Programme Management and Monitoring

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As understood in the European Higher Education Area, Quality Assurance (i.e. the identification of what needs to be done to improve the quality of students' education) is

grounded in an HEI's recognition of its own *corporate responsibility* for the quality of the educational provision made for its students.

This responsibility can best be seen as a collaborative process devoted to optimising quality (within the constraints of resources etc)

which extends upwards from

- the ***personal responsibility of the individual professor to seeks ways of improving what he or she does***

through to

- ***corporate responsibilities and accountability*** at each institutional level

At the most fundamental level each professor should be asking him or her self

'Could I do what I am trying to do for my students better?'

Such a professor will exercise objective self-criticism and will also listen to his or her students.

(This implies an ethos where students feel free to express themselves frankly without repercussions)

Usually there will be some improvements possible which are in the individual professor's hands alone, and

• with attention to what the reality of the students' experience is

• and some imagination exercised about how their learning outcomes might be better supported,

- improvements can be effected.

*Other problems are likely to be identified which ca
only be resolved in collaboration with others,*

- at the next most basic level, this will be
collaboration with the others who are involved in
the delivery of the programme of studies.

All of those staff (including learning resource staff and technicians) who are involved in the delivery of a programme of studies should see themselves as a team, *and should seek to resolve issues and develop improvements in the quality of the programme of studies through debate - and ultimately consensus agreement.*

The programme team is the most basic level at which one can identify corporate responsibility for the quality of the provision made for student learning.

Such a process at the programme level is neither easy nor conclusive, and

requires leadership.

The crucial role of programme team leaders requires recognition within the wider institution.

Programme Team leadership has many of the characteristics of any manager's role. It requires

• a particular sort of person with

• particular skills in 'man management',

• who has earned respect and confidence, and

• can generate and work within a context of shared commitment

The programme team's responsibility for the management of the programme implies a measure of autonomy (freedom of action) but it also implies accountability (readiness to justify).

- Accountability to students and other stakeholders, but also accountability within the HEI's structures.

"Stakeholders" =

Whoever may be affected by the outcome of any decision or set of decisions.

Typically those who have a vested interest (i.e. a "stake") in the success of any enterprise.

Higher Education has many different kinds of stakeholders.

As well as meeting together on more mundane and specific matters,

the members of a Programme Team should, from time to time, deliberately and collectively ask themselves the question:

'Could we do better?'

(I.e exercising "self-evaluation")

As well as asking themselves the question they should also listen to what the students are saying:

Questionnaires are valuable (particularly if designed in conjunction with the students), as is student representation, but *simply talking to students is important.*

(If students' declared needs cannot be met they should always be told the reasons why. "Feedback" should be two-way.)

Programme Teams should also employ the more systematic and routine QA procedure known as

'*programme monitoring*'

(easier with appropriate administrative support).

They can **monitor** at least the following as **performance indicators**:

- The demand for the programme (the ratio of applicants to available places).
- Student success in examinations.
- The retention of students (as against the proportion who drop out, and **if possible the reasons for the latter**).
- What happens to graduates.

Trends from year to year are important (and can give rise to questions which need answering), but **targets** can also be set and the success in meeting them monitored.

Performance Indicators should not be treated as though they are a scientific measure of 'Quality',

but they can indicate the need for some explanation

- which, when found, may indicate a critical need for remedies.

The programme team, through the Programme Leader, may well need to negotiate on behalf of the interests of the programme

– at the institutional level(s) capable of effecting those improvements which the Programme Team has identified a need for

but cannot itself effect.

The next level of corporate responsibility (e.g. a University Faculty):

is responsible for ensure the quality of all its programmes of study and is accountable to the University

the corporate identity of the latter being represented by Senate rather than the Rector

– as well as to other stakeholders (students, graduates, employers, peer groups, etc)

The Faculty should exercise Quality Assurance ('periodic review' - possibly involving peers from elsewhere and consulting stakeholders).

Basically it should ensure that the Programme Team is asking itself the right questions and taking appropriate decisions .

While this may be a formal procedure (beneficial in encouraging objectivity), that should only be a framework for a two-way and open dialogue.

This dialogue should again have a place for the student voice.

"Peers" =

Fellow academics, with relevant subject expertise, who share a common understanding of what you are trying to do.

QA procedure at the Faculty level should include **an identification of real need**,

some of which needs the Faculty itself may be able to meet, *as it has an obligation to do if it can (unlik in "external evaluation" procedures),*

while some may require the Faculty to negotiate at the University level.

But the fact that it is the outcome of an objective evaluation process should strengthen the Faculty in its negotiations with the University.

There is a University responsibility to ensure the quality of the provision made for students, both through an appropriate form of QA (which might be focused on the way in which the Faculty exercises its responsibilities)

and

through the University itself realising its responsibility to provide for confirmed needs

- *through its planning and resource allocation*