

ENGAGING IN THE MODERNISATION AGENDA FOR EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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11. INTERNATIONALISATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

INTRODUCTION

With internationalisation in higher education becoming part of the mainstream activities of many higher education institutions and continuously gaining in importance, there is a growing expectation that universities be able to define the added value of the international dimension. Accordingly, there is some growth in the attention paid to measuring the impact of internationalisation on the institutional mission. In Europe, internationalisation has gained additional prominence as it is seen as an aspect of modernising European higher education in an increasingly Europeanised and globalised context (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Amaral, Neave, Musselin, and Maassen, 2009; Marginson and van der Wende, 2007).

In 'standard' quality assurance processes, attention to internationalisation's quality remains limited. Quality, even without adding the complication of 'internationalisation', remains a controversial concept with a range of definitions and purposes, and ways to measure it—whether it is conceived as excellence, fitness for purpose, value for money or the ability to transform students.

Another challenge lies in balancing accountability, i.e. the need for trustworthy external quality control to assure external stakeholders of a bottom line of quality, with enhancement, i.e. the need for a creative evaluation structure and culture that stimulates institutional learning and improvement.

Quality assurance in internationalisation should be able to provide reliable information on institutional performance while taking into account the diversity of institutional missions and profiles. This proviso about mission is especially relevant in regard to internationalisation, because it is not a function taken up equally in all higher education institutions.

The main questions addressed in our full report included:

- How can the quality of internationalisation be assured?
- Which instruments are available?
- What are current experiences and what should be action lines for the future?
- How do we know that internationalisation is achieving its goals?

A few more introductory remarks about the core concepts of quality assurance and internationalisation are in order, however.

QUALITY AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

However quality may be conceived, it has to do with the *performance* of higher education institutions in education, research and the 'third mission', as well as with the *satisfaction* of stakeholders (internal and external) with those performances. Controversies include whether attention should focus on threshold levels of quality, or conversely on achieving top levels ('excellence').

The quality of education and its assurance have gained importance over the last decades, and practically all higher education systems in the European Higher Education Area and most other world regions now operate quality assurance schemes (Eurydice, 2010; Westerheijden et al., 2010). *Quality assurance can briefly be defined as (recurrent) practices to evaluate the quality of some of a higher education institution's activities, and the structures associated with these practices* (Westerheijden, 2010).

External quality assurance on programme, institutional and supra-institutional levels is coordinated by national as well as international quality assurance schemes established by quality assurance agencies. The supra-institutional level also allows for benchmarking and comparison. Benchmarking may have two aspects: one is setting a standard (an external one), and the second concerns a learning process within the higher education institution, in open communication with other higher education institutions, to emulate best practices with regard to internal processes that impact on performances addressed in quality assurance exercises (ESMU, 2008, 2010). *Comparison* since a few years increasingly focuses on institutional performances as they appear in *rankings* (van Vught and Ziegele, 2011).

Quality schemes mostly reflect priorities and characteristics of the higher education system in which they are embedded; in other words, they reflect national policies etc. The context thus drives the indicators by which quality is measured. As a consequence, indicators developed for one quality assurance system might only be applicable to a certain extent in other countries' quality assurance schemes. Accommodating the diversity of universities within a system is an additional major challenge in supra-institutional quality assurance schemes. Quality assurance systems may reduce (desired) diversity in higher education systems if they impose uniform measures, because 'what gets measured gets done'.

Indicators can be divided into the following categories:

- Inputs: Staff numbers, staff qualifications, facilities
- Process: delivery of curriculum, student satisfaction
- Outputs: Retention rates, success rates, drop-out rates

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

The Bologna Process has not only encouraged the internationalisation of higher education as such, but also of quality assurance (Westerheijden, et al., 2010). In addition, a number of EU projects have supported and furthered this development. Until the early stages of the Bologna Process, most attention went into national quality assurance arrangements: the development of agencies, legal frameworks, criteria and indicators (Schwarz and Westerheijden, 2004).

