PERSPECTIVES ON DISTANCE EDUCATION

Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Papers presented to a Symposium on Quality Assurance New Delhi, India July 1994

Prakash M. Deshpande and Ian Mugridge, Editors

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PREFACE

"It is hardly an exaggeration to say that, as funding issues dominated the past ten years, so quality issues will dominate the next decade." (The Higher, 1991) The focus on quality as the theme for the decade is an outcome of the redirection and restructuring of higher education." (Nunan and Calvert, 1992) These comments on the prominence now being accorded the issue of quality assurance in higher education in the nineties begins the consideration of the subject in a major report on quality in Australian distance education; but it reflects a reality that, extending far beyond Australia, has become almost universally a central concern in the world of higher education as institutions try to wrestle with problems arising from new expectations and demands that are coming from students, governments and industry. This collection of essays is part of two approaches to dealing with the issue of quality assurance in distance education.

The first approach arises from the agreement on research signed at the sixteenth world congress of the International Council on Distance Education (ICDE), held in Bangkok in November, 1992, by ICDE and The Commonwealth of Learning (COL). This agreement set up a mechanism under which the two organisations could begin to approach jointly a matter contained in the mandate of each, the encouragement of research in distance education. As part of the attempt to give effect to their agreement, ICDE and COL have begun to sponsor research in two major items of concern to distance educators. The first of these is an area of constant concern to distance teaching institutions (as to conventional institutions) as they struggle to acquire the resources to meet their mandates, the funding and costing of distance education. (See Mugridge, 1994) The second is that of quality assurance which, as we have already noted, is a matter to which distance teaching institutions, like those in the conventional sector of higher education, are paying increasing attention. This collection, which contains a review of the literature on quality assurance recently commissioned by COL, is part of the attempt to provide a basis for the continuing attempt to develop quality assurance systems for distance education.

The second approach is a more focussed one aimed at work in a particular country. As the final essay in this collection details, one of the projects with which COL and the two editors of this collection have become involved is the attempt to develop quality assurance systems for the Indian open universities and for the distance teaching components of conventional Indian universities. In late November and early December, 1993, three representatives of Indian institutions undertook a tour, sponsored by COL and the Indian University Grants Commission, of institutions in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom to review existing and planned quality assurance systems and the related issue of credit transfer. The object of this tour was to inform the participants about quality assurance programmes in the countries they visited so that this experience could, as appropriate, form part of the process for developing quality assurance systems at home. One way of doing this was to collect this volume of impressions provided by some of the people with whom they consulted and by others involved in the field.
Thus, the commissioned review of the literature of quality assurance begins this collection and essays have been contributed by staff members from three of the Australian institutions that the group visited, Deakin University in Geelong, the University of South Australia in Adelaide and the University of Queensland in Brisbane. Only one of these, however, deals solely with the question from the perspective of a single institution while the essay by Brian Wilson, chair of the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee on Quality Assurance, provides an overview of quality assurance in Australian higher education. Alongside these Australian essays, we have placed a description of the rather different system in New Zealand. Finally, current activities in India are considered against the background of quality assurance programmes in other countries. The collection forms the basis for discussions of the development of quality assurance systems in distance teaching universities in India, held in New Delhi in the summer of 1994.

We wish to acknowledge the help of the contributors to this collection who provided us with their essays to meet the very stringent deadline we were obliged to set. We also acknowledge the support of Professor James A. Maraj, President, The Commonwealth of Learning, Professor K.B. Powar, Secretary General, Association of Indian Universities, and Professor G. Ram Reddy, Chairman, University Grants Commission, India. The final acknowledgement is separate from those in the previous sentence because, as we acknowledge the strong support for the quality assurance project provided by Professor V.C. Kulanlai Swamy, Vice Chancellor, Indira Gandhi National Open University, we also recognise and pay tribute to his work at IGNOU and on behalf of distance education in general. His retirement from the vice chancellorship coincides with the publication of this collection which we respectfully dedicate to him.

P.M.D

J.M.

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QUALITY ASSURANCE AND DISTANCE EDUCATION: 
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Jennifer Warren, Katherine McManus and Reginald Nnazor

The topic of quality assurance has become the subject of considerable discussion and debate in a variety of educational arenas. That quality assurance is of topical interest is evident in the focus of existing educational literature and the fact that it has been the theme for several recent conferences of higher education, open learning and distance education. This concern for quality and the need to assure it is expected to remain a major issue in the future.

The purpose of this paper is to explore existing literature on quality assurance with respect to three primary questions: 1) How has quality assurance been defined?; 2) What is being done about quality assurance in various countries and/or institutions?; and 3) What questions should be considered regarding the implementation of quality assurance systems? While the primary focus of this paper is distance education, higher education literature will also be drawn upon to address these questions. The inclusion of literature on higher education is justified by the substantial theoretical and practical work that has been generated by this field regarding quality assurance and by the influence this work has had on the consideration and implementation of quality assurance systems in distance education institutions.

WHY HAS "QUALITY" BECOME A CENTRAL ISSUE?

Since World War II, radical changes have taken place in higher education systems. The number of higher education institutions has increased and new kinds of institutions have been developed. In addition, the number of students enrolled has risen substantially and the range of available programmes has expanded to meet the changing needs of this educational sector. Accompanying the rapid growth in higher education systems has been a rising interest in the quality of education provided by this sector. (L'Ecuyer, 1993a; Webster, 1990)

Concern about the quality of higher education can be attributed to both external and internal factors. Escalating costs associated with this quantitative growth have resulted in enhanced scrutiny from the general public and government about the quality and value of education for money. (Frazer, 1992) Funders want to be sure that they are investing in

1 Jennifer Warren, Katherine McManus and Reginald Nnazor are graduate students in the Department of Administrative, Adult and Higher Education at the University of British Columbia.
excellence and that the resources they provide are used efficiently. ([E]cuyer, 1993a) Particular concern has been raised with respect to the relevance of programmes, the achievement of programme objectives by learners (Dhanarajan & Hope, 1992), and the extent to which students are receiving the best education possible. (Frazer, 1992) In addition to public accountability, rising costs at a time of restricted financing have also led to concern within higher education institutions regarding efficiency and ways in which this can be enhanced by assuring and maintaining high levels of quality.

The pursuit of quality in distance education is driven by factors similar to those of higher education as well as a determination by distance educators to establish the credibility and respectability of the distance mode of delivering education. Distance teaching universities have had to “prove that the education they offer is valuable and on a high level and even more qualitative in some respects, as compared to some conventional universities....” (Guri-Rozenblit, 1993, p. 101)

WHAT IS QUALITY?

In order to address the question ‘What is quality assurance?’ it is first necessary to define what is meant by the concept of ‘quality’ itself. It is apparent from the higher education literature that the construction of a clear and concise definition of this concept represents a problematic issue that is the subject of considerable debate. To illustrate the elusive nature of quality and the confusion associated with its definition, several authors of recent publications have referred to Pirsig’s (1974) well-known citation:

Quality...you know what it is, yet you don’t know what it is. But that’s self-contradictory. But some things are better than others, that is, they have more quality. But when you try to say what the quality is, apart from the things that have it, it all goes poof! There’s nothing to talk about. But if you can’t say what Quality is, how do you know what it is, or how do you know that it even exists? If no one knows what it is, then for all practical purposes, it doesn’t exist at all. But for all practical purposes it really does exist...So round and round you go spinning mental wheels, and nowhere finding any place to get traction. What the hell is Quality? What is it? (p. 179)

In response to this question, Harvey and Green (1993) conclude that quality means different things to different people. They identify that there are a variety of ‘stakeholders’ in higher education (students, employers, teaching and non-teaching staff, government and its funding agencies, accreditors, validators, auditors, assessors and others), each with a different perspective on quality. They assert that “this is not a different perspective on the same thing, but different perspectives on different things with the same label.” (p. 10) Morgan (1993) provides a useful description of the different concerns and priorities of academic staff and professional bodies, students, and government and funding agencies for what constitutes quality. This discussion is illustrative of the range of perspectives held by key stakeholders.

Green and Harvey (1993) also identify five different approaches to viewing quality that are used in higher education. These include the definition of quality:

- in terms of the exceptional (high standards);
- in terms of consistency (zero defects and getting it right the first time);
- as fitness for purpose (meeting stated purposes);

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• as value for money; and
• as transformative (transformation of the participant).

Given the range of definitions or approaches to quality and the relative nature of the concept, it is difficult to identify a single substantive definition of the concept that is most appropriate for the field of higher education. Rather than searching for a single definition, it appears to be most important that those who use the term explicitly address the nature of quality to which they refer. In order to establish effective quality assurance systems, it is imperative that quality be initially defined before specific mechanisms are identified. Green and Harvey (1993) contend that “no model [of quality assurance] will work effectively unless everyone knows what quality is being assured.” (p. 190)

HOW HAS QUALITY ASSURANCE BEEN DEFINED?

The focus of much of the educational literature on quality assurance addresses the questions, “Why does quality need to be assured?” and “How can quality be assured?” The question, “What is quality assurance?”, however, is often neglected. This makes it particularly difficult to determine what is encompassed by ‘quality assurance’ and in what ways it differs from other related terms such as ‘quality control’, ‘quality assessment’, and ‘quality management.’ (Green & Harvey, 1993)

Due to the lack of agreement regarding the definition of the concept of quality, a specific universal definition of quality assurance is unavailable. Nevertheless, several broad and general definitions are evident in the literature. For example, Ellis (1993) defines quality assurance as “a process whereby a consumer or other interested party is made confident that standards will be maintained.” (p. 241) Carley and Waldron (1984) state that quality assurance may be defined as “planned, deliberate actions or activities instigated and carried out with the intent and purpose of maintaining and improving the quality of learning for participants.” (p. 62) A more inclusive definition is provided by Green and Harvey (1993) who refer to quality assurance as “those mechanisms and procedures designed to reassure the various ‘stakeholders’ in higher education that institutions accord a high priority to implementing policies designed to maintain and enhance institutional effectiveness.” (p. 178)

While the above definitions provide a general understanding of the concept, the distinction between quality assurance and other related terms is not clear. Within the literature, several authors have emphasized the unique nature of quality assurance by distinguishing it from quality control. Tannock (1992), for example, states that quality control “consists merely of the operational techniques and activities that are used to fulfill requirements for quality, usually interpreted to mean conformance to the required specifications” while quality assurance refers to a “process of continuous and never-ending quality improvement.” (p. 109-110) Tannock also asserts that this process is composed of the combination of several principles (e.g., setting of quality objectives; planning activities to meet these objectives) and a philosophy that promotes “the commitment and motivation of all staff” and “the empowering of staff toward the improvement of quality.” (p. 110)

Frazer (1992), in his critique of quality control, argues that the overall quality of a university is dependent on all aspects of the university’s activities. Because these activities are interrelated, he asserts that “no university could, or should, employ groups of controllers or inspectors to examine each of these aspects in isolation. The overall quality of a university must be the concern of everyone who works there” (p. 10). This
emphasis on integration and involvement is evident in his definition of quality assurance. He states that "as defined here, and by many in industry, quality assurance has four components. These are that:

- everyone in the enterprise has a responsibility for maintaining the quality of the product or service (i.e., the sub-standard rarely reaches the quality controllers because it has been rejected at source);
- everyone in the enterprise has a responsibility for enhancing the quality of the product or service;
- everyone in the enterprise understands, uses and feels ownership of the systems which are in place for maintaining and enhancing quality; and
- management (and sometimes the customer or client) regularly checks the validity and viability of the systems for checking quality." (p. 10-11)

To apply this definition directly to higher education he suggests simply replacing the world 'enterprise' with 'university' throughout this paragraph. He asserts that "a university which takes quality assurance seriously emerges as a self-critical community of students, teachers, support staff and senior managers each contributing to and striving for continued improvement." (p. 11)

In addition to the participation of all who are responsible for and involved in the education process, the need to integrate all elements and processes of educational activities has been suggested (Frazer, 1992), thereby creating a quality assurance 'system'. While there does not exist a universally agreed upon definition of what is encompassed by quality assurance, Green and Harvey (1993) have identified the following elements for consideration:

- inputs to the teaching and learning process;
- the process itself;
- outputs (e.g., the number of graduates, standards achieved);
- the individual university and its (quality) management;
- the discipline; and
- the course/programme of study. (p. 183) For quality assurance to be an integrative process, it appears necessary to include a variety of significant individuals and to consider the multiple, interrelated facets of the institution.

The definition of quality assurance as it is expressed in the literature of higher education implies that quality assurance is a continuing, active and integrative process for maintaining and improving quality rather than simply a system of evaluation and checking for errors. Upon reviewing the literature of distance education, it is evident that the basic definition of quality assurance does not differ within this context.

In summary, it appears that, at a general conceptual level, quality assurance in both higher and distance education refers to a continuous process that is a proactive rather than reactive process, and that, through involving all actors and many facets of the institution, it is integrative. While the general definition of quality assurance does not seem to differ across educational sectors, the mechanisms used to assure quality and the specific focus of quality assurance measures does appear to differ across countries, institutions and educational subfields. These differences will be discussed in the following section.
WHAT IS BEING DONE ABOUT QUALITY ASSURANCE?

In the growing literature on quality assurance, considerable discussion has been directed towards institutional efforts to implement quality assurance systems. Much of the literature on this topic focuses on quality assurance as it is applied in higher education. More recently, however, descriptions of quality assurance mechanisms and procedures used by distance education institutions have also been described.

Upon reviewing available literature in both educational arenas, it is apparent that no uniform model exists to which all institutions subscribe. Meacham (1991) also contends that "there seems to be no definitive model which can be applied in all institutional, political and economic contexts." (p. vii) In addition, there does not exist a conceptual or analytical framework within which quality assurance can be discussed in higher and distance education. These issues pose serious problems for an attempt to summarise the literature on quality assurance developments.

In the absence of an overarching framework, the literature reviewed in this paper is summarised as follows. Higher education developments are discussed with respect to

- the different methodologies employed by different institutions, and
- international developments.

This structural approach reflects the organisation of conference proceedings and the content of included papers. As quality assurance in distance education is still in the earliest stages of exploration, the literature typically addresses specific elements or components for which quality must be assured rather than institutional or international implementations of quality assurance "systems." The discussion of this literature reflects this current focus.

Quality Assurance Systems In Institutions of Higher Education

Despite the fact that higher education institutions vary widely in their development of quality assurance methods, three approaches to assuring quality are frequently identified in the literature. First, quality assurance typically involves some degree of external review. In other words, a committee of either government representatives, faculty representatives, or some mixture of the two is responsible for visiting institutions and reporting on their internal quality assurance systems. Second, institutions generally have some manner of reviewing their own programmes in order to prepare themselves to respond to external review committees. Third, institutions often include an assessment of outcomes in their system of review.

External Approaches

It is frequently stated in the literature on quality assurance in higher education that an institution's internal committees of faculty are kept on track through the guidance of external review committees. (Staropoli, 1992; Williams, 1992) External review committees can be formed either by a group of universities and their faculties, some of whom agree to be members on external review advisory committees (Fincher, 1991); or they can be formed by a government department of education as is frequently the case in the United Kingdom and in Europe. According to Frazer (1992), the first stage of external review "must be a document reporting the self-evaluation" (p. 21), but further visits should be for the purpose of meeting with both small and large groups at the institution. To gain an understanding of the manner in which external review committees
function, we turn to specific examples from Australia, the United Kingdom, France, and the United States.

In Australia, external quality assurance reviews of universities are guided by a committee made up entirely of faculty from Australian universities. These committees are called Academic Standards Panels. The panels are formed by the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee. (Linke, 1993) It is believed that they “provide significant means of monitoring standards.” (Dow, 1992, p. 29) The panels are composed of five to seven persons who are respected in their discipline, from a variety of disciplines, from across Australia. They serve on the panel for three years and during that time they visit every university annually. They review the statistics for honours grading and review students’ written work. The purpose of the panel in Australia is more to assure equality across the universities than it is to assure quality. Dow (1992) explains that in considering what the work of the panels would be, faculty found that:

greater differences exist between subject areas in any one university than within any one subject area across the Australian universities. We decided therefore that it was more important to obtain consistency within particular disciplines across Australian universities than to seek consistency between the different subject fields. (p. 31)

The Australian academic and administrative bodies view the maintenance of equality as synonymous with quality.

In the United Kingdom, external review is performed by the Academic Audit Unit, a group established by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the United Kingdom (CVCP). The Academic Audit Unit’s (AAU) terms of reference are:

- to consider and review the universities’ mechanisms for monitoring and promoting the academic standards which are necessary for achieving their stated aims and objectives;
- to comment on the extent to which procedures in place in individual universities reflect best practice in maintaining quality and are applied in practice;
- to identify and commend to universities good practice in regard to the maintenance of academic standards at a national level;
- to keep under review nationally the role of the external examiner system; and
- to report to the CVCP via the Management Board.

(Williams, 1992, p. 144)

According to Williams (1992), the AAU does not impose a single standard for all universities but uses its authority to discover “the extent to which the universities’ quality assurance systems are appropriate for the purposes they are designed and used for, and that they work effectively.” (p. 146) He believes that the existence of a quality assurance system, of which the AAU is an integral part, focuses faculty on the issue of quality programmes and teaching. In the U.K., the Academic Audit Units are considered to be a part of a continuing process of review that seeks to improve instruction and programmes through requiring the universities to consider and review their own mechanisms for promoting and monitoring academic standards. The method the AAU uses includes providing universities with ‘Notes for the Guidance of Auditors’ which outline the basic concepts of the AAU’s work and includes “an extensive list of questions which audit team members are encouraged to use as triggers for their enquiries.” (p. 147)
Quality assurance in the United Kingdom, then, is chiefly encouraged through the existence of the Academic Audit Unit which helps to promote, through its very existence, a quality agenda within universities.

In France, the government is very actively involved in higher education. Three levels of quality control are in evidence in France: centralised administrative control, market control and the Comité National d’Evaluation.

Centralised administrative control is performed by the French Ministry of Education whose responsibility it is to make sure that taxpayers’ support of the education system is justified. The ministry concerns itself with the appointment and promotion of teaching and administrative staff, the universities’ budgets, and the regulation of accreditation.

Market control is exercised by the increasing partnership the universities are forming with outside partners in the private sector. The partners can exert pressure upon universities to offer courses of a certain quality. (Staropoli, 1992) Finally, the Comité National d’Evaluation (CNE) is separate from the civil service bureaucracy of the ministry, but is nonetheless tied to government. It is composed of seventeen members chosen from the academic and scientific community. It has a permanent staff and complete autonomy. It reports directly to the president and parliament. Its function is to report on the research and teaching at the universities. The CNE has no regulatory authority but it is able to collect and examine data. The CNE is able to perform qualitative assessment and through that function it also provides a quality assurance mechanism.

As an independent body the CNE is free to ask questions, make recommendations, and publish findings. Such a committee is advantageous for two reasons:

First, it makes it possible to see the institution’s policy orientation more clearly, to appreciate its strengths and weaknesses, and to bring about desirable reforms. Second, it helps in persuading external authorities to take account of specific problems of the institution, including difficulties with students or with the academic community as a result of inadequate staffing or resources. (Staropoli, 1992, p. 45)

It is hoped by those involved in higher education in France that the ‘intercessor’ role of the CNE will provide the needed stimulus for institutional self-reflectivity that will encourage continued review and revision of academic programmes.

In the United States during the 1980s, a number of reports were commissioned by several education associations and accrediting bodies. Those reports indicated that education needed improvement. The United States government did not act unilaterally to impose change or innovation on universities. Instead, education associations and boards in regions of the country attempted to suggest changes. In one region of the country — the South — several external bodies became involved: the Southern Regional Education Board, the National Governor’s Association, the Southern Governor’s Association, and the Southern Growth Policies Board. Each of these boards and associations offered a short list of improvement and innovation they felt were necessary for universities in the South to implement. The groups did not work as a co-ordinated body with the universities; instead, their unsolicited lists of diverse recommendations were handed down to the universities as a warning or ultimatum. As can be imagined, the suggestions were poorly received. Fincher (1991) believes this situation is a typical one in the United States because the internal structures of the university are not conducive to creating a proactive response to needed change. Among his reasons for this are:
• Many recommendations [by external boards] run cross-grain to academic beliefs and values concerning: institutional autonomy, faculty prerogatives in curriculum and instruction, and the market pressures to which curricula are subject.

• Faculty incentives, rewards, and personal recognitions must be tied to improved classroom performance and to re-organisation of undergraduate programmes for faculty to willingly become involved in a quality assurance process.

• More often than not faculty are frustrated by the absence of interest on the part of deans and department heads and by the gauntlet of committees they must run to gain course change.

In the United States, quality assurance might be achieved within individual programmes in a university as a process of internal review rather than come about as a response to external reviews.

In summary, the formation of external committees or advisory panels seems to blur the line between quality assurance and quality control. Of the models discussed above, a clear distinction is not always maintained between quality assurance and quality control. As quality assurance is defined, it is a continual process undertaken by most of the members of the institution. If an institution seeks to maintain a quality assurance system the members of the institution must be using review, assessment, and evaluation procedures to continually improve programmes, teaching, and evaluation instruments; whereas, quality control would merely seek to repair errors in the system as they arose.

Internal Approaches

L'Ecuyer (1993a), in his discussion of quality assurance developments in industrialised countries, identifies the trend that “quality assurance is first and foremost up to the institutions themselves. Central agencies are not there to do the institutions’ job, but to ensure that they do it properly and, if necessary, more satisfactorily.” (p. 5) The literature is unanimous in stating that institutional efforts require the active involvement of all individuals within the institution (Berdahl, Moodie, Graeme, & Spitzberg, 1991; Fincher, 1991). Fincher (1991) says “many observers will argue that the active involvement and participation of faculty must precede realistic hopes for substantive and enduring improvements in undergraduate education.” (p. 40) The method for capturing faculty’s active interest is typically through a peer advisory group. According to Fincher (1991) most of these groups have the following shared elements:

• The groups are made up from faculty across all disciplines;

• The groups are meant to assess programmes currently in place in the institution according to criteria established either by the institution, or the government;

• The groups are expected to publish a report on their findings and/or progress.

