tables in the UK, which are being published by an ever-increasing number of newspapers. She examined national and international university rankings and raised methodological issues. She concluded that, for the majority of potential students, rankings do not provide them with the critical information needed to make an informed choice of where to study. Some of the likely future developments of these league tables were also discussed. Harvey (2008) further examined the growing prominence of ranking of higher education institutions and critiqued their construction and validity.

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