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Quality assurance and the links to teaching and learning: Perspectives, pitfalls and potentials

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The drivers of quality assurance (QA) in Europe

- Quality assurance linked to many (domestic) policy agendas within the region:
 - Reforming public sector (efficiency and effectiveness issues)
 - Challenges with massification
 - Mobility and transparency
 - Globalisation and excellence agendas
 - Regulation of private sector HEIs

The system level build-up in quality assurance

- National agencies supported by European initiatives (ESG)
- Associations for the agencies (ENQA, EQAR)
- Instrumental expansion (accreditation, audit, assessments and evaluations)
- Public attention (conferences, journals, publications, media coverage, etc..)

The impact of QA on the sector

- Centralization of governance in HEIs
- Professionalization of QA in HEIs
- Student empowerment
- Enhancing knowledge on quality in HEIs
- External profiling of HEIs
- De-coupling of academics

But has it really affected how teaching and learning is conducted?

Understandings of quality and the links to teaching and learning (1)

- Quality as a relativistic concept
- Harvey & Green (1993) Quality as: exception, perfection, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformation
- Harvey & Greens definitions are mostly related to output understandings of quality

Understandings of quality and the links to teaching and learning (2)

- Are our definitions of quality related to how we conduct quality assurance?
- Most indicators used in quality assurance tend to be either «input» or «output» factors:
 - Input: number of staff, qualifications, infrastructure, library, etc.
 - Output: completion and drop out, grades, salaries, employment rates, skills (the political interest in «learning outcomes» may strengthen this perspective)

Understandings of quality and the links to teaching and learning (3)

- Has quality assurance really opened up the «black box»?
- **We know that process factors are very important for student learning:** student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning, feedback, time on task, high expectations, diversity in teaching and assessment methods (Chickering & Gamson 1987, Hattie 2009, Gibbs 2010)

How do QA currently try to assess the processual factors of teaching and learning?

- Through national student surveys
- Through student assessment of teaching (frequently at module level)
- Through periodic (peer) reviews of study programs (normally every 4-7 years)
- ???

The pitfalls of quality assurance

- Is it the lack of process orientation in QA that has lead to uninterested, and even sceptical academics?
- Organizational and individual resources and time not used in the most efficient way
- Focusing on factors that are of less importance for student learning

Future potential of quality assurance at institutional level (1)

- Revised European Standards and Guidelines for QA (ESG 2015): emphasizing «active students» and «competence of teachers»
- Shift from student assessment of teaching to **student assessment of learning**: Focusing on the ways in which students and teachers interact, cooperation with other students, feedback practices, time on task, expectations, diversity in approaches to learning

Future potential of quality assurance at institutional level (2)

- Shift in QA focus with respect to teachers: less focus on formal qualifications – more focus on **competence building and practices**
- Shift in focus from «periodic reviews» to **continuous improvement** with respect to study programs
 - emphasizing study program leadership
 - engagement of students and staff in collaborative activities