These elements are integral to the internal approaches to quality assurance, it seems, no matter where the university might be situated.

In Quebec, for example, universities engage in a process of quality assurance because pressure was exerted on universities in the 1970s to respond to the growing demand for better, more relevant programmes. The result has been the creation of a 'New Programmes Assessment Board' and the creation of individual institutional internal review panels that review both old and new programmes. (L'Ecuyer, 1993b) The universities’ response to governments’ external pressure resulted in a policy that was loose enough “for each institution to be able to develop procedures and mechanisms that took their individual culture and ways of operating into account; at the same time, it
included clearcut obligations which all of the universities agreed to respect.” (L’Ecuyer, 1993b, p. 3)

One way of proceeding can be seen through the University of Sussex (United Kingdom) approach. Faculty were faced with the imposition of an External Academic Audit Unit created by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals. The unit’s mandate was to investigate quality assurance mechanisms in every university in the United Kingdom. Individual universities were given the opportunity to set up the type of quality assurance mechanism that suited their institution. According to Becher (1992), the response of faculty at the University of Sussex to the external audit was to view the imposition of quality assurance ‘as an academic rather than a managerial exercise.’ (p. 48) Becher, as Chair of the University’s Audit Unit, first consulted literature in the area of educational innovation and policy implementation; then he began to interview all heads of Units within the university:

The interviews were by appointment, in the room of the individual concerned. A brief explanatory note and a suggested agenda preceded the meeting, and colleagues were encouraged to decide which issues they wanted to concentrate on and how long they wished the session to take... The style was interactive, in that I used the opportunity wherever possible to test out my own thoughts, and interesting ideas I had come across in previous interviews, as well as to elicit the views of the colleague concerned. (p. 55)

Becher then summarised the findings of the interviews. He circulated the summary among those he had talked with in order to give everyone a chance to add or modify anything they had contributed. He was surprised by some findings:

A somewhat unexpected finding was the degree of legitimacy accorded to students’ evaluations of their courses. Again, the level of enthusiasm varied, but no one came out explicitly against the idea of taking students’ views into account. (p. 56)

Becher also offers ‘a flavour of the content of the summary document’ through the following excerpts:

1.12 Quality assurance procedures should be designed to serve a positive purpose in furthering the interests of the university, its staff and its students, rather than a merely defensive one in meeting externally-imposed demands.

1.13 The audit exercise should be seen as one of collective responsibility, with control maintained as far as reasonably possible at the relevant operational level.

1.14 The overall approach should be as cost-effective as circumstances allow, and bureaucratic over-elaboration should be avoided...

1.31 There seems no overriding reason to require uniform procedures across the university as a whole... Accordingly, it is suggested that each school should have the opportunity to draw up its own specifications for quality assurance, in consultation with the relevant subject groups...

1.32 There should be benefits in testing out a variety of possible procedures in the early stages of the audit exercise. (p. 59)
Becher says: "It would be too much to claim that many faculty members have as yet come to regard quality assessment as a natural extension of their familiar academic activities, or to accept the audit process as expressing a valid professional concern with teaching quality;" (p. 64) but he also stresses that there has been a desire to resolve conflicts between individuals and departments from the beginning of the process.

The individual responses of institutions to the external pressures created by governments' calls for accountability have resulted in an unexpected positive outcome. According to L'Ecuver (1993b), Fincher (1991), and Becher (1992), the internal approaches devised by institutions seem to have had a positive effect on faculty involvement, interest, and teaching effectiveness.

**Outcome Assessment**

Outcome assessment is discussed both as the assessment of the institution as a whole and as an assessment of the students. The literature does not clearly indicate which is the 'product' for the purposes of implementing quality assurance.

Assessments are frequently made of the student. Typically students are assessed against class, institution, or national medians on examinations. Such assessment instruments, i.e., the examinations, should be a matter for quality assurance review. Fincher (1991), from a U.S. perspective, says that the faculty must be involved in the development, adoption, administration, and scoring of instruments and procedures used in student assessment. To him, the purpose of assessment is three-fold:

- to be assessable, educational outcomes must be defined in ways that make good sense to college instructors and students;
- instructional and learning outcomes must then be assessed by means that are creditable and fair; and
- the results (outcomes) of assessment must be useful and wisely used in the improvement of both teaching and learning. (p. 24)

Assessments are just as frequently made of the institutions' programmes. When outcome assessments are of the programmes within a given institution, they can be made both by the external review committees (as has already been discussed) and by the marketplace. If the marketplace judges an institution's programmes in need of improvement, the institution must respond. Institutions' responses to market assessment can be an important aspect of quality assurance. If the institution continually seeks information from both graduating students and potential employers and responds proactively, the institution is using the information to continually hone its self-reflectivity, which in turn creates better programmes.

**Summary of Quality Assurance Systems in Higher Education**

The three components clearly evident in most quality assurance systems in use in higher education are external approaches, internal approaches, and outcome assessment. These three components must be part of an integrated approach to the quality of teaching and programmes offered at the institution. This means that committees, their reviews, and the collection of data are on-going and as much a part of the functioning of the institution as is the beginning of courses every term.
QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Quality assurance, although relatively new to distance education, has been the subject of several conferences in the past year and is beginning to emerge as a primary topic for distance education in the 1990s. Literature on this topic typically focuses on component parts of distance education. Several recent publications have, however, provided information about quality assurance systems which have been implemented in distance education institutions. Selected literature pertaining to component parts as well as examples of quality assurance systems in distance education will be discussed in the following subsections.

Components of Distance Education Activities

The literature on quality assurance typically focuses on those components of distance education activity that are unique to this mode of education. Two areas which have received substantial attention are:

- the processes and production of course and programme materials, and
- the delivery of distance education to learners.

1. Processes and Production of Materials

Nunan and Calvert (1992), in their Report of the Project to Investigate Quality and Standards in Distance Education, found that the processes and production of materials included everything from broadly stated pedagogical concerns, such as the ‘enunciation of realistic learning objectives,’ to the specifics of ‘clearly defined minimum entry competencies.’ (p. 78) The methods for assuring quality in these areas, however, are still the subject of considerable discussion. The processes and production of materials currently scrutinised for quality are typically those materials sent to the students as instructional materials. Various institutions endeavour to do this through a variety of mechanisms. Bottomley (1991), in his discussion of the British Columbia Open Learning Agency, “identifies that course content is determined by a course writer or writers and is verified by a consultant from another university. No course is produced and offered to students without approval from a consultant that it is appropriate in both level and content.” (p. 77-78)

Guri-Rozenblit (1993) maintains that, at the Open University in Israel, external professors must submit a proposal for a new course. They must also submit sample materials which are equivalent in length to approximately one ‘learning unit.’ (30-70 pages) The decision to request sample materials resulted from a series of previous failures in which written learning materials did not meet the structure and format of an instructional self-study text. (p. 108) Guri-Rozenblit asserts that even ‘brilliant scholars’ cannot always communicate their knowledge in an appropriate manner for distance learning.

Dekkers (1991), from the University College of Central Queensland, describes a materials development approach that moves from ‘client needs’ (organisation and students) to ‘learning’. He identifies the following stages inherent in the process of material development: analysis, specifications and standards, develop materials, and deliver subjects. Dekkers indicates that quality assurance mechanisms are used in each stage of this process in addition to feedback between the stages. As such, quality
assurance is continuous, integrative and integral to the development and maintenance of quality material.

2. Delivery of Distance Education to Learners

The delivery of materials and the relationship between the institution and the student is another area of concern for distance education. According to Nunan (1991), "delivery is often taken to mean the sum of the activities of teachers at a distance." (p. 389) Delivery includes both delivery of course materials via text, visual or electronic methods and delivery of services to the student. As is the case with production and processes of materials, different distance education institutions employ a variety of mechanisms for assuring the quality of material and service delivery.

With respect to materials, the emphasis of quality assurance is placed on production standards and technical quality. The quality of delivered materials can be assured in a variety of ways. For example, quality is measured in terms of the sophistication of print materials, the design of material, and marking turnaround. (Lentell & Murphy, 1993) Dekkers (1991) identifies that "the emergence of relatively low cost, sophisticated computer aided publishing equipment has meant that institutions engaged in the development and preparation of instructional materials can now, within their own environment, manage and monitor the total preparation of quality print materials." (p. 136)

Nunan and Calvert (1992) identify several visual and electronic modes of delivery as components of quality assurance. Among these are the use of television and videos to introduce the lecturer and the subject to the student, telephone communication, and other appropriate interactive technology. In the literature, it appears that 'appropriateness' is established through both the involvement of expert technicians and the number of student and staff complaints. (Nunan & Calvert, 1992)

A variety of services is typically provided to the distance education student. The role of tutor is emphasised in the literature on quality in distance education. This is likely due to the critical role of the tutor in the distance education experience. Of particular concern in this discussion are the tutors themselves, the training of the tutors, the degree of interaction and the institutional support for that interaction. Benke and Jarmo (1993), state that "the greater the tutor's understanding of the student's goals and motivations, the higher the quality of the total learning experience. Thus, one fundamental component in quality assurance is tutors who are student centred." (p. 30)

The provision of access to tutors is an area that most distance educators still struggle over. Providing interaction between students and tutors or students and instructors has proved to be problematic in a system that began as strictly correspondence teaching. Nunan and Calvert (1992) assert that there is "tension and uncertainty surrounding the matter of fostering quality interactions with students; tensions, because there seemed insufficient time available to effect an ideal form of individualised response, uncertainty, caused by the often limited information available about the learning situation — an absence of any agreed 'standard' which might be applied to judge whether a particular response was indeed adequate." (p. 92) These issues result in a great deal of frustration for those involved in attempting to assure quality.

In summary, quality assurance literature has addressed a number of areas of consideration which typically fall within processes and production of material, and delivery of distance education to learners. While the assurance of such activities is critical to the success of distance education institutions, the consideration of separate
parts of a dynamic system does not imply an integrative quality system that includes a comprehensive set of procedures for assuring quality.

**Quality Assurance Systems**

If one is to investigate quality assurance as a system it is necessary to have an institutional view of quality assurance mechanisms and procedures which are designed to maintain and enhance the quality of all components of the educational activity and institution. Two institutional models described in the literature appear useful in providing insight into such a ‘systems’ perspective: 1) the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong; and 2) the Open College of the United Kingdom.

1. **The Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong**

The Open Learning Institute (OLI) of Hong Kong represents one distance education institution that has embraced the concept of quality assurance and has developed and implemented an integrated quality assurance system. The procedures inherent in this system and the focus of these mechanisms illustrate the range of methods that may be used, the various individuals involved in the process, and the specific content upon which quality assurance focuses.

As described by Dhanarajan and Hope (1992), quality assurance at OLI is pursued through two complementary approaches, external and internal, as well as some specific additional measures.

**EXTERNAL APPROACH**

The external approach consists of the contributions of advisory peer groups, external assessors, external examiners, and the participation of external peers in the Programme Review and Validation Committee.

Before any degree programme begins at the institute, its aims and the courses that constitute it are discussed by an advisory peer group in conjunction with the academic staff of the institute. The advisory committee is usually made up of nine people drawn from higher education institutions and from professions related to the programme area. The input of the peer advisory committee in assuring the quality of the programme is not limited to the point at which a programme is launched. It goes beyond that to include advising on programme improvements and reviews.

The institute appoints as external assessor, an expert of high standing to review the final draft of any proposed course and make recommendations to the Academic Board. The assessment involves examining “the course’s structure, balance, relevance, content level and pedagogy.” (Dhanarajan & Hope, 1992)

The institute appoints external experts from institutions of higher learning as examiners. The external examiners ensure that assessment procedures are fair and that the ‘exit standard’ of the institute is comparable to that of similar programmes in other institutions.

Besides measures taken to assure the quality of individual courses, the beginning and review of all degree programmes must be approved by the Programme Review and Validation Committee of the institute whose membership includes external peers.
INTERNAL APPROACH

The institute’s internal approach consists of committees and the roles of tutor, course co-ordinator and the Education Technology Centre. Internal committees work with external advisory peer groups. Every degree programme has an internal Programme Team that works with its associated advisory peer group. Each course has a Course Review Committee made up of the academics involved in the courses and a representative from the Education Technology Centre.

Each school of the institute has a school committee comprising all the academics in the school. School committees consider proposed courses and programmes. For each course there is an award committee that recommends the award of results to students. At the directorate level, a Course Results Group “maintains an overview of the award process on behalf of the Academic Board.” (Dhanarajan & Hope, 1992, p. 215)

Besides the use of internal committees, there are other internal mechanisms for assuring quality at OLI. They are:

- the role of the tutor;
- the role of the course co-ordinator; and
- the role of the Education Technology Centre. Once a student is registered in a course, she or he is assigned to a part-time tutor who is suitably qualified and experienced. “The tutor’s role is to deliver both distance and face-to-face teaching to a group of thirty students.” (Dhanarajan & Hope, 1992, p. 215) Tutors conduct tutorials and make written comments on students’ assignments. Course co-ordinators are ‘high quality’ academic staff appointed to oversee the development and delivery of courses. They also monitor the performance of tutors. The Education Technology Centre plays a key role in the training of tutors. The centre provides all new tutors with training material (including a distance learning package).

ADDITIONAL MEASURES

There are additional quality assurance measures at OLI. The institute imports its science and technology courses from the UK Open University. The quality of the courses is ‘guaranteed in advance’ and the courses are adapted, where necessary, to the local environment. Courses that need to be totally relevant to the Hong Kong context are developed ‘in-house’.

The institute is aware of the importance of image. The way courses are packaged counts in terms of public perception of quality. Consequently, attempts are made to ensure that the design aspects of packaging create the appropriate image of a high quality institution.

Institutional review is also a quality assurance measure at OLI. The institute was established in 1989 and in 1990 it underwent a second institutional review exercise. The 1990 review was conducted by the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation. Based on its findings, the Council “reported that the OLI had made impressive and substantial progress towards the establishment of a suitable academic environment for the conduct of degree level studies.” (Dhanarajan & Hope, 1992, p. 218)

2. Open College, United Kingdom

Innes (1988) provides an account of the measures adopted by the Open College to assure quality. She acknowledges that quality assurance “is a complex task for the College both because of the range of customers we have to satisfy — home-based learners, in-company learners, employers — and because of the number of agents through and with whom we produce and deliver open learning courses.” (p. 10)
The college’s efforts to assure quality are focused on production and delivery of course materials; staff development and training; and feedback from learners.

PRODUCTION
There are subject panels that advise on the content and design of courses. In constituting the panels, steps are taken to ensure that teachers, employers, and awarding bodies, among others are represented.

Producers of materials are required to first produce piloting materials which are tested for acceptability and efficiency. Materials, whether produced ‘in-house’ or ‘bought-in’, are rigorously reviewed by expert groups, assessment panels and the College Council. Review or assessment processes of materials are conducted with the following objectives in mind:

- There shall be a clear statement of objectives and outcomes, consistent with content and treatment of the learning material.
- The learner shall be provided with the means of regularly and frequently assessing progress towards objectives.
- Tasks to be undertaken by the learner shall be set out clearly and precisely.
- Each unit of learning shall be coherent, complete in itself, with its relationships to other relevant units clearly stated.
- Each learning package shall consist of well-produced and well-presented attractive material, free from errors.
- The make-up of each learning package shall be clearly stated, so that the learner knows precisely what has to be worked through.
- Procedures for self-assessment shall ensure a thorough understanding of what is being learnt.
- Where practical skills are to be learned, the arrangements for learning and assessing them shall be appropriate, adequate and accessible.
- Each learning unit shall normally contribute to a nationally recognised qualification.

DELIVERY
For the delivery of courses, the College relies on open access centres, the National Distance Learning Centre (NDLC), and the growing number of in-house, in-company centres. The college’s quality assurance efforts in regard to the delivery of materials appears to be limited to encouraging the various centres to introduce their own quality assurance mechanisms.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING
At the Open College, staff development and training is an important element of the quality assurance efforts. The college has “defined the competencies needed by staff to deliver open learning.” (Innes, 1988, p. 11) Consequently, the competencies provide guidance in selecting appropriate staff. They also provide guidance in identifying training needs and in monitoring staff effectiveness.

FEEDBACK FROM LEARNERS
The production and the delivery divisions of the college employ a number of strategies for obtaining the views of learners in regard to the quality of course materials and of the
delivery service. Every course package to a learner is sent with a questionnaire requesting the learner’s evaluation or perception of the quality of services. In addition, there are television programmes where a panel of learners articulates its views on the quality of services offered by the college.

The Research Unit of the college monitors the perceptions of the public and the college’s clientele. The operations of the unit enables the college to determine not only how well it is doing, but also how and what to plan for the future.

The Two Systems Compared

Upon comparing the two institutional models described above, it is apparent that, while both OLI and the Open College are committed to quality assurance, their approaches and methods are different. It appears the difference in approach is a result of organisational contextual peculiarities. The Open College has diverse clientele and corporate agents through which it delivers materials to learners. The existence of corporate intermediaries between the college and learners is likely to diminish the college’s ability to make autonomous decisions in order to assure quality at every point in its operations. This speculation is predicated on the possibility that the corporate intermediaries may not be under the direct control of the college and may not be as philosophically and practically committed to quality assurance.

Each of the two institutions has external and internal quality assurance components. In the case of the Open College, the roles of external individuals, groups, and organisations are not as explicitly defined as is the case at OLI. The discussion of quality assurance at the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong does not mention taking into account the views of learners or clients. The Open College, on the other hand, does identify arrangements for collecting the views of its clients and learners on the quality of the products and services it offers.

Finally, neither of the two accounts presents evidence of the benefits of the quality assurance mechanisms by comparing the institution’s operation before and after the introduction of quality assurance. Such evidence will be needed if full credibility is to be accorded to the favourable assessments of quality assurance provided in these two documents.

Implications for Distance Education Providers

Green and Harvey (1993) identify four key issues which are critical for those who are considering the development and implementation of quality assurance systems in higher education. These issues, outlined in the form of four questions, are:

- What is quality?
- Quality of what?
- Whose quality?; and
- Which methodology is appropriate? While these questions were developed for higher education, they also appear to be relevant to professionals in the field of distance education.

The question, ‘What is quality?’ has been addressed earlier in this paper; but there are additional concerns regarding this question that need to be raised. Nunan and Calvert
(1992) observe that "statements about the quality of distance education...may focus upon worthwhile achievements within the educative process itself. Value is attached to certain generic skills." (p. 38) Discussion of quality in distance education is typically a discussion about the acquisition of individual technical skills rather than the mastery of a body of knowledge. When the discussion of quality is dominated by the teaching and learning of specific skills, it provides an "impoverished view of education itself." (Lentell & Murphy, 1993, p. 147) Lentell and Murphy (1993) identify that:

The dominant paradigm in distance education is scientific technicism; the technical application of theory and knowledge to ‘producing’ and ‘delivering’ distance education. There is, therefore, a marked absence of a dialogue about the very nature of education and the values reproduced in distance education as it is defined and practised. Normative assumptions underlying why distance education is defined so narrowly are not problematised and are thereby ignored, as are wider relationships between distance education and social, economic and political interests. What ‘quality’ represents beyond these ‘objectively’ measured items or processes cannot be discussed within the terms of the scientific-technical paradigm. (p. 148-149)

While a variety of definitions of quality may exist in the literature, the above discussion identifies the need to adopt a critical perspective on the definition of quality within distance education.

With respect to the question, ‘The quality of what?’, distance education providers need to consider the range of activities and processes inherent in the provision of this mode of education. Nunan and Calvert (1992), for example, identify that “the majority of works in the literature of distance education address quality from a limited framework or with reference to a particular process or aspect.” (p. 40) The problem of focusing solely on component parts without a global perspective creates the potential for some parts of the system to be scrutinised while others may be overlooked.

The question ‘Whose quality?’ raises a critical issue about which stakeholders’ perspectives are considered in the assurance of quality. Nunan and Calvert (1992) assert that “education at a distance, because it is closely linked to government goals for mass education and, in fact, an instrument for achieving these goals, can be seen to serve the interests of the nation and the economy.” (p. 38) Many institutions cater to the needs and desires of government and other corporate stakeholders. It may be argued, however, that distance education as an educational provider should aim its quality assurance measures toward the interests of the learners. This may be difficult to achieve because of the varied nature of the learner and his or her experiences and expectations of the institution; but it should be of high priority and not neglected. Attention must also be paid to the different perspectives of quality held by various stakeholders and the potential for conflict that may result in attempts to establish a set of core criteria common to all stakeholders.

Finally, distance education providers need to think critically about their choice of methods and specific mechanisms for assuring quality. Green and Harvey (1993) assert that “it is axiomatic that stakeholders will only have confidence in the quality of Higher Education (whatever the focus of their interest) if they have confidence in the methods used to demonstrate that quality (however) defined is present.” (p. 185) They attribute failure of existing quality assurance arrangements to the fact that “the methodology is complex, potentially open to abuse and not demonstrably cost effective.” (p. 185) The nature of quality assurance implies that it is imperative that internal as well as external methods are employed such that the institution becomes a self-critical organisation in which all faculty and staff are committed to assuring the quality of all distance education processes and activities.
CONCLUSION

In this paper, the following major questions were addressed: 1) How has quality assurance been defined?; 2) What is being done about quality assurance in various countries and/or institutions?; and 3) What questions should be considered regarding the implementation of quality assurance systems?

Quality assurance, as it is defined in the literature of both higher and distance education, refers to a continuing, active and integrative process for maintaining and enhancing quality. In its ideal state, a philosophy of quality assurance would be adopted by all who are involved in the activities of the distance education institution. In addition, quality assurance mechanisms would be integrated into all facets of institutional activity.