In 2005 the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG) were established (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2005, 2009). These guidelines consist of three parts, of which the first is most relevant for higher education institutions, because it defines which areas must be included in their quality assurance arrangements:

- Policy and procedures for quality assurance
- Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards
- Assessment of students
- Quality assurance of teaching staff
- Learning resources and student support
- Information systems
- Public information

Note that internationalisation is not mentioned in the ESG Part 1. It is at most assessed through standards on internationalisation of the curriculum and perhaps through quality of teachings staff.

Part two of the ESG defines external quality assurance through for example quality assurance agencies and part three covers the quality assurance of these agencies.

To further cooperation between quality assurance agencies and to establish a certain harmonisation of quality assurance procedures throughout Europe, the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) was established (www.eqar.eu). The umbrella organisation of quality assurance agencies, the European Association of Quality Assurance Agencies (ENQA, www.enqa.eu), was deeply involved in the development of the quality assurance policies in the framework of the Bologna Process.

In addition the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA, www.eaconsortium.net) has been established by a number of accreditation agencies with the main aim of mutual recognition of accreditation and quality assurance decisions. Currently twelve bilateral mutual recognition agreements have been concluded among quality assurance agencies from eight European countries.

Our report also provides a number of case studies of national quality assurance agencies and their different approaches e.g. the institutional audit approach from the UK's Quality Assurance Agency or the evaluation per study programme developed by the Flemish-Dutch NVAO. None of the studied approaches, however, mention internationalisation as one of their key components.

A quality label that explicitly evaluates internationalisation on all levels is the EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System) label developed by EFMD for the accreditation of business schools.

INTERNATIONALISATION

Internationalisation of higher education has also gained importance over the last decade and, in response to globalization, has developed into a key element of many higher education institutions' missions. Internationalisation has become an integral part of university strategy; in good practice cases, it is no longer a separate area unconnected to the other components of a university's mission.

The rationales for internationalisation are manifold (academic, social, cultural, political, and economic). The different rationales also lead to actors giving different answer to the question: what is internationalisation meant to achieve? Obviously, as in the case of quality, different conceptions of the term imply different ways of measuring internationalisation's achievements.

The definition for internationalisation used in our report is one of the most common definitions used in the literature: *The process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension in the purpose, function and delivery of postsecondary education* (Knight, 2004).

As mentioned, this process is driven by a number of different rationales. Among these, the economic rationale (income generation) has gained in importance in the last decade, especially in countries where foreign students pay full-cost fees. Economic arguments are also sometimes connected with national governments internationalisation strategies for reasons such as demography or stimulating institutions to generate additional resources to substitute for reduced state funding.

Internationalisation is realised in a number of different activities, which can be subsumed under two headings:

- Internationalisation at home: activities that help students develop international understanding and intercultural skills in their home institution, including internationalisation of curricula, campus life (e.g. mixing with international students) and education (e.g. international teaching staff).
- Internationalisation abroad: all forms of education crossing borders: mobility of students, teachers, scholars, programmes, courses, curriculum, projects.

INTERNATIONALISATION ABROAD AND MOBILITY

Student mobility is the activity most associated with internationalisation abroad. The mobility of students has developed over the years (e.g. aided by mobility programmes and schemes) and can nowadays be divided into the following subgroups:

- Credit mobility (also short term mobility or horizontal mobility): Students follow a short term of their studies abroad e.g. as part of the ERASMUS programme and gain credits valid at home for modules completed during this stay.
- Diploma mobility (also vertical mobility): Students complete a diploma or degree in a foreign higher education institution.

Widespread use of these two terms should not close our eyes to the fact that these terms are often interpreted differently and that the measurement of student mobility is still difficult, partly due to different interpretations and partly through different administrative definitions and procedures (e.g. connected with visa regulations).

Besides counting the numbers of mobile students, it is also important to measure the impact of student mobility. The crucial issue is what impact a study abroad period has on students and their personal and professional development and, moreover, how these influences can be measured. Similar questions could be asked around the mobility of staff. With regard to staff mobility, data are even scarcer than those concerning student mobility.

With increasing international competition among higher education institutions, both reflected and spurred by global rankings, these issues become increasingly important.