To date, existing distance education literature tends to portray quality assurance as separate and isolated attempts to assure quality rather than integrated quality systems. Two examples of quality assurance systems in distance education have been provided to illustrate institutional developments of a more holistic nature.

Before developing and implementing quality assurance systems, it is crucial that distance education providers think critically about the concepts of quality and quality assurance; the components and individuals upon which the system will focus; and the types of methods and specific techniques appropriate for establishing an effective quality assurance system.

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QUALITY ASSURANCE IN TEACHING IN TWO AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES

Mike Lally and Marion Myhill

INTRODUCTION

This paper describes the recent focus on processes of quality assurance in higher education institutions within Australia. There have been major changes in the Australian tertiary sector since 1987 when the binary divide between the university sector and the college of advanced educator sector was abolished. One of the major changes has been the increasing tendency of the federal government to view all higher education institutions as members of the one system, and for it to insist upon greater accountability procedures in return for tagged funding allocations. In recent years, reporting procedures on quality assurance in the higher education sector have been under review by the relevant funding arm (DEET) of the federal government.

Indeed, in March 1994 the Australian Federal government announced special funding of an additional Aus$77 million to institutions on the basis of a quality audit. Individual institutions received allocations depending upon how well they fared under the quality appraisal procedure. Institutions judged to be in the top performing group (Group 1) received an additional amount equivalent to 3% of their total operating grant while institutions within Group 6 received an additional amount equivalent to 0.5% of their overall operating grant. The 1993 quality audit was based on a range of university outcomes and processes. However, the quality audit for 1994 will be based upon teaching and learning processes within higher education institutions. As a result, many institutions are currently focussing on their teaching and learning processes, with an emphasis on improving the quality of these.

A further indication of increasing efforts to improve the quality of teaching is the recent (since 1993) establishment of the Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching. This committee operates in a way similar to the Australian Research Council but provides grants of up to Aus$55,000 to develop improved methods/techniques for teaching. This committee is funded by the national Priority (Reserve) Fund and is administered by the Higher Education Division of DEET.

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This paper describes the recent history of quality assurance for teaching and learning within Australian higher education institutions, examines problems in measuring quality of teaching and learning, and provides some examples of procedures which are being implemented in two very different tertiary institutions within Australia.

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN TEACHING IN AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTIONS

Historically, the universities in Australia have always been well aware of their responsibilities in providing quality tertiary education to students because of their special circumstances as publicly-funded and state-based institutions. It has also been the case that Australian universities have been internationally focussed and comparable to the highest quality institutions in the USA and UK. One indicator of this has been the very many undergraduate students from Australian universities who have successfully continued their studies at the postgraduate level in these two countries. These factors can be seen to have provided quite powerful, though informal, means of overall evaluation of academic staff teaching performance. In these situations, the provision of quality control on university teaching has come from the appointment of staff, promotion procedures and the university ethos of self-imposed quality standards combined with their recognition of the institutions’ responsibility to their particular state populations and their international reputation.

The present focus on the quality of teaching in tertiary institutions therefore is part of more explicit and stringent accountability procedures required by government funding of institutions and a general concern to focus on excellence rather than adequacy.

In an earlier DEET trial evaluation study (DEET, 1991), a performance indicator was developed to measure teaching quality. This quality of teaching Performance Indicator was based on the development of a rating scale of student perceptions of teaching, the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ), by a research group at the University of Wollongong. (Ramsden, 1991) This questionnaire was shown to have good validity and reliability properties which would make it useful for assessment of teaching quality at the aggregate level (course, field of study or academic organisational unit (AOU)). The aim of the CEQ was the collection of ‘quantitative data which permitted ordinal ranking of AOUs at different institutions, within comparable subject areas’. It should also be noted, however, that by focusing on teaching performance at the more general, aggregate level across tertiary institutions and disciplines for institutional evaluation purposes, the study did not attempt to deal with the individual performance of academic staff.

The AVCC has also set out steps to be taken to improve the status and quality of teaching in institutions through their Draft Code of Practice for University Teaching. (1991) The steps advocated for the improvement of university teaching in this document included:

- awards for teaching excellence;
- teaching as a criterion in selection, tenure and promotion;
- procedures for the review of new and existing courses;
- means for student contributions to evaluation of teaching and curriculum; and
- a framework for institutional self-evaluation in meeting its teaching aims. (AVCC, 1991)
The Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (AVCC) has recently indicated its concern to focus on university teaching and to encourage improvements in teaching. In April 1993, for example, the AVCC circulated a document entitled *Guidelines for Effective University Teaching*. This document described university teaching as:

a creative activity designed to foster students’ learning, their ability and desire to undertake scholarly work, and their developments as a whole person. Teaching draws on professional and disciplinary expertise of staff and is continually revitalised by research, scholarship, consultancy, or professional practice. (AVCC, 1993)

**PROBLEMS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE**

The process of assessing teaching is not a simple process. The appropriateness of the teaching evaluation itself depends fundamentally upon many other factors, such as the purpose of the evaluation, academic staff members’ discipline-related and personal philosophies of teaching and concepts of good teaching, as well as the context in which the teaching and evaluation takes place. The evaluation of teaching also relates to definitions of ‘good teaching’ and teaching effectiveness, the relationship between teaching and learning and the role of students in defining and evaluating quality in university teachers and teaching.

What the earlier definition implies is a recognition of a unique and distinctive feature of university teaching. Unlike other teachers, academic staff are not only required to engage in teaching to students an already existing body of knowledge within a discipline, but are also expected to create new forms of that knowledge both in product and process. The aim of teaching then for an academic teacher is not only to produce knowledgeable students, but also to develop students as ‘critical thinkers’, to facilitate the development of the students’ own thinking processes which will enable them in turn to examine critically present knowledge and knowing and to create new knowledge and new ways of thinking.

This creates additional problems for how to go about measuring quality teaching, particularly in distinguishing between adequate teaching and excellent teaching.

**Defining good teaching**

Defining ‘good teaching’ is helpful for content validation in assessment, but there are of course problems with defining and definitions. Is ‘quality teaching’, for example, synonymous with ‘good teaching’ and is this the same as ‘effective teaching’?

These structural changes and epistemological differences must also have a major impact on assessing quality teaching as a process and student learning as a product or outcome. Anecdotal evidence, for example, suggests that there are quite different views of good teaching. One view seems to be that a good teacher is someone who assists all students to pass a particular unit/course, regardless of their entry characteristics (e.g., ability, prior learning, motivation) and hence could be assessed at the minimum level by the student pass rate. On the other hand, there is another firmly held view, particularly perhaps in the longer-established universities, that quality teaching equates with stimulating highly talented students to maximise their abilities and to produce a creative and original work. This could be held to be analogous to a ‘master class teaching’ model.
It could be argued that the majority of existing published instruments for assessing teaching quality are predicated upon the former model of teaching — that is, teaching as instruction. This is evidenced by the fact that many of these instruments have been normed on large undergraduate student samples drawn from the US liberal arts college population.

Part of the problem is definitional. The DEET report acknowledges that ‘the assessment of teaching quality is inherently a matter of judgement ...[it is] a complex pattern of behaviour [which] has no absolute standard of reference’ and concedes that there is at present no ‘consensus on the nature of good teaching expressed in clear and specific operational terms’ (DEET, 1991) especially in relation to the balance between the components, although there seems to be agreement on what the principal components are, or should be. As a consequence, measures of teaching performance are the least defined performance indicators and their development and use seems to present quite significant problems.

Research on effective teaching at the higher education level has primarily been in two areas. One focus has attempted to identify which teacher characteristics are associated with good teaching. The net result of this line of inquiry has been a list of teacher characteristics (attributes, traits and personality factors) which are used to define the ideal teacher. (Aubrecht, 1981; Dowell & Neal, 1982; Feldman, 1978; Feldman, 1989; Doyle, 1983) The second line of inquiry has focused on the relative effectiveness of the lecture method and alternative modes of instruction. (Kulik & Kulik, 1985)

Problems in evaluation using student questionnaires

An examination of the teaching performance instruments currently in use indicates a number of concerning features. The most obvious concerns relate to the following:
- all the main published tertiary teaching assessment instruments are student evaluations of academic staff performance;
- many of the instruments are of US origin, or are Australian instruments adapted from or based on US models;
- almost all of the instruments adopt a ‘discipline-free’ approach to assessing teaching performance;
- almost all of the instruments focus on the teaching performance displayed in the lecture or tutorial setting;
- few instruments, if any, recognise the range of teaching settings used in universities (e.g., clinical, field and laboratory work as well as the more usually recognised lectures and tutorials);
- few instruments, if any, recognise the importance of the level of teaching and class size on teaching performance; and
- few instruments, if any, consider the entry characteristics of students and their motivation for taking the unit/course.

It is clear that a number of issues require further examination to determine whether or not the standard instruments are valid for all aspects of teaching in Australian universities. Furthermore, there had been few attempts to examine the current reality of teaching in Australian universities, particularly from the academic staff member’s perspective. Further, teaching assessment instruments were almost exclusively student rating scales.
Few attempts had been made to approach the question from a perspective other than that of students.

Academic staff sometimes claim that the use of rating scales inadequately sample the range of issues and contexts which are considered important by themselves in their teaching situation, and that these scales are imposed on them without suitable consultation as to the most appropriate content and priorities. The collegial culture of universities in particular is such that the collaborative development (i.e., between the developers and the users — as well as the students) of teaching assessment instruments would seem necessary, not only for acceptance but also for the efficient use of such a rich source of available expertise. Collaboration and consultation become vitally important, however, when the assessment instruments are used in ways which clearly would have an influence on an academic staff member’s career path.

**Issues in the validation of assessment instruments**

The use of student questionnaires has a long history in higher education. Studies of their reliability and validity have been undertaken for more than 50 years. (McKeachie, 1979) Much more is known about this method of evaluation than any others, because of their long-standing and widespread use. However, before such questionnaires can be used, all aspects of their validity and reliability need to be carefully considered.

Current research and reviews into the evaluation of university teaching primarily focus on validating student ratings of teachers. For this purpose most of the research work aims to prove concurrent validity of student ratings by using a criterion-related approach. Other forms of validity establishment, such as content and construct validity have been less often researched.

This standard concurrent validity approach attempts to establish the validity of a student rating instrument by demonstrating a relationship between the findings of this instrument and other measures or indicators of teaching competence or effectiveness. The most common other measures or indicators have been:
- ratings by faculty colleagues;
- ratings by administrators;
- self ratings;
- alumni ratings of student achievement; and
- achievement of attitudinal and motivational goals.

Using this concurrent validity approach, the following results have been demonstrated in support of the use of student ratings of teaching:
- student ratings correlate with other measures of teaching competence, and thus have sufficient validity to warrant their use for both personnel decisions and improvement purposes; and
- global ratings by students correlate more highly with student learning than do diagnostic ratings. Therefore, global ratings have been recommended as part of a teaching portfolio in personnel decision making.

Considerable evidence supporting the credibility of students as evaluators of instruction in higher education has emerged from past research. (Ellett et al, 1991) Alemoni addressed many of the most common myths regarding student ratings and concluded that
much of the criticism aimed at student ratings is unfounded. However, he warned that
problems can arise from misinterpretation and misuse of these student ratings.
(Aleamoni, 1987)

There are four main purposes for evaluating teaching:
- to diagnose and improve the course or teaching performance;
- for personnel decisions regarding retention, promotion, tenure and salary
  adjustments;
- to help students choose courses; and
- to provide criteria for research on teaching itself.

Information about a teacher, for example, can be collected from a variety of sources
since different people are better placed to make judgements about different aspects of
teaching. The appropriate sources of information on teaching would include:
- the instructor and relevant colleagues (i.e., other faculty, administrators, deans,
  chairs, professional evaluation staff);
- current and recent students;
- alumni; and
- anyone else who has had the opportunity to observe some aspect of teaching.

Students are appropriate sources of information on teachers when they are describing or
judging the following:
- the student-instructor relationship;
- their views of the instructor’s professional and ethical behaviour;
- their workload;
- what they have learned in the course;
- the fairness of grading; and
- the instructor’s ability to communicate clearly.

The five areas in which students, because of their direct classroom contact with the
teacher, are uniquely able to answer questions are:
- pedagogical methods;
- fairness;
- the teacher’s interest in the student;
- the teacher’s interest in the subject; and
- normative teaching judgements or global ratings.

Colleagues who have the necessary expertise in the discipline of the faculty member
being evaluated are in an excellent position to judge the following:
- teacher knowledge and expertise in the major field as reflected by the course
  syllabus and the reading list;
- teacher selection of realistic course objectives;
- teacher assignments, group projects and examinations;
• teacher incorporation of research into course;
• teacher motivation (self and for students);
• teacher skills at higher degree supervision;
• student achievement as indicated by performance on exams and projects;
• contributions to instructional efforts in the department;
• thesis supervision;
• involvement in instructional research;
• student-teacher relations within the classroom; and
• the teacher's style as a scholar and as a model teacher.

Colleagues with the necessary expertise can also provide useful evaluative information in three areas:
• observations of the instructor in the classroom;
• appraisal of course materials; and
• evaluation of instructor in instructional development activities and advising.

It must be said, however, that some researchers have viewed colleague or peer ratings negatively as sources of information, regarding them as highly susceptible to prejudice and often inaccurate. (Ramsden, 1983) It has been argued that in reality academics typically have scanty and biased knowledge of their colleagues' teaching abilities and their judgements correlate poorly with other measures. One of the more rigorous reviews rejects peer review completely as input into personnel decisions about university staff. (Marsh, 1987)

**Types of student rating scales**

Not all student ratings scales are the same. There are three main forms of student rating scales, each of which has been developed with a different rationale. These three main forms are:

• the omnibus form;
• the goal-based form; and
• the cafeteria system.

The omnibus form typically includes major categories of instruction that have been identified through research (usually factor analysis). The areas commonly included are: communication skills, rapport with students, course organisation, student self-rated accomplishments, course difficulty, and grading and examinations. The same form is given to all faculty (academic staff) at an institution so that overall comparisons can be made. The form is often considered applicable for both summative and formative purposes.

The goal-based form allows students to rate their personal progress on a number of stated course goals and objectives, such as developing special skills and competencies (e.g., IDEA, Kansas State University). (Cashin, 1989)
The cafeteria system consists of a pool of items from which instructors have the opportunity to select items they consider most relevant for evaluating their course (e.g., ICES, University of Illinois). (Abrami, 1989)

Characteristics of student ratings of teaching effectiveness

In his review of the findings and research designs used to study students' evaluations of teaching effectiveness, Marsh concluded that class-average student ratings have a number of characteristics that make them appropriate for such assessment. (Marsh, 1984) Student ratings were generally found to be:

- multidimensional;
- relatively valid against a variety of indicators of effective teaching;
- reliable and stable;
- relatively unaffected by a variety of variables hypothesised as potential biases; and
- primarily a function of the instructor teaching the course rather than the course itself.

They also had the advantage of being seen to be useful by faculty as feedback about teaching, by students in course selection and by administrators for use in personnel decisions.

However, student ratings are difficult to validate because there is no single criterion of effective or good teaching. The effective teaching factors most commonly identified in student rating scales include: skill, enthusiasm, structure, rapport, workload/difficulty, and group interaction. (McKeachie, 1979) The factors measured by Marsh's Students' Evaluations of Educational Quality (SEEQ) instrument (Marsh, 1983), for example, were: Learning/Value, Instructor Enthusiasm, Organisation, Individual Rapport, Group Interaction, Breadth of Coverage, Examinations/Grading, Assignments/Reading, and Workload/Difficulty. Similar factors can be identified in other student rating instruments.

Factors influencing student ratings of teaching

Correlations between student ratings and other indicators of effective teaching rarely approach their reliability, hence there is residual variance in the ratings that may be related to potential biases (Marsh, 1984). Characteristics of students, of courses and of teachers, have in the past been thought to influence student ratings. Some factors may be valid in that students may learn more and rate teachers higher in certain situations, and other variables may be interpreted as biases. In general, most factors assumed to invalidate ratings have relatively small effects, and the factors which affect ratings also affect learning. (McKeachie, 1979)

Personality characteristics of instructors do not show consistent relationships to student ratings. Furthermore, there is no consistent relationship between student ratings and instructor rank, sex or research productivity. (Seldin, 1988)

The size of a class, whether or not it is a required class, and the subject matter, are all course/class characteristics that may affect student ratings. Required courses, for example, tend to be rated lower than electives. (McKeachie, 1979)
Four background variables were found by Marsh (1983) using the SEEQ to be the most important in relation to student ratings and accounted for almost all the explained variance:

- students' prior subject interest;
- expected grades;
- levels of workload/difficulty; and
- the percentage of students taking the course for general interest only.

More favourable student ratings were correlated with higher prior subject interest, higher expected grades, higher levels of workload/difficulty and a higher percentage of students taking the course for general interest only. Marsh (1984) concluded that prior subject interest, expected grades, and perhaps workload/difficulty are the background variables most strongly correlated with students' evaluations of teaching.

**STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE QUALITY ASSURANCE IN TEACHING**

The above material would suggest that, while the collection of student ratings is a useful exercise, the results of such ratings will not provide a complete picture of the level of quality being achieved. Therefore, it is suggested that additional measures be employed in the quest for a complete picture of quality assurance in teaching.

**Alternatives to student ratings of teaching**

*Peer or colleague evaluation*

Faculty peers are recommended as better suited or qualified to evaluate the quality, relevance and up-to-dateness of course content than students. Students are better suited to judging ability to communicate information and ideas clearly.

The most appropriate option currently, therefore, seems to be to use multiple data systems, rather than one method of data collection.

As student rating scales are so widely used, the following recommendation summarises the research literature on the effective and appropriate use of student rating scales in assessing teacher and teaching performance.

The research literature provides general information on the appropriate procedures to be followed in developing and using student rating scales. These are that:

- to obtain reliable, representative data, ratings should be collected from at least ten students and at least two thirds of the class: data based on fewer students than this should be interpreted with caution;
- the scale should control for variables other than teaching effectiveness that are correlated with student ratings, in particular student motivation, course level, academic field, and class size, as these variables are not in the control of the teacher. (Expected grade, workload/difficulty, and faculty rank have been shown to be related to student ratings, and the influence of these factors will also be investigated;
potential biases may be controlled for by using comparative and/or normative data; and

• comparative data should also be provided for all items to control for inflation of student ratings.

The remaining sections of this paper describe a study which attempted to identify the complex nature of quality teaching and then to describe some examples of innovations and policies which have been adopted by higher education institutions to improve the quality of teaching and learning which takes place. The intention is not to provide comprehensive descriptions of all procedures and innovations but to give examples of mechanism which can be implemented for the purposes of quality assurance.

CASE-STUDY

What do academic staff perceive to constitute quality teaching?

One example of an attempt to improve quality assurance is a recent study which attempted to investigate notions of what constitutes quality teaching, from the perspective of academic staff.

The University of Western Australia (UWA) is an ideal institution in which to examine the assessment of teaching quality. It is a medium-sized older university with a well-established reputation for quality teaching and research. It is a generalist university at the undergraduate level, providing courses in a wide and comprehensive range of discipline areas. As well as the more traditional arts and science courses, there is strong undergraduate student enrolment in areas such as economics and commerce. UWA also has many professionally oriented undergraduate courses, such as medicine, dentistry, law, education, architecture, social work, psychology and music.

The undergraduate student population is largely drawn from Western Australia, but also includes an increasing number of overseas and interstate students. It remains the institution of first choice for the majority of TEE school leavers in WA. There have been strong equity initiatives in recent years in attempts to increase the heterogeneity of the undergraduate student population (e.g., in terms of SES and ethnicity), as well as attempts to increase the number of girls entering non-traditional areas (e.g., engineering, maths and science).

UWA has a large postgraduate student population in relation to the other universities in WA. Students are spread widely over the university departments, although there are also a number of prominent scholars and areas of research specialisation which attract postgraduate students both local and overseas.

In this study interviews were conducted with academic staff informants who could give a comprehensive and knowledgeable view of teaching across the university. The intention was to sample opinions widely across the campus for the purpose of validity and reliability establishment.

• Are there commonly and consistently held views of ‘good teachers’ and ‘good teaching’ that are similar regardless of discipline area and,

• is there some degree of specificity of description of teaching/teacher behaviours or characteristics.
Methodologically, the aim was to allow interviewees to respond spontaneously to more
general open-ended questions and to 'speak with their own voices', rather than to
respond in the first instance to questionnaire items, which might unnecessarily bias their
responses in the direction of previous research findings. That academic staff generally
are well able to articulate their 'teaching philosophies' has already been clearly shown by
Dunkin. (1991)

From the research literature and from the contents of the existing student rating forms, an
assumption was made that all university departments would be fairly similar in terms of
their modes and styles of teaching, at least at the undergraduate level. It became
immediately apparent, however, that this was not so. For example, when divisional heads
were asked to name 'typical' departments in their divisions, and they found this to be a
very difficult, if not impossible task. The 'typical department' was a fiction, a
generalised prototype of which all departments shared features, but no department
matched exactly. Most heads of division, for example, indicated immediately that each of
their departments varied from the others in significant ways: size, teaching methods, staff
profiles, student population, links to other departments and self-perception.

What constitutes “teaching” in the University?

From the interview data, it became obvious that there were a number of general points
that could be made about teaching in the university:

- there were quite marked differences in precisely what the term ‘teaching’ meant
  operationally in the various departments;

This variation seemed to be determined by the nature of the discipline area, the norms
established by that discipline area for what were the aims of teaching and the appropriate
teaching methods to achieve those aims, and the composition of staff. These factors
interacted to determine what was taught, how it was considered to be best taught and
what were the desired outcome in terms of student learning and performance. For
example, in some departments 'teaching' referred predominantly to information
transmission when first year students were considered, but increasingly came to mean
the generation of creative thinking when second and third year students were considered.

The aims of teaching also varied. In many departments, the emphasis was almost entirely
on developing thinking and communication skills in students (e.g., to be able to argue a
legal case on the basis of appropriate evidence; to write clearly, coherently, logically and
critically as displayed in a good essay, etc.). In other departments, however, there was an
additional requirement that students reach a necessary level of physical, technical or
professional mastery of skills for the practice of the discipline (e.g., competence to
perform surgical procedures, to give psychological tests, to play a musical instrument, to
conduct archaeological digs or geological surveys, to handle native animals in the field,
etc.). These different aims led directly to differences in aims, styles and modes of
teaching.

- there were differences in the degree to which there was a 'core curriculum' in
departments which guided what should be taught;

For example, there was high consensus in many arts and humanities departments that
there was no 'core curriculum' for that discipline area and hence staff were free to teach
their own areas of expertise within the framework of an overall agreed upon
departmental pattern of units. In contrast were many of the science departments where
there was a clear view that there was a core curriculum, particularly for first year which also contained a developmental notion of work which was graded in difficulty or which had necessary informational or skill prerequisites from first to third year. Staff therefore were not free to teach just their individual areas of expertise, but were expected to contribute to generalist teaching, particularly at the first year level.

- there were differences in the degree to which there was commonality and consensus in departments as to how the teaching should be conducted;

In some departments there was obviously high consensus as to the appropriate methods of teaching, while in other departments there seemed to be considerable differences of opinion. The range of opinions seemed to depend on the size of the department and/or the homogeneity in discipline backgrounds of members of the academic staff and where they had gained their qualifications and previous teaching experience — as well as how clearly articulated and/or prescribed was the curriculum.

- 'teaching' took place in a wide range of contexts;

These teaching contexts ranged from the standard arts lecture-plus-tutorial undergraduate model to the science departments where teaching took place in many different places and circumstances (e.g., in laboratories or in the field) or to the medical departments where teaching is more likely to be a type of 'modelling' in the real world setting (e.g., in clinics and on hospital rounds) than lecturing in a lecture theatre.

- 'teaching' can cover a wide range of aims — many, if not all, of which seem to be involved at any one time;

The aims of teaching indicated were: information transmission, enthusiasm generation, making students think, showing students how to do something, and developing students holistically so that not only intellectual skills, but also personal, social and professional skills were developed. Departments varied, however, in the prominence they gave to any one aim in relation to the others and this depended to some extent on the discipline area, the aims of the course and the career destinations of the students. Developing personal, social and professional skills in students, for example, was obviously a more clearly articulated and dominant aim in teaching in those discipline areas where the students are clearly going on to practise professionally (e.g., medicine, dentistry, (clinical) psychology, social work), than in areas where there is no necessary practitioner orientation (e.g., politics, history).

- the range of teaching situations and contexts in which teachers can be seen by students varies from department to department;

Some staff teach students in a relatively limited range of situations only (e.g., solely in lectures and tutorials), while others teach in a much wider range of situations (e.g., in laboratory classes, the field or in vivo clinical settings, as well as lectures and tutorials). Similarly teachers varied in the contexts in which they taught. Some teach only in the context of the lecture theatre and tutorial room on the campus, while at the other extreme, some academic staff spent a considerable amount of their time off campus in settings other than the lecture theatre, such as geological, botanical, zoological and other field sites, and some are rarely on campus at all (e.g., those based in hospitals and clinics).

These differences lead to considerable variation across departments in the nature and range of the demands made on academic staff members in their teaching role. These various demands, it should be emphasised, were considered to be the 'norm' in each department and were not at all regarded as unreasonable by the academic staff involved — they merely reflected the way that they believed their discipline considered it.
necessary to teach students and staff undertook the duties clearly by agreement. Hence staff in many science departments organise and supervise students on field trips, in addition to their giving lectures and tutorials, and this requires them to live and work with students (sometimes in fairly basic conditions) for quite long periods.

- staff considered that student motivations for unit selection were important in teaching;

Student interest and performance levels were considered to vary depending on the reasons for student selection; if the unit was for personal interest and/or career preferences; if it was a required/service unit (e.g., Chemistry 100, Economics 100, Mathematics 100, Psychology 100); or if it was an interesting but terminal unit (as in the case of some first year units) chosen to make up the required number of units at a particular level.

- the recognition of the special factors involved in their particular teaching context was considered very important by staff when their teaching performance was assessed;

Staff considered that there were significant differences in teaching across departments and discipline areas and even across units in the same department. For example, staff recognised that important differences in teaching arose from the different aims of teaching and expected student outcomes in the various departments, with the distinction most often being drawn between the professional departments (e.g., the medical departments) and the non-professional departments (e.g., the arts departments).

Similarly, many staff made a clear distinction between teaching service and non-service units. In the departments involved with teaching service units, it was clearly the view that teaching a service unit, was very different from teaching other units in the department. The service units (e.g., Economics 100, Mathematics 100, Psychology 100) were usually characterised by very large student numbers (from 200 to 500+), a heterogeneous student population and mixed student motivations (e.g., many students were unlikely to pursue the subject beyond first year through personal interest or ability and/or they were enrolled in courses outside the department and were only taking the unit because they were required to do so). The service units were also at the first year level, which in itself gave them special characteristics.

Teachers of these service units were therefore seen to require different and special teaching skills from those teaching the second and third year units with their smaller, more homogeneous, highly motivated and self-selected student populations.

- departments varied considerably in the number of part-time and adjunct staff they used for teaching.

In many of the professional departments, for example, a large number of non-academic but professionally practising staff was employed for tutorials or specialist teaching (e.g., accountancy, law) and in others (e.g., the science departments) postgraduate students were often employed for laboratory and tutorial work. In the medical departments, the teaching of students in their clinical years was quite routinely undertaken by doctors in the teaching hospitals (e.g., specialist consultants), although they were not actually members of the university medical school staff.

In some departments the ‘outside’ part-time staff from the city firms provided the professional models for students (e.g., workplace and social behaviour, dress, etc.) and effectively socialised them into the profession.
What is good teaching?

An attempt was made to separate the input characteristics of the 'good teacher' from the process characteristics of 'good teaching'. Five main or general themes, however, emerged from the respondents' descriptions of good teaching:

- good teaching makes students think;

Most staff cited this as not only the first criterion of a good teacher in the university context, but also the main aim of all tertiary teaching: Inculcating the ability and the desire in students to think independently was universally held to be the quintessential aim of all teaching staff. It was also mentioned as the main area where they would be differences of opinion between staff and students as to the value of this aim and the recognition of 'good teaching'. Many felt that first year students, for example, particularly in the large service units, valued information transmission more highly and emphasised the importance of organisational and presentation skills to a greater degree than staff, who held this higher-order cognitive aim.

- information is presented to students in a well-prepared and well-organised way;

A hallmark of good teaching for all respondents was good presentation. This involved good organisational skills in preparing the information/content for students.

- good teaching is a totality of organisational skills and personal characteristics that provide a synergistic combination;

- good teaching is influenced by such factors as the year level and class size; and

Many respondents stated that they thought teaching first year undergraduate students and courses was the most demanding teaching in their area to do well. Lecturing to first year classes in particular was seen to require special or heightened skills, especially in departments with very large first year classes. The distinction between teaching first year and other years (and particularly 3rd and 4th year classes) was often quite marked and was based on the two distinctive features of much first year teaching on the campus: large lecture classes (200+ students) and the generalist nature of the content, which meant that staff were often teaching content outside their areas of specialist expertise.

- good teaching takes place in a variety of different contexts (e.g., lecture theatres, tutorial rooms, laboratories, clinics, hospital wards, field trips).

An important point emphasised by many respondents was that, despite the predominance of the lecture mode in much of the policy and research discussion on university teaching and its place as the focus of most of the teaching assessment and student evaluation forms, teaching in many departments was much more likely to take place outside the lecture theatre.

Large lecture class size

Of particular interest is what constitutes good teaching in classes of differing sizes: large classes need the same general teaching skills as other lecturing situations, but to a greater degree and/or in a more skilled way. One academic staff member provided the following clear and comprehensive list of essential skills that the first year/large class lecturer needs for successful teaching:

- class control skills;

...keep them quiet either through entertainment or reason.
- knowledge of subject and presentation;
  
  The presentation of the course content is basic ... almost all staff could teach it ...it is more about generating an interest, presenting things in way students understand an find interesting, ...motivating them to take keen interest in learning.

- performance;
  
  (some people like to) perform in front of large groups ... in the large first year lecture you give your lecture and leave...some people request them, some don't like large classes...

- well prepared;
  
  There is so much more material to cover than one could possibly .. you have to think beforehand what you are going to cover in the lecture to get as much covered as you can. You can't do a good job if you wait till you're in the lecture to decide ... must have examples and lecture notes prepared.

- theatrical ability.
  
  ...it is not acting but more entertaining ... if you modulate your voice — it's not a monotone ...don't know whether students learn any more but they might pay more attention and then you hope they may learn more. It's the style of delivery ...there is so much material that students need that you have to present it well. You don't consciously look for theatrical skills for the large lecture, you look for good organisation.

Place of student assessment

Most staff were thought to be well disposed towards student assessment of their teaching. However, it was also expressed often that student assessment should be only one of the forms of assessment used for the reasons expressed by these informants: the range of students in classes, individual differences in student lecturing style preferences, and limitations on the students' abilities to perceive accurately what they need to know.

It is for these reasons that institutions are now examining a range of mechanisms for ensuring quality assurance. Examples of some of these are provided in the next section.

Examples of mechanisms for ensuring quality assurance

Two institutions are used to describe examples of quality assurance for learning. The two institutions were chosen on the basis of there being very different types of institutions. One, the University of Western Australia (UWA), was ranked in the top group during the recent quality audit, while the other, the University of South Australia (USA), was in group five (six groups were used and the quality audit examined all functions of university activity — teaching, research output and success at competitive grant schemes, and administration). UWA is a pre-1987 university, has a long tradition of research and teaching, and has a small student population (10,000) based on a single campus. USA is a post-1987 university and was formed by an amalgamation of an Institute of Technology and College of Advanced Education. It has a very recent history of research activity and has a student population of 23,000 spread over five campuses. This university is also involved in external education. Recent research initiatives have a focus on the application of knowledge and the development of close links to industry. As a
former college sector institution, it has a longer and perhaps stronger emphasis on quality teaching than the pre-1987 university sector institutions.

UWA has recently placed importance on individual staff members' commitment to teaching quality. The university's historical commitment to high quality research has meant that, until six years ago, academic staff could be appointed and promoted on the merit of their research alone, even though they were also expected to be involved in teaching. More recently, however, staff being considered for appointment and/or promotion have needed to demonstrate commitment to quality teaching.

For promotion purposes, this requires the preparation and submission of a teaching portfolio as part of their promotion application. These teaching portfolios need to describe applicants' views on teaching and to outline their development of teaching innovations. Typically, such innovations would be based on applicants' reflections on their own practice. Such reflection would be assisted by feedback on their teaching which might come from a number of sources, including students, their academic peers and perhaps their Head of Department. To assist in this process, an independent group for seeking feedback from students using rating forms is provided by the University Centre for Staff Development. Academic staff have been shown over the last few years to be making increased use of student evaluations and particularly the service which offers the Student Perceptions of Teaching item banking system. These portfolios are expected to document such reflectibe teaching practice over an extended number of years.

For staff who are applying for academic positions in the university, one of the essential criteria to be assessed by selection panels is concerned with demonstrated commitment to quality of teaching. Such panels are now chaired by the Dean of the Faculty, a person who is external to the academic department concerned.

To assist further in enhancing quality teaching, UWA has established an institution-wide 'Teaching and Learning Committee', a committee which matches the long standing institution wide 'Research Committee'. Plans now exist to establish a Centre for Teaching and Learning, and to provide further support for teachers of excellence. Such support might take the form of monetary grants or research assistance.

USA has a well established 'Centre for University Teaching and Learning'. This centre provides a range of services including:

- provision of professional development activities for academic staff in order to support and enhance the processes of learning and teaching;
- work with students in ways which enhance successful learning and which recognise the diversity of the student population;
- foster and conduct research into learning and teaching in higher education
- identify and analyse social, political, economic and technological changes that will impact on teaching and learning, and contribute to the shape of the university's responses to these;
- contribute to the development, analysis, monitoring and review of policy especially as it impacts on students and staff and the processes of teaching and learning.

Currently, the university has commissioned a major study into future learning environments and is in the process of planning a major paradigm shift from teacher-centred learning to student-centred learning. The basic philosophy of teaching and
learning is under active discussion, partly brought about by economic pressures but also as part of the evolution of teaching processes which is occurring at this institution.

In its corporate planning, USA is placing further emphasis on academic staff development for enhancing changing patterns of education delivery, resource based learning approaches and the use of new teaching technologies. There is also a very active professional development service provided by the Distance Education Centre to support staff who wish to pursue modularisation of courses for off-campus delivery.

CONCLUSIONS

The material discussed above indicates that there is no simple solution to quality assurance in teaching in higher education. One of the current dangers is the temptation for administrators and politicians to view the use of student rating forms as a simple quantitative method for evaluating teaching quality. However, the use of such forms, while adding a valuable element, does not provide a full picture of the teaching process. There are other mechanisms which are necessary to ensure the continual improvement in quality of teaching within the higher education sector. These other mechanisms are also vital components to the process of ensuring quality of teaching, both at system and individual levels.

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QUALITY ASSURANCE IN DISTANCE EDUCATION
AT DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

Louise Moran

INTRODUCTION

The term ‘quality assurance’ has only recently become part of the everyday language of Australian universities, but the concept of quality and goals of excellence have always been integral, if understated components of university life. In order to survive and prosper, a university must demonstrate the quality of its teaching, research, staff, and students. Quality, and the measures by which it is assessed, are fundamental to a university’s legitimacy and prestige.

In Australia, the search for prestige through continuing improvements in quality is distinctively evident in distance education. The history of this form of teaching/learning over the last 25 years reveals a notable shift in reputation and position within the subtle hierarchies of higher education, and in the support offered by governments and employers. Where most of the institutions teaching at a distance once marginalised their ‘external studies’ operations, the major players are now bringing ‘distance education’ or ‘open learning’ into the mainstream of their teaching activities. Other, campus-based institutions are adopting distance teaching strategies and values for use in their on campus programmes — though not necessarily recognising their origin. The federal government, which is the primary funding source for Australian higher education, has generated a major shift in public support for distance education in the context of massive changes in the organisation and operations of the university and vocational education systems. Perceptions of the quality of distance teaching have been important to this process.

This chapter explores Deakin University’s experience as a way of understanding the contemporary prominence of ‘quality assurance’ and its consequences for a leading Australian distance teaching university. I briefly outline recent changes in the Australian higher education system and in Deakin University itself, and then describe the National Quality Review process. This forms a backdrop to analysing the university’s response to the National Quality Review process in 1993, and the far-reaching policies and activities now being put into place to assure the university's quality in all aspects of its teaching, research, community activities and administration.

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CHANGES IN AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The 1990s focus on quality in Australian universities is an outcome of radical changes in the structure, size and pedagogies of higher education which have been vigorously pursued by government since the late 1980s. These changes are, in turn, part of broader shifts engineered by the Australian government in the economy and welfare systems, and aimed at making Australia more competitive in a global economy. In particular there has been an enthusiastic embrace by leading politicians, especially in the education and employment portfolios, of the potential of the new communications technologies to transform work and social life, and to contribute to Australia’s place in the international economy. Although this enthusiasm is sometimes naive, it has played an important part in fostering reconsideration by the universities of their teaching and communications strategies. Higher education and, notably, distance education have become a direct tool of economic and social policy as governments of both the left and right have closely linked the knowledge and skills of Australian workers to national prosperity and prospects. This linkage, while not new, has become more overt in the last five years, and closely reflects efforts to recover from a deep recession. School completion rates have improved remarkably, and school leavers are being encouraged into further education at unprecedented rates. (Finn, 1991) Unemployment levels remain unacceptably high, and long term unemployment is an intractable problem. Education is not a panacea for these ills, but governments have given it a prominent position in labour market and economic recovery policies.

Major restructuring of industrial awards, coupled with greater emphasis on communications and other technologies, and a strong export market drive, are significantly changing the nature of work. Lifelong education is no longer an ideal but a necessity, where workers and professionals must expect to return to formal education at intervals to renew and upgrade their knowledge. Distance education — or ‘open learning’ or ‘flexible learning’ as it is increasingly being called in Australia — is an obvious solution to the problem of enabling people to study while continuing to work and conduct their social lives. The rhetoric makes it sound easy; the reality, of course, is more problematic.

The restructuring of Australian higher education was formally signalled by a White Paper (Dawkins, 1988) which abolished the by then anachronistic binary system of universities and colleges of advanced education, replacing it with a Unified National System of fewer and larger institutions. Mergers halved the number of institutions from 72 to 37 and re-created several universities with multiple, geographically dispersed campuses — Deakin University among them. Significant changes were made to funding arrangements, which are now based on institutional profiles negotiated periodically with the government, and calculated according to set funding formulae. Nearly 75,000 additional student places were created between 1988-1993 but, with a remarkable increase also occurring in school retention rates, a large shortfall emerged between supply and demand. This shortfall has been compounded by the pressure for upgrading and diversification of the knowledge and skills of the existing workforce as the economy continues to be repositioned.

Rationalisation of distance education provision was an important goal of the restructuring policy. The government designated eight Distance Education Centres (DECs), based for the most part on existing major providers (all of whom teach both on and off campus), and attempted to establish a system where other universities wishing to offer a specialist course at a distance did so in collaboration with a DEC. On the whole, this did not work, partly because the funding arrangements were clumsy and ineffective. More importantly, perhaps, the new communications technologies, and the pedagogies
accompanying them, are being increasingly coopted by traditional classroom-dominated universities. Distance education is no longer the sole preserve of specialists. The DEC system faded out in 1993. As distance teaching technologies and strategies move into the mainstream, the major distance teaching universities are increasingly competing with other universities for students, funds and prestige. At the same time, the government has created an Open Learning Agency (see King, 1992) to encourage collaborative efforts to meet the demand and achieve new economies of scale not possible for any one university.

THE EFFECTS OF RESTRUCTURING ON DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

The changes in higher education have radically altered the existence, structures, courses and pedagogies of Deakin University. Located in the state of Victoria, in the southeastern quarter of Australia, Deakin began teaching at a distance in 1978. Like its Australian peers, the university was dual mode — that is, teaching both on and off campus. By the mid 1980s it had established a national and international reputation for the quality of its self-instructional course materials, teaching and student support. The values and expectations underpinning ‘quality’ were, in those days, not always clearly articulated, but ‘you knew it when you saw it’.

In the early 1990s, the original Deakin (based at Geelong) merged with two colleges of advanced education, one of which (based at Warrnambool in Victoria’s south west) had also been teaching at a distance for many years. The new Deakin is now the largest Australian provider of higher and continuing education at a distance. In 1994, with an academic staff complement of over 2,000, the university enrolled approximately 24,000 students in undergraduate and postgraduate courses (of whom almost 9,000 were distance students), and over 20,000 distance enrolments in continuing professional education programmes. Over half the distance students live in other Australian states, and a growing number are overseas. The university now operates on three metropolitan campuses in Melbourne, and two regional campuses, in Geelong and Warrnambool.

The amalgamations offered the opportunity for major restructuring of courses and academic structures. An integrated cross campus model was chosen in preference to a federated campus model, and the university now has five academic faculties — Arts, Education, Management, Behavioural and Health Sciences, and Science and Technology — each of which operates across several campuses. The administration and academic support services also function across campuses. They, like the faculties, have been significantly reorganised to create new unified systems and processes. In 1992-93 a radical process was undertaken to rationalise the courses of the three institutions and create a coherent new curriculum catering to students on, off and across campus. All this effort has been undertaken in a climate where ‘quality assurance’ has become a watchword. Deakin’s internal changes and the external ‘quality’ agenda are intimately linked.

The distance education infrastructure continues to be integrated into the mainstream of Deakin structures and systems. Responsibility for course development and teaching rests with the faculties. Academic, professional and technical support for course development, production and teaching has been consolidated into a new Course Development Centre which services the faculties. The inter-relationships of the faculties and administrative and academic support groups concerned with teaching is symbolised by the Deakin Course Development Network which is co-ordinated from the University Executive. Thus distance education — or the new forms which Deakin is evolving — is fully
integrated into the mainstream and is a vital part of the university’s identity and purpose. This contrasts with other Australian distance education departments which have typically been structured as separate entities and which have sometimes been marginalised in university planning and decision-making.

THE NATIONAL REVIEW OF QUALITY

In the late 1980s, the Australian government claimed that its restructuring of higher education was intended to increase effectiveness and efficiency in the system. In a period of severe recession, and dominated by ideologies of economic and political rationalism, the government has demanded greater productivity and cost effectiveness — that is ‘more scholar for the dollar’. While the institutions themselves accepted the changes (or more accurately, the idea of change) with a surprising degree of enthusiasm, they were not unproblematic. Not all amalgamations were amicable and none was easy to implement. Funding increased in absolute terms but sharply declined relative to the growth in numbers of students and courses. Workloads have greatly increased, as have class sizes. A greater diversity in the learning backgrounds and styles of students is causing many academics to question the efficacy of traditional teaching strategies. Funds for maintenance of buildings have declined, while the pressure for teaching space has grown dramatically. Changes in the methods of funding research have been particularly contentious.

By 1991 the government acknowledged the seriousness of universities’ concerns that the rapid expansion of the system had caused a deterioration in the quality of higher education. It also acknowledged a widespread criticism that government policies and control mechanisms were devaluing the intellectual traditions and cultural role of universities in favour of a narrow economic rationalism. (Baldwin, 1991, p.12) Late in 1992, a Committee on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (CQAHE) was created by the Minister for Employment, Education and Training to undertake quality audits of each university and advise the government on the annual allocation from 1994 of approximately $76 million in recognition of effective quality assurance practices and outcomes. Under its terms of reference, universities were “invited to participate in a regular review and audit of their mechanism for monitoring and improving the quality of their outcomes”. No one declined the invitation, though some baulked at its implications. The prospect of additional funds, coupled with concerns about the political consequences of ignoring the process, won the day.