INTERNATIONALISATION AT HOME AND THE CURRICULUM

Internationalisation at home provides students (mobile as well as non-mobile) with an international experience within their home university environment. Moreover, universities are required to be active internationally in order to be competitive and more attractive to students, research contractors, etc.

An international campus can be achieved through, for example, the following:

- Content, e.g. literature, language learning
- Methods, e.g. peer learning (with international students), innovative pedagogies, ICT use (web learning, communicating abroad or using teaching materials from abroad)
- Delivery, e.g. language of instruction (through international teaching staff)
- Services, e.g. student support services

INTERNATIONALISATION AND THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

The Bologna Process and its two main goals, i.e. establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the promotion of European higher education, have given the internationalisation of Higher Education an additional impetus. Four of the Bologna action lines concern core activities of internationalisation:

- Mobility
- Recognition
- Joint degrees
- Global dimension

Other action lines also have close links to internationalisation. The Bologna Process supports internationalisation instruments such as ECTS as the credit currency, National Qualification Frameworks under the European Qualification Frameworks (QF-EHEA as well as EU's EQF) and the Diploma Supplement.

INSTRUMENTS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE OF INTERNATIONALISATION

The overview of current practices in quality assurance showed that internationalisation is not a major area of interest in current quality assurance schemes. However, internationalisation and quality assurance have become increasingly linked along three major dimensions:

- Quality assurance of internationalisation
- Quality-added due to internationalisation of higher education
- Internationalisation of quality assurance

The latter two issues have been alluded to above. Attention now should turn to the former element. A strategic question is whether the quality of internationalisation should be measured and analysed in a separate process, or whether it ought to be part of the overall quality assurance process. In view of the lack of attention to internationalisation in most quality assurance processes, separate models to measure and assure the quality of internationalisation were developed and implemented as a first step.

One of the early efforts was made through IMHE/OECD's 'Internationalisation Quality Review Process (IQRP)', which operated from 1994 to 1998. The process included pilot peer reviews in institutions in different parts of the world (Knight and de Wit, 1999). The IQRP however did not gain enough support to remain viable.

The process was based on a self-assessment tool for the institution and an external peer review. The IQRP was a self-improvement exercise rather than a benchmark exercise. The IQRP proposed to evaluate internationalisation along six dimensions:

- Internationalisation policies and strategies
- Organisational and support structures
- Academic programmes and students
- Research and scholarly contributions
- Human resources management
- Contracts and services

Furthermore, during the years of implementing the IQRP the emphasis of quality assurance expanded from its original focus on the questions of 'why?' (motivation) and 'how?' (process), to including questions on 'what for?' (goal) and on the achievement of goals (performance).

The IQRP was followed by other projects and publications in the area of internationalisation that paid attention to measuring its quality. At the conference on internationalisation and its quality assurance that was part of the MODERN project, Professor Hans de Wit listed a number of them. The following conclusions were drawn from De Wit's presentation:

- There appears to be a need for quality assessment of internationalisation strategies in higher education
- In particular in the USA and Europe, but also in Japan, several instruments have been developed over the past 15 years to assess their mission-based quality. The conference showcased an example of a Dutch online instrument for this, MINT.
- These instruments borrow ideas and instruments from each other and use more or less the same programmatic and organisational categories
- They focus on input and output assessment
- They are mainly directed at the institutional level
- They address the state of the art and/or the process for improvement
- Some exercises in benchmarking have created databases for comparison and learning from best practice regarding internationalisation. An online tool to identify good practices fitting in a particular context was mentioned (from US-based NAFSA).

It has been shown that value added in terms of learning outcomes for students has become the focus of attention regarding the measurement and evaluation of internationalisation. The literature however suggests that definitions of learning outcomes and associated indicators are not easily developed and that different sources take different approaches to them.

Crucial questions that remain to be answered include what internationalisation is expected to do to students? What does it mean to train students to become European and global citizens? Should added value from internationalisation apply to all students in the same degree? The question of how to measure internationalisation's quality can only be answered satisfactorily once it is known whom different indicators are aimed at and for which type of decisions they are intended.

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