The committee itself comprised nine members — six of them senior university officers, a senior government bureaucrat, and two people with a commercial background in quality control. Three of the academics, including the chair, had had some involvement in distance teaching in Australia or Canada, but this did not necessarily ensure that they would be sympathetic to unconventional pedagogies and institutional structures.

The ensuing National Quality Review process has owed much to the model established by the British Higher Education Quality Council. (Wilson, 1993) Universities prepared portfolios summarising their quality assurance procedures and performance assessments. The committee visited all universities before preparing its recommendations to the government early in 1994. The exercise has forced universities to examine themselves in new, foreign and often uncomfortable ways, and has been highly charged politically.

One reason for the political atmosphere has been the perennial problem of defining ‘quality’, a concept many educators consider elusive and subjective. The government has assumed an essentially quantitative model, which is drawn directly from industry. This is
unsurprising given government’s economic fundamentalism but as Stewart points out in the UK context, universities are service industries not manufacturing industries. Service industries deal with intangibles, and with creating positive experiences for individual clients. (Stewart, 1993, p.146.) Moreover, as Nunan and Calvert point out (1992, p.7):

"The term quality defies any definition which will be universally accepted. When it is linked to performance, quality implies evaluation for comparative purposes; ‘measures’ of quality involve norms and standards and judgements of quality are assisted through use of norm or criterion referenced indicators. Where measurement focuses on the student as a product of education, quality is seen as ‘value added’ by the process of education. When the emphasis is management of quality, attention focuses on strategies for achieving or improving quality.

Quality also implies a combined judgement of ‘how well’ and ‘how worthwhile’. In this context it must be asked who makes the judgements, on what basis, for whom and in whose interests. Judgements about quality are closely tied to the aims and interests of particular constituencies; they are owned by stakeholders.

However, the evidence suggests that the Australian government views ‘quality’ primarily as value for money, evidenced by performance indicators such as number of graduates and maximum completions (both of which are problematic in distance education where many students complete only the units they wish and need to do, and then appear to ‘drop out’). The sheer volume of material through which the CQAHE had to work has also meant that universities have had to pare down and over-simplify descriptions of very complex activities and goals. Quantitative statements of targets and outcomes are the easiest way to do this, even though they may be only a minor part of the picture.

What constitutes quality is thus contested, and concerns were voiced in 1993 that those assessing quality would not recognise, or would reject claims to quality which rested on different approaches to education — that is, that conservative or conventional paradigms would prevail. For example, long-standing scepticism about the efficacy of distance education might inhibit a realistic assessment of such programmes. That fear appears to have been realised in general terms, though not, fortunately, for Deakin. The 1993 quality rankings generally approximated the ‘pecking order’ of universities according to national award of research funds — i.e., favouring the older, classically organised, traditionally prestigious institutions. Few of the major distance education providers fall into this category. This contrasts with other ways of comparing institutions, such as assessment according to teaching outcomes. In this area, in surveys by the Australian Graduate Careers Council, and popular semi-commercial studies, the leaders are clearly the distance teaching universities and those espousing innovative teaching/learning strategies.

The most contentious issue, however, has been the public ranking of universities with all that that implies for each university’s reputation to attract students and research funds, and for its overall legitimacy and status. Although the committee’s terms of reference acknowledged that responsibility for defining and assessing quality lies with each university, whose approach will be unique to its mission and style, the concept of a quality audit is basically a comparative, competitive one.

The committee’s recommendations dealt with universities overall — that is, comparisons were not drawn between particular courses, or modes of teaching. The 37 universities were placed in six categories, with the top 18 in categories 1-4. The Quality funds which each received were defined as a percentage of its operating grants, so that the actual
amounts were also directly tied to pre-existing resource indicators of rank or status. Of the former DECs, only Deakin and Monash Universities were placed in the top 18. In Deakin’s case, the quality of its distance education was a noted factor, but the committee did not single out distance education as an issue *per se*. The committee has not (yet) addressed the question of common performance indicators and quality assurance processes for distance education, but has signalled its intention to concentrate on quality in teaching/learning in the 1994 round. Deakin is now pursuing this issue very closely, and is seeking to measure itself against best practice in the international arena.

**DEAKIN’S APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE IN DISTANCE EDUCATION**

**Learning/Teaching at Deakin**

The university’s teaching mission is “to offer innovative, flexible, high quality courses that are informed by current scholarship, research and professional practice to all of its students, whether studying on campus, in their workplace, or at home”. Deakin aims to foster the lifelong education of the professional workforce, both in Australia and overseas, and has a strong, long-standing commitment from all its antecedent institutions to improving educational access.

In 1994 the university is at an historical moment of transformation where none of its previous learning/teaching approaches satisfactorily meets the needs of its new environment. The philosophy and policy outlined below is still being formed, but the university is committed to a view of education as “a dialogic process including interactions among teachers, learners, and the knowledge content in a complex and changing milieu.” (Deakin University, 1994) Pedagogies will vary according to this mixture, drawing on and extending best practice from traditional on and off campus teaching strategies, supported by new communications technologies.

Deakin terms this new approach ‘flexible open campus learning’, meaning an approach to education in which the interactions between teacher and learner, and the place, time, modes and pace of study are determined as flexible responses to particular and distinctive mixtures of the circumstances of the teacher and learner, the subject matter, and the learning milieu. This contrasts with the now classic definition of distance education as a form in which the teacher and learner are largely separated in time and/or space, and interact through a variety of media.

The university believes that its continuing commitments to access and equity, learner independence, and professional relevance demand a flexible, highly responsive and interactive approach to curriculum design and modes of teaching. This approach visualises an ‘open campus’ based not on constraints of space and time, but on the critical relationships between teachers and learners which underpin the educational process. The advent of mass higher education, in which many students do not conform to traditional assumptions about ability or learning aims, demands that Deakin apply its expertise with non-traditional learners to the broader canvas of *all* its students and give them a real range of choices in the mode, time, location and pacing of their study. In effect, the university is moving into a third stage of distance education, in which distance and classroom pedagogies are viewed as a continuum, and learning may become more of an individual than a group process. (see Nipper, 1989; also Bates 1991; Moran 1993) As a result, Deakin’s approach to quality assurance is to develop a range of control mechanisms and assurance processes which cater equally for all its media and modes of teaching/learning. At the same time, because Deakin has a distinctive and strong claim to
leadership in distance education, it is necessary to single out Deakin’s approach to quality control and improvement in distance education per se, in the National Quality Review and elsewhere.

In 1993, therefore, when the university prepared its first portfolio on quality in teaching, research and community service, it had first to answer the question of ‘what is quality in distance education’, then to measure Deakin’s performance against the standards and criteria distinctive to distance education. One aid in this process was a national study on Quality and Standards in Distance Education (Nunan and Calvert, 1992), which set out possible performance measures from the viewpoint of various stakeholders. Another was to consider Deakin’s performance against the framework of international standards and values.

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

Distance education and open learning, as practised world-wide in the 1990s, are a far cry from that of a mere twenty-five years ago. Then, ‘correspondence study’ was typically a study mode of last resort, in which poorly designed and produced print materials were common, and interaction between teacher and learner was limited. Since the late 1960s, a revolution has occurred in almost all aspects of teaching at a distance; student numbers have burgeoned; and distance education/open learning has become a significant mechanism for the achievement of mass post-secondary education and training. In the process, norms and standards have been established in the international field, against which distance teaching institutions can measure the quality of their own programmes.

In its 1993 portfolio, the university argued that it has striven for leadership in distance education in Australia and overseas to considerable effect. The international values, processes and structures associated with a modern distance education operation have shaped the university’s approaches to curriculum development, delivery, support strategies, and financial and administrative systems, and have underpinned the university’s standards and quality assurance mechanisms. In turn, Deakin has contributed to the development of international standards and understandings about quality in the practice and theory of distance education, particularly from the perspective of a dual mode institution. However, despite the copious literature on distance education theory and practice, the international benchmarks for quality in distance education are only beginning to be openly debated. In the meantime, the university defined them to include:

- Commitments to improving educational access and equity through lifelong education — measured variously through openness of admissions and credit transfer arrangements; success in reaching socially, economically and geographically disadvantaged citizens; services to support new and isolated learners during their study; and mechanisms for return to study at later stages.

- A student-centred approach to teaching/learning which encourages learner independence through instructional design techniques embedded in course materials, and interactive teaching strategies. Outcomes can be assessed through student feedback, responses of employers, and scrutiny of the openly-available learning materials.

- Preparation and manufacture of course packages which are open to peer and public scrutiny in relation to their educational effectiveness, intellectual rigour, and production values. Quality here is ensured not least by the incorporation of instructional design principles into course packages and teaching strategies, and
through the partnership of academics and professional educational and communications technologists in design and delivery of courses.

- Commitment to maximising interactions between teacher and learner, and among learners, through use of a range of communications media. Best practice is widely considered to involve the judicious mixture of media to cater for different learning styles and environments. Choice of media, and methods for their integration, form an important part of quality assurance.

- Implementation of organisational structures, management processes, and financial and administrative systems geared to the different rhythms and imperatives of course development and distance delivery, and needs of non-traditional cohorts of students. Quality can be assessed in terms of managerial effectiveness, responsiveness and flexibility, and through cost benefit analyses.

- Incorporation of evaluation into all aspects of the distance education programme (though this standard has not been universally or rigorously implemented). The better distance teaching universities are marked by their research and development activities, and their attention to emerging communications technologies and pedagogical innovations.

- A willingness to collaborate with other institutions in order to expand access, strengthen individual courses and areas of expertise, and enhance the quality of programmes to mutual benefit. Success in this area does not come easily.

Taken individually, such benchmarks and values are not unique to distance education. Collectively, they contribute importantly to what makes distance education distinctive. The outcomes can be evaluated not only through conventional measures such as retention and success rates, but also through peer scrutiny of publicly available course packages, and responses of students, employers and funding agencies in terms of educational effectiveness.

Having set this international base, Deakin then asserted its contributions to these standards and values in the past, and its current areas of strength including:

- the comprehensive levels and variety of its courses, and especially the emphasis on professional preparation and continuing study in postgraduate and non-award programmes.

- the depth and breadth of academic expertise in designing and teaching courses at a distance.

- professional staff expertise in instructional design, materials production, communications technologies, library services, and student support;

- the high quality of its printed, audio-visual and computer-based materials, and the innovativeness of its teaching strategies and use of communications technologies;

- the sophisticated, integrated networks of systems, structures, facilities and management processes which are geared to supporting course development and delivery;

- graduate courses in the field of distance education, instructional design, and educational technology;

- research and publications on pedagogical, policy and theoretical issues in distance education; and
the many strategic partnerships and collaborative ventures with educational, communications, and other organisations in Australia and overseas.

This approach was insufficient by itself. The National Review required universities to demonstrate not only that they were doing a good job, but also that they were exceeding their benchmarks. (Wilson, 1993) Deakin thus pointed also to a range of leading edge innovations in the context of its move to a new flexible open campus learning environment. These include the design of alternative forms of entry to study; Deakin’s integrated organisational model and planning processes; sophisticated approaches to computer-based teaching and computer-mediated communications; its ‘high tech’ teleconferencing facilities and academic and technical support; the research and development agenda on learning/teaching issues; Deakin’s extensive range of partnerships with other educational providers, professional associations, and industry; and its remarkably successful entrepreneurial arm, Deakin Australia (which uses distance education methods to provide professional continuing education and in-house education and training programme for corporate clients).

The portfolio included not only such assertions about university-wide claims to quality, but also case studies and statements from key areas involved in distance education. Predictably, given the profound changes engendered by the amalgamations, uncertainties about how to define and measure quality, and speed of preparation, some of the portfolio was not tightly substantiated. This was a problem which most other universities also encountered in the first round and has reinforced the demand for comprehensive and illuminating management information systems. Some aspects of distance education provision were easier to report on than others. Three are described briefly here.

In the learning/teaching domain, the university set out a ‘map’ of current and planned quality assurance processes which described how particular aspects of its mission are realised. An extract from this is:
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Course Advisory Committees on Teaching Excellence and Quality Assurance

Peer review of Distance Education materials

Staff, student, employer evaluation procedures

Expert judgements

The learning/teaching processes and quality assurance mechanisms were explained, in the context of the recent major changes to courses, structures and systems. The performance indicators were provided as far as possible but in the aftermath of the amalgamations it was not easy to provide comprehensive, consistent data. One major step was an unprecedented decision to evaluate every unit taught in first semester 1993. This was a substantial task out of which many lessons were learned for future course evaluation strategies. It operated in the context of a Teaching Excellence Project aimed at installing a university-wide system for evaluation of all units and all modes of teaching by the students, teacher and peers. While many academics appraise their teaching as a matter of course, the process has not been automatic or systematic in Australian higher education. The project also seeks to identify and reward good teaching practice and to develop the teaching culture of Deakin University towards a realisation of the flexible open campus learning objective.

The Library has long been acknowledged as a significant leader in the provision of services to distance students, and explicit quality assurance processes have been in place for some years. It has a set of performance and service standards for each aspect of its operation, together with management information systems to monitor the maintenance of
these standards, and a staff performance management scheme to ensure that individuals and groups meet these standards. For example, statistics of requests by distance students are analysed to ensure that a 90+% satisfaction rate is maintained. The Library also showed in the portfolio its strategies to deal with any drop in this level of service in a particular course. Standards for the distance education service require that material to satisfy 90% of requests shall leave the Library within 24 hours of receipt of the student’s request (which may come in by telephone, fax, email or letter). The Library showed that 92% has been the norm for several years.

These quantitative standards and statistics, of course, are only the tip of the iceberg. A high quality library service to distance students and others depends on the Library’s success in identifying the real needs of its clients, especially in an information environment being rapidly changed by the new communications technologies and global access to information. For the Library, as for other areas of the university, the achievement of goals and maintenance of standards are heavily dependent on the resources available — however lean and responsive the Library may be.

In the Course Development Centre, too, it was possible to present evidence of quality assurance processes over a number of years. The centre provides academic, professional and technical support to course development and teaching, and manages the production of Deakin’s learning materials. Statistical data were compiled on output and cost of print and audio-visual material. Comparisons were drawn with publishing elsewhere. Deakin is Australia’s largest tertiary publishing organisation; in 1989-90 it published 40% of the new titles released by the tertiary sector of the publishing industry. Quantity is only one component. The quality of the materials themselves was on display for the CQAHE during their visit to Deakin — an advantage which classroom-based teaching does not readily offer. More qualitative assessments of the Centre’s activities were presented in relation to the greater educational value being experienced or anticipated through investment in new technology.

OUTCOMES FOR DEAKIN’S QUALITY ASSURANCE IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

The university was well pleased with its placement in the top half of universities in the 1993 National Quality Review rankings. Informal feedback suggests that this was due in no small measure to perceptions in the committee of Deakin’s leadership in distance education. However, there is no room for complacency. The 1993 National Quality Review was conducted in a higher education system largely unprepared for the detailed, mechanistic specifications of targets and performance indicators which industrial approaches to total quality management have espoused. The CQAHE members and universities alike learned as they went. Although the process involved many person-hours, it contained many gaps and flaws which left the outcomes open to criticism from many quarters, not only from universities in the bottom rankings (though some have been very vocal). The 1994 round will undoubtedly be less sympathetic to the largely impressionist, subjective approach which characterised most 1993 submissions, Deakin’s included. It is likely that 1994 submissions will be required to produce hard evidence of national and international referencing of quality claims, and that euphemistic, vague or unsubstantiated claims will be unacceptable.

For Deakin this means that its quality assurance processes and justifiable claims to quality outcomes in flexible open campus learning must be sharpened up. This adds a particular flavour to the goals it has already set. The 1993 quality round revealed not only the remarkable changes engendered by the amalgamations, but also forced hard
assessments more privately within the university of areas of strength and weakness. The national agenda is having a significant impact on the way Deakin is implementing its quality assurance processes, but the university’s strategy is equally driven by its goal of achieving high status and international recognition for its distinctive, innovative approaches to teaching, learning, and research. While much of this strategy would probably have been implemented anyway, as the next stage in cementing the style and operations of the new Deakin, its plans are substantially affected by quality assurance considerations.

In 1994 numerous initiatives are under way that will have long-term impact on the nature and practice of flexible learning. In the learning/teaching arena, these initiatives include the creation of a Centre for Academic Development to develop, monitor, and enhance the quality of teaching (including self, peer, and student evaluation of courses and teaching), and to provide academic staff development programmes. It manages the Teaching Excellence Project and works closely with the Course Development Centre whose instructional designers and academic support staff provide direct assistance to academics preparing, teaching, and evaluating courses offered in flexible, multi-media modes on and across campus. Guidelines for review of courses and units are being prepared, and the university has decided that each unit will be comprehensively reviewed every two years. Student feedback on teaching performance is to become a factor in promotion and tenure decisions. A Student Charter will elaborate the university’s broad responsibilities to students, and the reciprocal obligations of students. It includes an obligation on academic staff to report back the results of unit evaluations to their students. Teaching/learning management plans are being prepared by each faculty, and Teaching Excellence Coordinators have been appointed to the schools in each faculty to foster innovative teaching practice. Similar plans are underway for research. A comprehensive review of information technology is in train, with a particular focus on technologies in teaching/learning.

The 1994 portfolio will be more quantitative in presentation, matching learning/teaching goals, more closely with student outcomes. The administrative and academic support areas are going even further down the total quality management route. With assistance from the Australian Quality Council, each branch (including the Course Development Centre, Student Administration and Support Services, Library, and Computing Services—all of which are directly involved in distance education) has re-examined its missions, goals and underlying values. Customer Service Standards are being developed for all key support activities; service level agreements are to be reached with key internal ‘clients’; and ‘continuous improvement’ projects have been established in each branch of academic support area. Training programmes are being initiated on quality, service, and tools for analysing and measuring improvement. Management information systems are being overhauled. A comprehensive course data base for curriculum planning and resource allocation will be installed by late 1994, together with a new scheduling system for course development and production.

All these activities are occurring in conjunction with the university’s decision to seek accreditation with the International Standards Organisation. The aim is to achieve ISO 9000 certification for course accreditation, student enrolments, examinations, course development and course delivery by the end of 1994. This move represents Deakin’s recognition that a growing number of its clients are not only the individual students but also their employers or professional accrediting bodies. The university is increasingly making arrangements with such bodies to provide courses (often custom-designed) in the workplace using flexible learning strategies and communications technologies. Corporate clients, in particular, expect Deakin to demonstrate that it meet international best practice. While commercial considerations are only one part of Deakin’s concerns, the
university believes that the service standards and performance indicators in the ISO 9000 system will contribute to Deakin’s overall quality assurance.

CONCLUSIONS

The first National Quality Review was far from perfect. There have been criticisms — ranging from serious to carping — of the government’s agenda; of the linking of funding (rewards) to the review process; of the idea of openly ranking universities; of the CQAHE’s approach; and of the outcomes. It is clear that everyone has a lot to learn, and that pinpointing what is and is not high quality in higher education is a difficult, inevitably conflictual task. There is a potential for the process to be so controlled by government that universities’ autonomy is even further diminished. However, as Deakin’s experience illustrates, there is also a potential for genuine improvement in the quality of learning/teaching at a time when the nature and practice of higher education are undergoing profound change.

It could be argued that distance education is better off than other areas of education in this review and change process. Certainly, the ‘industrial’ systems, divisions of labour and organisational structures typical of the second stage of distance education lend themselves to quantitative assessment of performance. The curriculum, in the form of teaching materials, is open to public scrutiny. It is perhaps easier to implement quality assurance mechanisms in a form of education whose practitioners have long had to argue for credibility and demonstrate quality in order to gain status in a sceptical educational environment. However the quality control measures now being considered are of a very different order to the relatively simplistic assertions of the past.

As Brian Wilson, Chair of CQAHE, points out, interest in quality in higher education does not exist in a vacuum, but is a society-wide and global phenomenon (Campus Review 31 March 1994). In Australia, as elsewhere, higher education is now a mass phenomenon, and the social climate is increasingly one of ‘user pays’. ‘Customer satisfaction’ and ‘client service’ are terms creeping into universities’ lexicons and practices in new ways. Proving one’s quality, rather than simply asserting it, is essential. The position of distance education in all this is an intriguing one. Distance education, which once lived in a ‘policy shadow’ (Prebble, 1993, p.148) in Australian higher education, has emerged into the daylight as government has become convinced that its pedagogies and communications technologies can materially assist economic recovery and growth. Even so, the 1993 ranking which placed most of the universities with large distance education programmes into the lower categories, suggests that the distance education factor is not yet seen as wholly legitimate or of high quality. The old pedagogical hegemony of face-to-face teaching strategies and the traditional university hierarchies based on age, research productivity, scholarly reputations, facilities, financial resources and so on, will not change easily.

Concepts of quality are inevitably subjective and influenced by the values and agenda of the stakeholders — in this case the universities, the students, government, and industry clients. Quality also involves comparison. The new Deakin University has proclaimed its future firmly as a university whose teaching programme is characterised by a higher degree of flexibility and responsiveness than any Australian university has ever previously sought to achieve. Comprehensive and defensible quality assurance processes will be a critical factor in aiding Deakin to attain that goal, and to convince its stakeholders not only of its high quality teaching, research and community service, but also of its right to assert leadership in higher education. It is not clear yet what the long term effects will be for Deakin’s flexible open campus learning programme. In principle,
improvements in the quality of teaching and service to students can only be of benefit. In practice, there may well also be less beneficial consequences for university autonomy and the control and use of knowledge. The next few years will be interesting.

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QUALITY INITIATIVES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

Brian G. Wilson

Governments play an important role in Australian education, although this role varies significantly between the various educational sectors. Post-school education is provided in institutions which are almost entirely publicly established, co-ordinated and financed. In contrast, a significant proportion of primary and secondary school pupils are enrolled in private schools — approximately 20 percent in Roman Catholic schools; and 8 percent in non-government, non-Catholic schools.

Constitutionally, in the six states and two territories, education is a matter for the individual state or territory government rather than for the federal authorities. However, by virtue of popular pressure and its control over the major sources of revenue, in particular retaining the sole right to levy income tax, the federal (or Commonwealth) government has become increasingly involved in education. Initially, this occurred at the university level, but the federal government is now heavily involved in the support of education at all levels, in both the public and private sectors.

During the past 35 years, three major shifts in regulation and administration of higher education funding — initiated by changes in government attitudes and policies — have had significant impacts on the development of universities, on the attitudes of students, on university-community relationships, and on the ways in which university resources are procured and managed. Before discussing these issues, however, some background on higher education in Australia may be necessary. (See, for example, Harman, 1992)

The first university in Australia, the University of Sydney, was inaugurated in New South Wales in 1850, 62 years after the arrival of the first British colonists. A powerful force for its establishment was to protect students from the perceived “baleful influence of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge”! Over the following 70 years, each of the other five states established a university in its capital city, a situation that was to remain unchanged until after World War II. Each of these institutions was set up under an act of the state parliament and higher education was almost exclusively a state responsibility.

In the 1940s, however, to help cope with war-time demands and subsequently the post-war increase in student numbers, the Commonwealth government began to provide significant financial assistance. This was continued until the late 1950s, but was largely

4 Brian Wilson has been Vice-Chancellor of the University of Queensland since 1979. He is the first Chairman of the Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
an ad hoc arrangement; there was no formal acceptance by the Commonwealth of a long-term commitment to universities, with the one exception of the Australian National University, established directly by the federal government in 1946.

The first major change in the balance of formal responsibilities between federal and state governments with regard to universities was initiated by Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies who, in 1956, invited the chairman of the British University Grants Committee, Sir Keith Murray, to preside over a committee of inquiry into the future of Australian universities. This committee recommended new relationships between state and Commonwealth governments with regard to university support, including the appointment of an Australian University Grants Committee to advise the Commonwealth government, after consultation with the States, in order to ensure balanced development.

The Murray Report of 1957 was largely accepted by the Commonwealth government. The Commonwealth agreed to share financial responsibility for universities with state governments on a matching grant system [dollar for dollar for capital expenditure; and a dollar of federal support for each 1.85 dollars of state support for recurrent expenditure]. However, a decision was made to establish an Australian Universities Commission as a statutory agency rather than a grants committee.

From the establishment of the Commission until the mid-1970s, this matching system of financial support for universities operated, and over this period the Universities Commission worked on a system of triennial planning and reporting. Every third year, after considering detailed submissions from each university and after visits to campuses and consultations with various parties, including state governments, the commission recommended the level of financial support to be given to each institution for both capital and recurrent expenditure for a predicted number of students, and what new major academic developments should be approved. In effect, the commission acted as a broker between the universities and the state and federal governments; this mechanism encouraged increased involvement by the states in order to gain the benefits of additional matching funds from the Commonwealth.

The six original universities [Sydney, founded 1850; Melbourne, 1853; Adelaide, 1874; Tasmania, 1890; Queensland, 1910; and Western Australia, 1911] had been augmented by only three others, apart from the ANU, through the 40s and 50s. However, significant expansion of the system developed through the 1960s and 70s, with nine more universities being established by 1975. The first private university was not founded until 1987; there are now two, both small.

State governments had been considerably slower than the Commonwealth in establishing special statutory co-ordinating agencies for higher education. Until the mid-1960s, there was little incentive for them to change their traditional administrative patterns; in most cases, they had to relate directly to only one or two universities, while teachers' colleges, technological institutes, agricultural colleges and technical colleges within the states were under the direct control of relevant government departments.

But non-university higher education also grew rapidly after the Second World War. Existing institutions expanded quickly and many new teachers colleges and other specialist institutions were established. Following the recommendations of the Martin report of 1964, from the mid-1960s the Commonwealth government provided financial help to many of these non-university institutions and guided their development to form a separate 'advanced education sector', parallel to the university sector. These institutions were not funded to do research. Called colleges of advanced education (CAEs), they were, however, funded by a similar mechanism to universities; and, by 1972, there also existed a parallel commission for CAEs, the Australian Commission on Advanced
Education. The higher education structure thus formed in Australia became known as the 'binary system'.

The Australian higher education system in 1970, therefore, was similar to those of many other countries, with funding provided by a combination of government grants and fees paid by students.

The second major change in funding mechanisms occurred from January 1974, when the matching system of university financial support was discontinued. The Commonwealth government, by agreement with the states, assumed full responsibility for providing all capital and recurrent funds to universities and colleges of advanced education discontinuing tuition fees. This led to the unusual situation, still current, that almost all higher education institutions remain under state influence, with state governments appointing about a third of the membership of governing bodies — senators or councils — even though their total financial support comes from the Commonwealth. The advisory mechanisms — the two commissions — continued, however, as did the triennial funding arrangements.

As might be expected, growing federal involvement in the planning and funding of higher education has been associated with an enlarged governmental bureaucracy and increased centralised control. In June 1977, the Tertiary Education Commission [later renamed as the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, or CTEC] was established by bringing together the previous Universities Commission, the Commission on Advanced Education and also the trades-oriented Technical and Further Education [TAFE] Commission, as councils within a single commission, reporting as before to the Commonwealth Minister for Education.

Nevertheless, as far as the universities were concerned, these structural changes had limited impact on their financial support; of more significance was a decade of virtually static enrolment. Although operating budgets were adjusted to meet agreed salary increases, 'incremental creep' of salaries reduced the effective budgets progressively throughout the decade.

In July 1987, a new combined Department of Employment, Education and Training was established at the federal level, and Mr John Dawkins was appointed Minister. Much to the surprise of the tertiary education community, the federal government announced that the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission would be abolished, and institutions would henceforward negotiate directly with the department.

This was the beginning of the third series of major changes to affect Australian higher education. A variety of issues were raised for discussion purposes in a Green Paper in 1987 (Dawkins, 1987); and subsequently government policy was officially announced in a White Paper, released by the new Minister in July 1988. (Dawkins, 1988) These changes included the following major elements.

First, the binary system, with its separate sectors for universities and CAEs, was to be abolished and replaced with a so-called 'unified national system', composed of institutions whose 'educational profiles' were required to be negotiated annually with federal authorities. Increased funding would be based on the agreed increases in student numbers, taking into account the relative cost of the relevant degree programmes.

A second element was the federal government's commitment to having fewer and larger institutions, in the declared belief that this would increase student choice and credit transfer, provide better academic services and facilities, offer better career opportunities for staff and achieve greater efficiencies. This policy has been achieved through...
amalgamations, with the 67 members of the binary system in 1987 being reduced to just 37 current members of the unified national system. The exercise has been facilitated through a combination of implied threats and promises — smaller institutions being potentially limited in breadth and depth of research development, and access to additional financial support to facilitate the amalgamation process. The use of the word ‘implied’ recognises the inability of the federal government to legislate formal changes in the status and structure of state institutions.

Third, the government committed itself to significant expansion of student numbers in order to achieve increased numbers of graduates, and to renewed efforts to achieve greater equity of access to higher education. Special emphasis was also given to promotion of increased enrolments in areas considered by the government to be of high priority for economic growth.

Fourth, special efforts were to be directed to the increase of research activity and output, with a renamed and restructured Australian Research Council [ARC] to undertake a major role in allocation of research funds. To provide additional funds to the ARC for allocation to the enlarged system of universities, the Commonwealth increased its direct commitment; and operating grants to the pre-1987 university sector were progressively reduced over the following four years by five per cent to provide additional resources to the ARC. Allocation of research funds by the ARC was to be determined by application of researchers on a merit basis through national competition for grants. At the same time, operating grants to all higher education institutions were reduced by one percent to provide a reserve fund for projects of national priority.

A fifth element was the planned rationalisation of external studies programmes, reducing the numbers of providers of distance education from 41 to eight, named as Distance Education Centres.

The most far-reaching of the Dawkins initiatives, however, has been the successful pressure on smaller institutions to amalgamate with others in order to participate in the regularly funded unified national system, thereby eliminating the formal binary system composed of research universities and colleges of advanced education unfunded by government to undertake research.

As noted, the number of independent institutions has been reduced from 67 to 37. No institution has been closed in the process. In each amalgamation process, formal agreements were negotiated between representatives of the relevant universities/colleges of advanced education and endorsed by their governing bodies. These agreements often have involved definition of a transition period during which administrative policies and procedures, developed separately, would be phased into a single set. Of particular importance were issues related to tenure and promotion, where university expectations were usually quite different from those in the college sector. Entrance of the consolidated body into the Unified National System required satisfaction of five basic conditions: one governing body; one chief executive; one educational profile; one funding allocation; and one set of academic awards [e.g., degrees and diplomas].

Inevitably, satisfying these conditions has required reassignments of responsibilities of senior administrative staff, but there have been few, if any, redundancies in the system. Since all the merging institutions have been state instrumentalities, each amalgamation has required an act of parliament to make it legally effective. In general, this process has taken place without significant problems or delays, since it had involved open discussion and, finally, agreement by the parties. The influence of state governments has been variable; however, as all funding derives from the federal government, state interests
have been more oriented to ensuring a fair share of Commonwealth funding coming to the particular state.

Not all these institutional mergers seem, on the face of it, other than marriages of convenience. Some new universities have constituent campuses lying scores, even hundreds, of kilometres apart, with little previous commonality of interest. Most face the difficulty of incorporating two sets of academic staff, appointed using different criteria, with different career expectations, with different academic cultures and, industrially, represented by different unions. In some cases, entrance standards for students are quite disparate between the partner campuses, yet they study for a single university degree qualification.

As noted, the professed government intent was to improve diversity of learning experiences for students and to obtain economies in operation by increasing the scale size of the amalgamated institutions. As yet, no detailed studies of the success in these expectations have been published. Anecdotally, however, the impression grows that the former college sector elements are moving to achieve the perceived status of the ‘university’ with increasing orientation to research activity and seeking additional research funding. The diversity of learning experience issue is more open, dependent on whether the distances between campuses permit commuter access. One might surmise, however, that the general interest in the ‘university’ providing the norm of behaviour will gradually reduce the interest of academics in teaching at certificate and associate diploma level rather than at the ‘real’ degree level, decreasing current options which relate more directly to practical training. Consequently, instead of increasing diversity, the amalgamation process may reduce it.

With respect to economic gains, there is great scepticism about potential success. Where campuses are contiguous, there are clear economies possible in administration, provision of library and computing resources and use of building facilities. But these are likely to be significant only where one of the combining institutions is small. After all, institutions are funded for teaching purposes on a per-student basis, taking into account faculty mix and the undergraduate/graduate proportions. This suggests, a priori, that there are no significant advantages of scale in a developed system. Where constituent campuses are widely separate, a condition more common than not, communication costs, particularly in person-hours, are likely to outweigh any marginal economies of scale.

QUALITY ISSUES

Current interest in quality issues in Australia does not occur in a vacuum — it is a worldwide phenomenon. Throughout the western democracies, the issue of quality in higher education could well be termed the ‘flavour of the decade’. Special government agencies have been established, particularly in Europe, to assess, audit and review teaching and research effectiveness in the university sector. Independently, quality audit agencies have been established within the higher education sector itself.

Governmental interest relates to the high levels of public expenditure on higher education in a period when most governments are seeking to reduce expenditure and achieve greater value for money. Students are interested because of the career potential of a degree. Employers are concerned to ensure that the skills and attributes they require of graduates are attained.

Newspaper reviews of universities are now becoming common. These normally take into account, among a variety of performance indicators, the levels of entry scores, the
proportion of doctorates among teaching staff, and competitive research success.

Maclean’s magazine in Canada, for instance, has now completed its third such annual

review; and similar processes are current in England and Germany. Informal and quasi-

formal rankings of US universities are of long standing, with various states having more

formal evaluation processes, sometimes linked to funding. In Australia, more recently,

we have seen the advent of The Independent Monthly Good Universities Guide.

Many individuals in universities, on the other hand, believe that they are effective

teachers and researchers and that there is no need to disturb the system. Any lowering of

quality is attributed to decreased funding for students and to resulting enlarged class

sizes. They question the need for quality assessment and are sceptical of the value of

concepts such as total quality management.

Nevertheless, a strong case can be made for the incorporation of quality approaches in

a university environment. This has been supported by the recognition that there has been

a substantial level of general disaffection with the performance of universities; and the

belief that a closed and defensive response to this is at odds with universities’ intellectual

ideals of open discussion and willingness to respond to criticism in a constructive

manner.

It is also supported by the fact that the world in which the higher education system

operates is changing dramatically, as the mix of students — at both undergraduate and

postgraduate levels — alters both in terms of a higher median age and greater part-time

involvement.

Further, the increasing level of market forces and competition in higher education mean

that its consumers will be increasingly concerned with the value of their degree or

diploma based on their perceptions of quality in learning, service, timeliness and price.

Anticipated limitations in economic growth have already had a curtailng effect on the

funds available for expansion in higher education, and are causing greater public demand

for demonstrated quality outcomes for the financial investment provided.

THE AUSTRALIAN SETTING

Quality is not a new concept in Australian universities. It has been a matter of concern

since they were established. And interest in improving the quality of work in the

university system has not been solely the province of governments. The Australian Vice-

Chancellors’ Committee came into being 70 years ago to provide a forum for discussion

of matters common to all institutions and has, from time to time, published reports on

quality-related issues. These have included an inquiry into teaching practices published

in 1965; academic staff development published in 1981; and the reviews of honours

courses by discipline across the university system throughout the ’70s.

Pressures for more open accountability led the Commonwealth government to set up a

national inquiry into education and training in 1976 to examine and report on the means

evaluating the quality and efficiency of the system. This resulted in the Williams

Report of 1979. Subsequently, the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission

initiated a series of national discipline reviews to examine the general quality of teaching

and research across the system as a whole. These reviews include the Williams Report of

1988 on engineering; the Matthews Report of 1989 on accounting; and the Speedy

In July 1991, the then Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services, the Honourable Peter Baldwin, MP, asked the Higher Education Council (HEC) to advise the government on quality in higher education and particularly on mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of institutional quality assurance.

This was in response to concerns expressed by the higher education sector and the wider community about a perceived decline in the quality of higher education associated with a reduction in per capita Equivalent Full-time Student Unit (EFTSU) funding and rapid expansion during the late 1980s, resulting from the White Paper reforms. In October 1991, Mr Baldwin gained cabinet approval for an additional two per cent of the operating grant [$72 million in December 1990 prices] to be allocated to those universities able to demonstrate a high level of quality assurance in the context of their mission and goals.

In its 1991 policy statement, *Higher Education: Quality and Diversity in the 1990s* (Baldwin, 1991), in which the additional funding was announced, the government indicated that, following this period of intense change, it was appropriate to enter a period of consolidation, and to assure the community that the quality of higher education provided by Australian universities was of an appropriately high standard.

In its report, *Higher Education: Achieving Quality* (Higher Education Council, 1992), presented to the Minister October 1992 after extensive consultation with the higher education sector and the community, the HEC found that there is renewed interest in the question of quality, but that this is because of the differences between the system now and 50 years ago — particularly the rate and extent of change — rather than evidence of any actual deterioration of quality. Nevertheless, the Council indicated its belief that there is a need to assure a range of interest groups and the public in general that the system is offering quality in all of its various activities.

Therefore, the council recommended the establishment of a quality assurance mechanism to conduct quality reviews of Australian universities which elected to participate in the programme. The HEC indicated that such a body should make recommendations to the government on the distribution of the available funds, which would be additional to institutions’ operating grants. So, the Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education was established in November 1992 as a non-statutory ministerial advisory committee, to assist the government in the implementation of its strategy for ensuring the quality, excellence and international standing of Australia’s higher education system.

Within institutions in recent years, the introduction of staff appraisal for development purposes and orientation activities for new staff members, coupled with greater attention being paid to appointment, review and tenure procedures, have addressed staff quality issues, while competitive grants from the National Priority [Reserve] Fund have provided impetus for a range of initiatives directed at improving teaching and learning, research and administrative processes. More recently, the grant scheme established under the aegis of the Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching has provided greater incentive for new teaching initiatives.

Consequently, the establishment of the Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, while of a different dimension to previous initiatives, has to be viewed as a further step in a sequence of university and governmental actions over many years, rather than as an isolated instance of government intervention.
The Quality Program Concept

The committee's objective, as indicated in the Ministerial Guidelines issued in May 1993, is to contribute, through its quality review, advisory and other activities, to the effectiveness of the Quality Assurance Program and thereby to the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of Australian higher education through recognising and rewarding effective quality assurance, management and excellence of outcomes in universities.

In discharging these responsibilities, the committee was required, under its terms of reference, to consider and apply the following principles:

- As self-governing bodies, institutions have the major responsibility for ensuring that the teaching process, their research efforts and their graduates are of high quality; they are funded for these purposes through their operating grants.
- Excellent outcomes in universities are a function not only of the level of resources available but also of the way resources are used.
- Institutional self-assessment will be a key element of the quality review processes to be implemented by the committee.
- Diversity in the higher education system will be promoted through an approach which emphasises quality within the context of an institution's own mission statement and its stated objectives; institutions' missions, objectives and outcomes may be regional, national and international to varying degrees.
- The committee's review framework will focus on the mission and objectives of an institution, and their relationship to the Australian Higher Education System Statement of Purpose.

In addition to these principles, the guidelines indicated that the overall quality of outcomes should be taken into account — these to include the national and international impact of the institution's research; the production of graduates with attributes which enable them to operate anywhere in Australia or overseas at standards consistent with best practice in their fields; and the contribution of institutions to their various communities.

The programme is funded by government subvention for an initial period of three years, with approximately $78 million available for distribution in 1994, about 1.6% of the total operating grants to the university sector. Quality Assurance Program funds, which may be up to 5% of an institution's operating grant, do not have to be fully spent or committed within any one financial or calendar year by the recipient institutions and can be carried forward.

Section 18A of the Higher Education Funding Act 1988 confers on the minister the power to make determinations and impose conditions on the allocation of funds for quality management and assurance purposes. Subsequently, the government requires that a recipient institution will set out its strategy for spending these funds in a way which addresses the maintenance and enhancement of quality, particularly in the institution's areas of strength. The committee is to take these strategies into account in recommending future allocations of funds and to report annually to the minister on the effectiveness of the recipient institution's expenditure in respect of maintaining and enhancing quality.
THE 1993 REVIEW

The first meeting of the committee was convened on 30th June 1993. Subsequently in July, the committee issued guidelines to institutions inviting them to participate in this voluntary programme, setting out the objectives of the assessment process and providing guidelines on the preparation of a submission, termed a portfolio, and indicating the areas to be reviewed by the committee in 1993 and, provisionally, in the subsequent two years of the programme.

In the first year of the programme, the committee undertook an overview study of all three areas of university activity: teaching and learning, research and community service. This approach enables baseline data to be gathered so that changes in the system can be identified in later years. It was indicated that the intention was to place greater emphasis on teaching and learning in the 1994 round, and on research and community activity in 1995.

There will, therefore, be a balanced emphasis on teaching and learning, research and community service over the length of the multi-year cycle. The process will not, however, concentrate on just a single area of activity. While a major emphasis of the process in any year, other than the first year, will be a single area of activity, the committee will look at how the other two functions are related to the function under consideration. The committee and its quality assurance review processes are expected to be reviewed after the 1995 round.

The guidelines issued to institutions in 1993 by the committee described the proposed mode of operation of the review and gave institutions until late September to submit a portfolio of 20 pages. The committee also sponsored two workshops to provide relevant information to institutions on the preparation of their portfolios. All universities took advantage of these opportunities, and subsequently accepted the invitation to participate.

After consideration, it was decided to have four review teams, each including two members of the committee, one of whom led the team; two additional members coopted from higher education institutions and other appropriate agencies; and a fifth person [the secretary to the team] selected from senior administrators nominated by vice-chancellors. The intent of coopting these additional members was to provide greater breadth of experience to the teams and also to make the assessment process as transparent as possible.

In the 1993 round, membership of the teams encompassed 18 different institutions of the unified national system. There was progressive variation in membership within the four teams, which was seen as enhancing the ultimate comparability of results. In addition, the chairman and deputy chairman served on more than one team, the chairman being involved in 13 institutional visits. To reduce the potential for or perception of conflict of interest, no member of any team reviewed universities in the state of his or her own institution.

The Director of the UK Higher Education Quality Council's Division of Quality Audit was invited to conduct training sessions for review team members before commencement of their review tasks. Prior to the visits, all teams held a briefing meeting at which the individual institutional portfolios were examined as a group, issues highlighted, individuals and groups with whom the team wished to meet identified, and decisions made about any additional information required before the visit.
The committee set out five broad questions as a basis for review team evaluations, each to be considered within the context of an institution’s mission and goals. These questions were included in the committee’s guidelines to institutions and constituted a framework for the quality review process:

- What quality assurance policies and practices does the institution have in place or is it developing?
- How effective are these?
- How does the institution judge the quality of its outcomes?
- In what areas and in what ways are the outcomes excellent?
- What are the institution’s priorities for improvement?

The purpose of the visits was, through discussions with senior management, staff, students and community and industry representatives, to enable the team to test the evidence presented by the institution in its portfolio and to assist it to make judgements on the merit of the claims made by the institution. The people with whom the teams held discussions were selected largely by the university, based on criteria set by the team. Following each institutional visit, the teams held a debriefing meeting at which the content of the team’s report on the institution was agreed, including an assessment of process and outcome across the three areas of teaching and learning, research and community service.

In the latter half of January 1994, draft reports were sent to vice-chancellors to seek information about any factual errors in the reports. The reports, amended as necessary, formed a part of the committee’s overall assessment and informed the recommendations contained in its report. Final versions of the institutional reports have been provided to universities, which may publish them if they wish.

These reports, though written to a general structure and format, differ in terms of the emphasis placed on different aspects of the universities’ operations. This is to be expected in an assessment exercise which relates to an individual portfolio and places emphasis on the institution’s context and mission. The variations reflect the necessarily individualistic focus required of the committee and its teams in carrying out the review task.

The reviews and their resulting reports are not designed to be comprehensive studies of all relevant aspects of institutions’ operations and performance. Rather, they seek to present a broad picture of the institutions’ quality assurance processes and outcomes, and the effectiveness and excellence of these — gained from the evidence made available to the team and through selective sampling of activity and outcomes. Where appropriate, they also include suggestions to the institution for improvements.

Guidelines to institutions made it very clear that the review process placed the onus on the institution to demonstrate quality through its self-assessment and associated evidence. The committee and its review teams have not set out to prove or disprove the universities’ cases but rather to obtain a relative measure of their validity overall and of the depth of understanding and commitment to the reported processes within the institution.

Part of the training process for team members emphasised the importance of discarding ‘personal baggage’ related to the ‘best way’ to initiate and manage change. This has not
reduced the value of the ‘devil’s advocate’ role in seeking to establish the merits of any particular approach in the context of that institution’s traditions and ethos.

In late December 1993, following the conclusion of the institutional visits, the chairman wrote to all vice-chancellors and members of review teams and requested feedback on the conduct of the review process to that point. The responses received at that time were largely supportive of the process. In addition, valuable comments and suggestions for improvement, reflecting a range of opinion, have been made. The committee will consider these in the context of its 1994 reviews.

As part of the teams’ reviews, institutions were assessed on a 1–10 scale on each of process and outcome, across the three areas of teaching and learning, research and community service, in the context of the institutional missions which were also evaluated in terms of the perceived difficulty of those missions. These evaluations, normalised through the variable membership of the teams, provided the raw data for subsequent committee review. Published data on a variety of performance indicators and the experience of the members provided additional input. Equal weight was given to the ‘teaching and learning’ and ‘research’ components; less to community service, which itself was, however, reflected in these other two elements.

When all the data were put together, institutions fell into six groupings, which subsequently formed the basis for the committee’s recommendations. In the Ministerial Guidelines to the Committee, the minister had indicated that the committee should recommend ‘around 50%’ of institutions for support. However, because of the considerable work on process within all institutions, the committee felt that it would be undesirable to limit support to the top 50 per cent of universities. With the agreement of the minister, differential funding was therefore recommended for all institutions.

Following the publication of the results (Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 1994) there has been a variety of criticisms of the programme. It is important to note that the initial study recommending the establishment of the committee on Quality Assurance had reported to one minister; however, after the general election, a different minister had developed the Ministerial Guidelines, and, after a reshuffle of portfolios, a third minister received the committee’s report! Initially, several institutions had been upset at what they perceived as a change in policy following Mr Beazley’s post-election assumption of responsibility for higher education from Mr Baldwin. The HEC report’s emphasis on better quality processes had been regarded by many as the basis for the quality review. However, the ministerial directions to the committee included outcomes as at least a comparable element. Although the HEC report on Achieving Quality also stressed outcomes, recently developed universities saw themselves disadvantaged in a competitive assessment by the inclusion of outcomes.

The committee’s guidelines put the onus for demonstration of quality on the institutions. Some institutions wanted much more specific guidelines. It was suggested that the committee’s approach was analogous to requiring institutions to sit for an examination without any advice as to its form or content. Setting detailed guidelines, however, could be likened to a multiple-choice examination with only yes/no alternatives. Since the committee did not want to impose any definition of ‘quality’ on a diverse system, it seemed essential to invite the individual institutions to define and defend their definitions of quality.

Concern has also been expressed about defining the quality elements of a university through a one-day visit, particularly for a multi-campus institution. A week, it has been suggested, would be more appropriate. While the one-day procedure was devised to ensure that the visitation process could be completed by November [and this was almost
accomplished], the current committee view is that eight hours is about right to test the validity of the portfolio. When dealing with processes within an institution, one tests the documentation level and the ‘ownership’ of the process throughout the institution. One can have the best quality procedures in the world, but if they are not applied or accepted, there is no process. Outcomes, on the other hand, are more quantifiable through data accessible without a visit.

While ideally one could envisage team visits to make disciplinary assessments including inspection of lectures, facilities, examination papers and other elements, one must recognise that Australian experience, for example the studies mentioned earlier, suggests that these are both expensive and time-consuming and, thus far, not very discriminatory. British experience suggests that they do not necessarily produce an enthusiastic response to outcomes.

A further concern is that the final ratings favoured the pre-1987 universities: indeed, one commentator felt that the whole exercise was unnecessary because the outcomes could have been predicted. In actual fact, the pre-1987 institutions are distributed over the first five groupings. In any event, with ‘outcomes’ an equal measure, it would have been rather surprising if the pattern had been very different. These institutions have been funded for many years to do research, and consequently they continue to be more successful in national competitions. With research an equal measure with teaching, and rather easier to discriminate through outcomes, the overall balance could have been seen [and was probably expected] as inevitable in round one. Nevertheless, as noted, the results show considerable dispersion.

A different kind of concern is that, if the committee had persisted with a 50 per cent success rate, unsuccessful institutions would have been indistinguishable from one another — each could have been close to the margin, as far as the institution, the public and potential students were concerned. Providing differential funding to all has, therefore, not been a totally unmixed blessing. An obvious concern is the potential impact on marketing to overseas students; no effect has been reported on such students travelling to the United Kingdom, despite ranking of institutions by the funding councils there — although such ranking has thus far been concerned largely with research evaluations.

Dissatisfaction has also been expressed about the inequity of providing funds to the ‘haves’ rather than to the ‘have-nots’. Our role, under the guidelines given by the minister, has been to reward quality — not to equalise institutions. Since 1990, all institutions have been funded on the same basis of faculty mix, apart from a modest research quantum. The Reserve Fund has provided significant resource towards levelling the playing field.

Finally, the reports to institutions have been criticised for failing to provide much help to the individual institution. This, in many cases, is a valid criticism; the committee plans to do better with one year’s experience under its belt.

In 1994, both the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee and the National Tertiary Employees Union have had an opportunity to provide input into the guidelines for round two. This second round will emphasise the teaching and learning component [including postgraduate supervision] over research performance and community service. Consequently, process and performance outcomes in teaching and learning will become of much greater relative importance.
CONCLUSION

The purpose of the programme is to enhance the development of quality processes and outcomes in Australian universities. This can be done by the sharing of good practice across the system and by reporting on good practice in other countries. The sharing of good practice is facilitated by the participation of individuals from all universities in the team visits, providing potential feedback to those universities of the experiences gained in the process. This opportunity will be extended to all 37 institutions by round three. Institutions should also gain advice from the team reports, reviewing the portfolios and commenting on observed good practice and deficiencies.

The committee had hoped to include examples of good practice in its Report to the Minister. However, after reviewing 20 or so examples identified by the teams, the committee felt that these should be subjected to expert review before publication. Individual teams would have visited only a quarter of all institutions and there may be better practice elsewhere in the system. It is hoped to carry out this review during the next months and release the material then. From time to time, the committee may publish information from overseas inquiries; however, the concept of 'international best practice' over all university activities is not necessarily consistent with the diversity of missions within Australian institutions.

The second round of the programme will focus on the teaching and learning responsibilities of universities and the relationships of research activities and community activities to these responsibilities. This exercise will be a greater challenge to institutions and the committee than the 1993 round. This is because performance indicators in the teaching dimension are perceived by many as less easily comprehended than, for example, relative success in national grants competitions. Input and output measures for students, drop-out and graduation rates, employment statistics, etc., can be subject to different interpretations.

Recently, a Course Experience Questionnaire has been sent to graduates, a few months after leaving the universities. Over 50,000 responded and results analysed by descriptive and institution. While the 1993 experience is confidential to the individual universities, in 1994 and subsequent years the data will be publicly available. The Course Experience Questionnaire is consequently of great interest as an added input to the evaluation of quality in institutions. It is a measure of the increasing interest by institutions in self-evaluation, that all have agreed to participate and to allow their results to be publicly revealed.

References


THE QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND

David Woodhouse

The New Zealand system of quality assurance for higher education is simple, complex and changing. It is simple because it has been established in recent years on the basis of logical considerations and structures. It is complex because pursuit of the logic has given rise to many interlocking structures and interacting agencies. It is also complex because these agencies are still developing an understanding of each others’ roles, and these roles are changing as the understandings develop.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

Over the last 10 years, regardless of whether the government in power has been left wing (Labour) or right wing (National), there have been steady moves towards deregulation, privatisation, user pays and a market economy. Social welfare has moved from universal to targeted, and health care from public provision towards private purchase. Control of compulsory education has moved from the centre to local boards of trustees. The aims of these moves have been to reduce government spending, promote efficiency through competition and contestability, reduce the national debt, and ‘make New Zealand competitive’. A need for ‘up skilling’ is also seen as necessary to achieve this latter purpose, and a new Industry Skills Strategy was outlined in the Industry Training Act of 1992. Other specific actions have been to create state-owned enterprises (SOEs) from public sector organisations (such as Telecom) by putting them on the same basis as the private sector, with total local control and full scope for competition — but total accountability for their performance; and to establish a new relationship with state-owned institutions (SOIs). There is now a ‘corporatisation spectrum’ from government institutions (GIs), through SOIs, then SOEs to private corporations, known in the education sphere as private training establishments (PTEs). Government-funded tertiary institutions (universities, polytechnics, colleges and wananga or Maori house of learning) are currently SOIs, but may be moved towards becoming SOEs. As SOIs, institutions have heads (vice-chancellors, etc.) that are chief executive officers (CEOs), under contract, with a new relationship with government based on outputs. The CEO is then the employer of all other staff of the institution. (This paragraph is based on D. Armstrong, 1994.)

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Government research agencies have become separate bodies known as Crown research institutes (CRIs), and the universities must compete with them for research funds.

THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

A major re-structuring of education was effected by the Education Act of 1989, which was amended, principally in relation to tertiary education, by the Education Amendment Act of 1990. (The two acts are now considered to be a single entity.) The act continues the 'autonomy with accountability' theme into education, as it gives 'tertiary institutions as much independence and freedom to make academic, operational and management decisions as is consistent with the nature of the services they provide, the efficient use of national resources, the national interest and the demands of accountability.' (Education Amendment Act, 1990) It will be noted that there are several 'time bombs' in here. Since it is impossible ever to prove that an educational institution is operating as efficiently as possible, the government could at any time reduce funding on the grounds of inefficiency. Furthermore, although the act later guarantees academic freedom in very strong and comprehensive terms, the reference to the 'national interest' raises a possible area of conflict, especially since the exercise of this academic freedom is to be 'consistent with ... the proper use by institutions of resources allocated to them'.

The act followed a government report entitled 'Learning for Life', which recommended a more comprehensive and coherent approach to education and qualification, so a second purpose of the act is to reform educational administration so as to establish 'a consistent approach to the recognition of qualifications in academic and vocational areas.' (Education Amendment Act, 1990) It therefore established the NZ Qualifications Authority (NZQA) for this purpose. However, it also recognised the different nature of universities and degree courses, and recognised the NZ Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC) as a legal entity with explicit responsibility for that sector of tertiary education.

Following the 'Learning for Life' report, 'seamless education' has become the catchphrase. This is intended to indicate that 'the artificial barriers that have existed ... between different areas of provision' will be removed, and 'obsolete distinctions between different types of learning' will be removed (Lockwood Smith, Minister of Education, 1993). The emphasis on 'seamlessness' appears to be encouraging some people to try to remove or conceal valid distinctions, and 'articulation' might be a more helpful description than seamlessness.

DEFINITIONS

The 1990 Education Amendment Act contains the following definitions.

*Universities* have all the following characteristics, and other tertiary institutions have one or more of those characteristics:

- They are principally concerned with more advanced learning, the principal aim being to develop intellectual independence.
- Their research and teaching are closely interdependent and most of their teaching is done by people who are active in advancing knowledge.
- They meet international standards of research and teaching.
• They are repositories of knowledge and expertise.
• They accept a role as critic and conscience of society.

The four types of New Zealand tertiary institution are further characterised as follows, and use of these terms by bodies other than those recognised as such when the act was passed requires approval by the NZQA. A college of education is characterised by teaching and research required for the pre-school, compulsory and post-compulsory sectors of education and for associated social and educational service roles. A polytechnic is characterised by a wide diversity of continuing education, including vocational training, that contributes to the maintenance, advancement, and dissemination of knowledge and expertise and promotes community learning, and by research, particularly applied and technological research, that aids development. A university is characterised by a wide diversity of teaching and research, especially at a higher level, that maintains, advances, disseminates and assists the application of knowledge, develops intellectual independence, and promotes community learning. A wānanga is characterised by a wide diversity of teaching and research that maintains, advances, and disseminates knowledge and develops intellectual independence, and “assists the application of knowledge regarding ... Maori tradition according to ... Maori custom.”

Currently, there are five, twenty-five, seven and two of these institutions respectively, all state institutions. There are large number of private training establishments, registered by the NZQA, but all are small.

Charters

The legislation specifies that councils of tertiary institutions are to contain 12-20 members, including staff, students, employers, employees, and ministerial appointees. The council appoints the CEO, the council’s only employee, establishes a charter, approves a statement of objectives, and ensures that the institution is managed in accordance with these documents. It reports to external agencies that have the responsibility for checking that this is done.

An institution’s charter is drafted by its council after consultation both inside and outside the institution. The charter must set out the institution’s mission (purpose), values (philosophy), broad goals and operational objectives, and specify the composition of its council. Most charters also contain a statement of ‘reciprocal obligations’ by the Minister of Education, in respect of her/his use of resources in the tertiary sector, and the autonomy of the institution. The charter must then be approved by the Minister, who thereby also accepts her/his obligations! The charter is to be valid for a relatively long period, at least five years. That seems an incredibly short period for the currency of a university’s specified mission etc., but in fact the charters are currently being amended even sooner. This is because the whole process is new, and institutions are on a steep learning curve — one of the aspects of change referred to at the beginning of this article.

Statements of Objectives

Every three years, the institution through its council must develop a statement of objectives, the achievement of which would fulfil, or make progress towards fulfilling, the goals set out in the charter. The statement of objectives must be approved by the Ministry of Education (MoE) as being adequate for this purpose. It must also include
performance measures that will allow for the achievement of the objectives to be verified.

This gives rise to one of the problems being caused by attempting to be totally consistent, in this case by trying to apply a specific reporting system right across the range of SOEs and SOEs. Like ISO9000 or TQM which arose in a business context, statements of objectives and associated measures cannot easily be applied to education, although they can be adapted to education. The extent and nature of this adaptation is a matter for active discussion between each tertiary institution and the MoE. Not surprisingly, the resulting statements of objectives evince different characteristics, relating not only to the different goals of different institutions, but also to the different results of this negotiation. Furthermore, in recognition of the existence of valid educational missions and goals that cannot easily be measured, and cannot be measured at all numerically, many performance measures are of a very general nature.

Institutions are funded in proportion to weighted equivalent full-time student (EFTS) numbers. The weightings relate to discipline area and how many years the person has been studying. The institution’s statement of objectives submitted to the MoE also proposes the number of EFTS it wishes to enrol in each discipline area for the next three years. The MoE eventually decides how many it will fund in each institution. Despite the triennial orientation of this process, funding levels are decided annually. If an institution enrols less than the specified number of EFTS, the MoE will claw-back the related funds; if it over-enrols, it has to support the excess itself. The use of the same document to propose such different matters as objectives, measures, and target student numbers also causes some difficulties.

**Statements of Service Performance**

Each year, institutions must produce a report. This annual report includes both the financial report and a Statement of Service Performance, which reports on the performance measures agreed with the MoE. Unfortunately, this report is not checked by the MoE, but is audited by the financial auditors, who had no part in agreeing the statement of objectives, and who operate under a different arm of government, which has rather different interpretations of the reporting requirements pertaining to tertiary education. The audits of all governmental institutions are the responsibility of the Audit Office, which has spawned one of the SOEs, namely Audit New Zealand. This body can compete for auditing contracts on the open market, and audits most (but not all) of the tertiary institutions. Auditors do not like non-numeric measures, as they are difficult to audit; furthermore, despite its privatisation, Audit NZ sees itself as having a developmental or educational role, and asks the institutions questions such as ‘what does this measure mean?’ or, ‘what is it you are actually reporting?’ Consequently negotiations between the institution and Audit NZ on whether the objectives have been met may take a direction different to that which occurred in the earlier negotiations between the institution and the MoE when the measures were agreed, and consequently inconsistencies may occur.

Audit NZ has quickly developed a great deal of expertise in auditing service agencies such as local government organisations, and getting them to think carefully about the services they provide, how they measure them, and how they ascertain the quality of the services. Again, however, this experience has been derived outside the educational sector and care must be taken to adapt it appropriately for application within it.
In 1992, four of the seven universities attracted a mild caveat in the auditors' reports. All the financial reports etc. were approved, but the auditors declared themselves unable to be certain that the other performance measures had been met. In this area, too, very rapid change is occurring, and the 1993 annual reports will show significant developments in the institutions' reporting.

NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY (NZQA)

The NZQA was established by the 1990 Education Amendment Act for a large range of purposes. These include:

- to oversee the setting of standards for qualifications in secondary schools and in post-secondary education and training;
- to develop a framework for national qualifications in secondary schools and post-secondary education in which...
- there is a flexible system for the gaining of qualifications, with recognition of competency already achieved;
- to maintain effective liaison with overseas certifying and validating bodies ... ;
- to ensure that post-school educational and vocational qualifications maintain international comparability; and
- to promote and monitor inter-institutional course approval and moderation procedures.

(Education Amendment Act, 1990),

and, in general, to assure the quality of provision and the quality of outcomes for learners. It is also required to act as the examinations authority for all national secondary and tertiary examinations (note that examinations set by individual tertiary institutions are not 'national examinations'). One effect of the original bill was that it gave the NZQA jurisdiction to approve and accredit universities and their degree qualifications, but strongly expressed opposition from the universities led to changes in the proposed legislation whereby the jurisdiction to approve university degree qualifications and to accredit university institutions to offer those qualifications was vested in the NZYCC (see below). (Malcolm, 1993)

THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

In the implementation of purpose (c), above, the NZQA is developing a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) which will apply to all post-compulsory learning, including secondary, post-secondary, vocational and experiential. The building blocks of the NQF are standards that are embedded in units of learning, which are assigned to one of eight levels. There are detailed definitions of the nature and scope of the learning appropriate to each level. These descriptions may be modified in the light of experience and of international developments. Each unit carries a credit rating of between 1 and 120, determined on the basis that 120 credits represents the normal outcomes or 'educational gain' for a student undertaking a full-time, full-year course in a typical state institution (NZQA, Mar 1993).
Level 1 is open-ended below to encompass all initial learning, and extends upwards to approximately the equivalent of Form 5 in secondary school. (Note: Children start school at age five or six, and after six years at primary school, Forms 1 and 2 comprise intermediate school, and Forms 3 to 7 secondary school.) Levels 2 and 3 correspond to Forms 6 and 7, and Level 4 to trade certificates. Any qualification obtained at Levels 1-4 will be called a National Certificate, which will therefore become the only secondary school qualification. (Existing examinations at forms 5 and 7 will become optional external examinations, based on unit standards at the appropriate levels, but outside the NQF.) To be registered as a National Certificate, a qualification must include at least 40 credits at or above the registered level of the certificate (NZQA, Nov. 1993). Learning acquired during employment will be open to certification on an equal footing with the skills and knowledge acquired from other providers of education and training. (NZQA, 1991)

Levels 5 to 7 correspond to post-secondary work, and a qualification that includes at least 120 credits at these levels will be called a National Diploma. By Level 7, degree-level work has been achieved. A bachelor’s degree comprises at least 360 credits at Level 4 and above, including at least 80 at each of Levels 4/5, 6 and 7. Although the New Zealand degree pattern is for three years to an ‘ordinary’ or pass-level bachelor’s degree and then a fourth year to convert to an honours degree, the NZQA is discussing the possibility that an honours degree in the NQF should comprise a full-time three-year programme with a minimum of 120 credits at level 7. From one point of view, this would introduce an unhelpful discrepancy between different New Zealand qualifications with the same name. However, those who are concerned that universities and university degrees should not be forced into the NQF structure may feel it would be helpful to have such an evident distinction between ‘NZQA degrees’ (given by polytechnics) and university degrees (at least at honours level). Level 8 is a catch-all for post-graduate degrees and higher certificates and diplomas. A post-graduate degree must include at least 80 Level 8 units.

FILLING THE SLOTS IN THE FRAMEWORK

The NZQA is defining and developing the NQF in a manner very reminiscent of the current work on ‘key competencies’ in Australia or the ‘core skills’ of the UK’s General National Vocational Qualification. It therefore proposes to establish National Standards Bodies (NSBs) to represent all major user groups connected with a particular area of education or training. An area may be a field, a sub-field or a domain. The whole sweep of education and training is covered in 16 fields (health, manufacturing and sciences are three of them). Sub-fields correspond to generally recognised subjects or vocations. Domains are more specialised topics (such as dressmaking, which is in the clothing manufacture sub-field of the manufacturing field).

An NSB will be responsible for analysing the skills and knowledge in its area for the development of units and qualifications. For each unit, it will set standards for learners to achieve (that is, statements of outcomes and associated performance criteria), and establish quality management systems and standards (including moderation to achieve national consistency, criteria and procedures for accrediting assessors, provision for regular review to maintain currency, etc.). When the NZQA has confidence in these, they are entered on the NQF as a unit standard. Combinations of these units into qualifications are registered in a similar way. (NZQA, Feb. 1993)
If an educational provider wishes to deliver one or more of the registered unit standards, it applies to the NZQA for accreditation to do so. The accreditation process involves evaluating the provider's capacity to deliver the unit standards specified. To do this, the NZQA considers, inter alia, how the provider intends to create suitable teaching programmes and learning environments for the specified units, adequacy of resource provision, and evidence that there is a comprehensive academic quality management system. Accreditation may be granted for a single unit standard, a specific group or category of unit standards, or for all Level 1-7 unit standards (Barker, 1993, O'Connor, 1994). There is no a priori restriction on the level of a unit standard that a provider may propose to deliver. A particularly contentious issue is that some schools are being permitted to teach university-level courses.

The delivery of a unit standard, unlike the unit standard itself, is the responsibility of the provider. It is hoped that this separation of standard setting and delivery will encourage innovative teaching, although some fear that it will result in a fragmented and mechanistic system. It is similar to the Certificate of Education system introduced at Forms 5 and 6 in secondary schools in the Australian state of Victoria. There, it has proved difficult to write study outlines and assessments that are general enough to allow for flexibility for providers, achievement for the average student, challenge for the better student, and a realistic total assessment load.

An NSB will be responsible for analysing the skills and knowledge in its area and developing unit standards and qualifications. It is responsible for setting standards for learners to achieve (that is, statements of outcomes and associated performance criteria), and for establishing quality management systems and standards (including moderation to achieve national consistency, criteria and procedures for accrediting assessors, and provision for regular review to maintain currency, etc.). When the NZQA has confidence in these, they are entered on the NQF as a unit standard. Combinations of these into qualifications are registered in a similar way. (NZQA, Feb. 1993)

A single unit standard may represent from about 1% to 100% of a year's work for a full-time student. Considering the breadth of the NZQA's purview, there is great concern, first, that the sheer size of the undertaking is far too great (i.e., registering unit standards that represent the whole of human knowledge!), and, second, that this will straightjacket the whole educational endeavour by fitting all knowledge into the same framework.

The NZQA will maintain a comprehensive summary of the learning achievements of all students. This can be built up over a number of years for eventual credit towards a complete qualification. Systems are also being developed for extensive recognition and recording of prior learning through work experience, non-formal education and life experience. (Cauchi, 1993)

**NSBS AND ITOS**

In the vocational area of industry training, the responsibility for setting standards of training is being placed in the hands of Industry Training Organisations (ITOs). These are voluntary organisations being formed by industry. An ITO may apply for government funding to purchase off-job training for people employed in that industry. In order to be eligible for this funding, an ITO must obtain recognition from the Education and Training Support Agency (which, along with ITOs, was introduced in the 1992 Industry Training Act). Before the Agency recognises an ITO, it must be satisfied that the ITO is representative of that particular industry. As may be imagined, in some
industries there is intense jockeying for the right to be designated as the ITO — reminiscent of trade unions arguing over coverage of a particular work activity. In addition to setting national skill standards, ITOs will administer (but not provide) their own training arrangements, or purchase training from other providers, principally polytechnics.

The NZQA proposes to establish NSBs to cover areas identified by the NZQA as not being covered by an ITO. There is an ambiguity in terminology, as 'NSB' may be used either to include both ITOs and any NZQA-originated NSBs, or simply to refer to the latter group.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN THE NQF

The NQF is underpinned by a number of quality systems (NZQA, 1994).

- Unit standards and qualifications are checked for fitness for purpose at the time of registration.

- Private Training Establishments (PTEs) must be registered, and Government Training Establishments (GTEs) approved, by the NZQA. Registration and approval are renewed annually. (State tertiary institutions and schools are not registered as the corresponding checking process is carried out between their councils and the government, as described above.)

- As described above, all providers must be accredited to deliver and assess unit standards. Accreditation is valid for two to five years, and providers are then subject to re-accreditation.

- All assessors and providers must participate in a moderation system, determined by the relevant NSB and approved by the NZQA at the time of registration of the unit standards on the NQF, to ensure that standards are applied consistently (with different assessors making assessment decisions within acceptable limits), that assessment is to the required standards, and that comparability is achieved between providers.

- Although individual workplaces do not have to be accredited by the NZQA to offer training, assessments must be carried out by an assessor who has been registered by their NSB.

- All quality systems put in place by providers or NSBs are subject to audit by the NZQA or a delegated agent.

THE POLYTECHNIC SECTOR

The 25 polytechnics have 52000 EFTS (31000 EFTS are in seven of these institutions). The polytechnics act collectively through the Association of Polytechnics of New Zealand. (APNZ) Under the 1990 Education Amendment Act, the NZQA is expected "to promote and monitor inter-institutional course approval and moderation procedures" (function (j), above). The New Zealand Polytechnic Programmes Committee (NZPPC) was established by the APNZ in 1991 to act, under delegated authority from the NZQA, as the quality assurance body for the polytechnic system. (APNZ, 1993) Despite its responsibility to promote such developments, and its overt commitment to the virtues of decentralisation and delegation, in practice the NZQA showed itself to be quite reluctant to recognise and authorise the NZPPC in this way, and only did so under pressure from
various directions. In 1993, the NZQA delegated to the NZPPC responsibility for approval of unit standards in polytechnics, and for accreditation of polytechnic providers up to the level of fields. For the future, the NZPPC wishes to work towards a system of institutional accreditation in the polytechnics, but at present the NZQA retains the responsibility for the approval of courses that are recognised nationally, and will audit the work of the NZPPC.

The NZPPC is permitted to approve local courses, — i.e., those available at a single polytechnic and not registered on the NQF — but the individual polytechnics tend not to request this. In fact, any provider can offer a local course. At present, it can also have it approved and accredited by the NZQA or one of its agents although this option may not be maintained. This gives the course more standing in the local community, even though it is not entered on the NQF, is hence not a national course, and hence not automatically transferable to or creditable towards other qualifications.

Until recently, polytechnics offered only sub-degree level courses, but are now introducing degree courses. Degree courses must still be approved by the NZQA, which uses the standard procedure of reception of a submission from the institution, establishment of an evaluation panel, a panel visit to the institution, and panel report and recommendation, possibly with conditions. The precise implementation of this process is currently being revised for 1995, but the panel has always contained university academics endorsed by the CIAP (see below) on behalf of the NZVCC, non-university academics, relevant representatives of industry, and NZQA staff. (NZQA, Apr. 1993)

The term degree is defined in the 1990 Education Amendment Act as an award recognising the completion of a course of advanced learning that

• is taught mainly by people engaged in research, and

• emphasises general principles and basic knowledge as the basis for self-directed work and learning.

It has therefore been necessary for the NZQA to define research in the context of its approval of degree courses in polytechnics. Its definition is under development, but the current thinking is that it includes basic, strategic and applied research, scholarship by which is not meant simply keeping abreast of one’s discipline, and creative work; and, under certain circumstances, consultancy and professional practice.

Again there is a logical but intricate situation, with changing inter-relationships among the various bodies and agencies. In addition to their specific interactions, the polytechnics share with the whole tertiary sector the need to produce charters, statements of objectives, etc., and negotiate them with the Ministry of Education and the Audit Office. Joint courses across sectors need joint consideration, which may involve the NZVCC, NZPPC and NZQA.

Furthermore, a significant problem is arising from the ‘user pays’ emphasis. The emphasis in the introduction of polytechnic courses has changed, from polytechnics taking the initiative in launching courses they believe are applicable and useful, to their waiting for ITOs to decide what they want and to commission (and pay) the polytechnics to provide them. At this early stage of the development of the new style of operation, the ITOs are being so slow in doing this that it is creating two sets of problems for the polytechnics. One is that they do not know what income they can assume and plan on, and the other is that they are being given unrealistically short lead times for course development to meet the specified needs.
THE NEW ZEALAND VICE-CHANCELLORS’ COMMITTEE (NZVCC)

The 1990 Education Amendment Act also re-established the NZVCC, which had been originally established under the Universities Act of 1961. Its functions include:

- to set up inter-university course approval and moderation procedures;
- to exercise in relation to universities ... the powers of the Qualifications Authority [to approve courses and to accredit institutions to provide them]...;
- to make recommendations to the Qualifications Authority on criteria for entrance to universities....

It will be noticed that function (a) interlocks with function (j) of the NZQA (above). It was clearly expected that the NZQA would not itself, in the long term, carry out such procedures. The universities have been explicitly given the responsibility for this task in their sector, while the NZQA is expected to encourage analogous developments in the other sectors. The sole example at present is the NZPPC (see above), although the five colleges of education are developing a corresponding body through their NZ Council for Teacher Education. The pattern that is developing, therefore, is of separate bodies with responsibility for course approval and accreditation in the various sectors of tertiary education, each of which must be consulted by the NZQA on the policies and criteria it should establish for approval and accreditation. Each of these sectoral bodies must then apply the relevant criteria established by the NZQA. In the non-university sectors, the NZQA delegates the powers of approval and accreditation, while in the university sector, the NZVCC has these powers by virtue of the legislation.

The criteria that the NZQA has developed for the approval and accreditation of courses of study are as follows:

- The acceptability of the proposed course to the relevant academic, industrial, professional and other communities, in terms of its stated objectives, nomenclature, content and structure.
- The adequacy and appropriateness of the regulations that specify requirements for admission, credit for previous study, recognition of prior learning, course structure, assessment procedures and the normal progression.
- The availability of appropriate academic staffing, teaching and research facilities, and support services.
- The adequacy of the means of ensuring that assessment and appeals procedures are appropriate, given the stated objectives, and fair.
- The adequacy of the provision for monitoring course standards and quality, for reviewing course regulations and content, and for determining whether the course shall continue to be offered (NZQA, Apr. 1993).

COMMITTEE ON UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES (CUAP)

To carry out its course approval and accreditation functions under the 1990 Education Amendment Act, the NZVCC set up the CUAP, together with a sub-committee on university entrance. (see NZVCC function (e), above) It should be noted, however, that the committee was not a new departure for the New Zealand universities, but instead
continued the work of a joint Curriculum Committee that had existed for many years prior to 1990. The CUAP acts for the NZVCC in consulting with the NZQA on policies and criteria for the approval of courses of study and accreditation, and carries out those functions for the NZVCC. The CUAP has one representative from each university, together with a polytechnics representative and a colleges of education representative, and all university proposals for new degree courses must be put to and approved by the committee before they can be introduced. (NZVCC, 1993)

In addition to this specific responsibility, the CUAP acts more generally at the interface between the NZVCC and the NZQA. Three of its members represent the NZVCC on the Joint Consultative Group (JCG) between the NZVCC and the NZQA, which was established in 1991 as a forum for consultation on matters of mutual interest and shared responsibility. These include, for example, the relation of university qualifications to the NQF and the transfer of credit to and from university qualifications.

The NZVCC's interpretation of the relevant sections of the 1990 Education Amendment Act (see function (a) of the NZVCC, above) is that it does not confer on the NZQA any standards-setting power, nor therefore the power to establish groups (like NSBs) that have such a role. The NZVCC also maintains that university courses are not an integral part of the NQF, but through the JCG has developed a set of common principles and procedures designed to associate the universities with the NQF's intended purpose. The principles include 'up skilling', recognition of prior learning, credit transfer, international comparability, and the Treaty of Waitangi. The procedures include:

- the provision of statements about the purpose and objectives of university courses, their entry criteria, their content, and the assessment of students who undertake them;
- the provision of information about the courses, including arrangements for granting exemption or offering credit; and
- the monitoring of the quality of university courses by a variety of measures internal and external to the individual universities.

ACADEMIC AUDIT UNIT (AAU)

Notwithstanding the range of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms and agencies, the universities decided to establish an Academic Audit Unit, with the following terms of reference:

- To consider and review the universities' mechanisms for monitoring and enhancing the academic quality and standards which are necessary for achieving their stated aims and objectives.
- To comment on the extent to which procedures in place in individual universities are applied effectively.
- To comment on the extent to which procedures in place in individual universities reflect good practice in maintaining quality.
- To identify and commend to universities good practice in regard to the maintenance and enhancement of academic standards at national level.

In fulfilling these terms of reference, the AAU will be expected to focus on:

- Mechanisms of quality assurance in the design, monitoring and evaluation of courses and programmes of study for degrees and other qualifications.
• Mechanisms for quality assurance in teaching, learning and assessment.
• Mechanisms for quality assurance in relation to the appointment and performance of academic staff.
• Mechanisms for taking account of the views in respect of academic matters of students, of external examiners, of professional bodies, and of employers.
• Mechanisms for quality assurance in research, more especially, but not exclusively, in the context of its relationship with university teaching. (AAU, 1993)

The first four of these foci are essentially derived from those of the UK’s Division of Quality Audit, while the fifth was included because of the interdependence of research and teaching specified in the 1990 Education Amendment Act as being one characteristic of a university, and to encourage the universities to report on their success in obtaining research funds, and their use of them.

The AAU will be funded jointly by the universities, but it has its own Advisory Board, and is independent of both the universities individually and the NZVCC itself. Its accountability is to the public, and its audit reports will be public documents, with the concomitant pressure on the universities to take very seriously any flaws in their mechanisms that are identified.

There were several reasons that led the universities to establish yet another external quality body. One is that the government, through the Minister of Education, has expressed the view that the quality of academic performance of the universities is not sufficiently transparent to external constituencies; a second reason is the universities’ recognition that the perceived quality of their programmes and qualifications is an important element of competitive advantage; thirdly, the universities are concerned to protect legitimate academic autonomy in their operations; and fourthly, although the CUAP is intended to address both approval and accreditation, and its procedures are extremely rigorous, it is a committee of the NZVCC, not independent therefrom. It was deemed appropriate to have an independent external body commenting on the universities’ quality mechanisms, both because this is becoming accepted practice worldwide, and because this is the situation that obtains for other degree-granting institutions in NZ through the NZQA.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

Distance education in New Zealand is provided principally by Massey University and the Open Polytechnic, although open and distance learning techniques are being used by an increasing number of tertiary providers. (Cauchi, 1993)

Massey University is among the largest dual mode providers of distance education in the world. By that is meant that it has a major presence in both distance and conventional internal teaching. Furthermore, Massey has emphasised the integration of the two modes, and treats distance students as comprising an extension of the internal class, so that all students are subject to the same quality of teaching and research scholarship. For their part, all academic staff are expected to develop and implement courses in both modes. So, the person who produces the study guides, conducts the on-campus course, marks the assignments and answers the letters, also marks the examination scripts, as well as carrying out research and publishing in his or her field. Furthermore, almost all academics are course controllers, i.e. are responsible for at least one extramural course.
The Centre for Extramural Studies provides academic staff with a wide range of administrative, advisory and production services, and provides extramural students with an administrative point of focus. (Pech, 1993)

External quality procedures for Massey are those pertaining to the university sector. Its new courses are submitted to CUAP for approval and in future it will be reviewed by the Academic Audit Unit. The unit will give special consideration to a university's provisions for ensuring the quality of all off-campus education, whether distance, joint, franchised or off-shore.

The Open Polytechnic is part of the polytechnic sector, and hence the above remarks on polytechnics and their courses apply. It was set up to provide a 'safety net' for the nation, and traditionally has provided the courses that were uneconomical for other providers to offer because of small numbers of students. Changes in the funding regime introduced by the government in recent years have undercut this, and it is now in the untenable position of having 70% of its courses bringing in only 10% of its revenue. (Open Polytechnic, 1993a) It aims to be flexible and responsive, and look for new markets. The polytechnic aims also to be an educational training and brokerage agency, a 'first stop shop', responding to training opportunities with services, materials and information to and from educational agencies and providers, national and international. (Open Polytechnic, 1993b) It introduced its first degree course (BBus) in 1993.

Much of the polytechnic's quality assurance revolves around its close client orientation. It works with industry or a company to anticipate needs, and to develop material with consistent standards to meet those needs, involving industry in all course development and evaluation. The polytechnic respects the fact that many industries want to do their own teaching and assessment, and can provide validation services so that employees being trained in companies that use Open Polytechnic resources as a base can obtain credit for unit standards registered on the NQF.

The polytechnic is, of course, also subject to the same quality review procedures as the other polytechnics through the NZQA and NZPPC. However, there is some concern that the special characteristics of distance learning institutions are not always appreciated by review panels (Cauchli, 1994), and it will be necessary to ensure that approval and accreditation procedures are developed in an appropriate fashion to do justice to the Open Polytechnic and other distance learning providers.

SOME TENSIONS

The above description is, as foreshadowed, one of a system in flux. There are definite decisions and directions, but there are also issues that are still subject to discussion and negotiation, and there are some basic differences of principle and philosophy that will not easily be reconciled. Some of these are summarised below.

One issue is the separation of the definition of unit standards by one body from their delivery by others, which raises significant concerns about the coherence of the resulting learning experience. The required skills and knowledge and associated performance criteria given in the unit standard act like coat pegs on which providers are required to hang their content, teaching and assessment procedures, whereas the integration of the two stages is critical for achieving a coherent programme. (Hall, 1994)
This approach may be appropriate at the more mechanical level of training, where the desired outcomes can be both specified and measured very precisely, but is less appropriate for broader developmental education. At all levels of education, the expectations, requirements and assessment of a course should be spelled out to students in advance, and this should be done more clearly and precisely than is often the case at present. However, for degree and possibly other courses, the actual way in which courses and units are developed and fleshed out may mean that such specification should be included as part of the course outline and delivery, rather than forming part of prior registration requirements. (Some would argue that one should not distinguish between training and education in this way, and contend that the two stage approach is inappropriate in most learning activities.)

There is an unanswered question as to whether it is feasible in terms of time, cost and ability to develop and register unit standards across the whole secondary and post-compulsory sweep of education, to update these as necessary, and to achieve consistency across thousands of unit standards and hundreds of providers. (Doyle, 1994) The cost of failure would be disaster for the NZ education system.

There is also a concern that the focus on competence may deter aspirations to excellence.

The NZQA has statutory authority to ‘oversee the setting of standards for qualifications’, but it is not certain that it has the power to set standards, nor to set up other groups (NSBs) that have this power.

Providers, such as polytechnics, are concerned that their autonomy in the identification, development and introduction of new courses is compromised because they are not permitted to register unit standards or qualifications on the NQF.

Units that form part of different qualifications may be cross-credited. However, although flexible credit accumulation and transfer procedures are highly desirable, there appears to be no system for marking a unit as having been ‘used’ in achieving a qualification, leading to fears of a high level of ‘double dipping’; perhaps, in an extreme situation, permitting two or more qualifications to be obtained for completing the same set of unit standards. The NZQA intends to monitor this by specifying an upper limit of repeat credit within a qualification (perhaps 50%), and refusing to register multiple names for the same programme of work.

CONCLUSION

There is significant interest in many parts of the tertiary sector and related arms of government in the forthcoming impact of the newest player on the scene, namely the AAU. It will be some years before the whole picture of quality assurance in New Zealand higher education settles down into a firm pattern.

Glossary of Acronyms

AAU Academic Audit Unit
APNZ Association of Polytechnics of New Zealand
CEO Chief Executive Officer
CRI Crown Research Institute
CUAP Committee on University Academic Programmes
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>EFTS</td>
<td>Equivalent Full-Time Student</td>
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<tr>
<td>GI</td>
<td>Government Institution</td>
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<td>GTE</td>
<td>Government Training Establishment</td>
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<td>ITO</td>
<td>Industry Training Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>JCS</td>
<td>Joint Consultative Group</td>
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<td>MoE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>NSB</td>
<td>National Standards Body</td>
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<td>NQF</td>
<td>National Qualifications Framework</td>
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<td>NZPPC</td>
<td>New Zealand Polytechnics Programmes Committee</td>
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<td>NZQA</td>
<td>New Zealand Qualifications Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>NZVCC</td>
<td>New Zealand Vice Chancellors Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>PTE</td>
<td>Private Training Establishment</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOE</td>
<td>State Owned Enterprise</td>
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<td>SOI</td>
<td>State Owned Institution</td>
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<td>TQM</td>
<td>Total Quality Management</td>
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References


QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: 
ISSUES AND TECHNIQUES

Implications of the Australian, Canadian and European Initiatives for the Indian Distance 
Education System

Prakash M Deshpande

INTRODUCTION

The Indian higher education system comprises 210 conventional universities and seven 
single-mode open universities. The conventional universities have more than a hundred 
years of tradition and many have international recognition as centres of excellence in 
specific disciplines. The University Grants Commission is the apex body for the 
conventional universities. One of the open universities — the Indira Gandhi National 
Open University — operates at the national level in the sense that students from all parts 
of India can enrol for the IGNOU programmes. In addition to being a teaching and 
research university, the IGNOU also functions as the apex body for the open and 
distance education activity in the country.

As the body representing the apex function of the IGNOU, the Distance Education 
Council (DEC) has three major responsibilities:

- To promote distance and open education activity in the country.
- To co-ordinate the distance and open education activity in the country.
- To ensure that high standards are maintained in the educational provision made by 
the distance and open education system in the country.

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6 Prakash M Deshpande is Director of the Distance Education Council in India.

7 These seven universities are:
- Dr B. R. Ambedkar Open University (1982), Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh
- Indira Gandhi National Open University (1985), N.Delhi
- Kota Open University (1987), Kota, Rajasthan
- Nalanda Open University (1988), Nalanda, Bihar
- Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (1989), Nashik, 
  Maharashtra
- M.P.Bhoj Open University (1992), Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh
- Ambedkar Open University (1994), Ahmedabad, Gujarat
Since its establishment, the DEC has launched a number of activities to give effect to its mandate. In order to promote distance education, the DEC has made grants to the state open universities and has also taken initiative in starting IGNOU study centres in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The DEC has initiated activity in credit transfer and common grading patterns in order to achieve co-ordination in the country's distance education system. In addition, the DEC has made grants to enable state open universities to use the materials produced by other open universities. Similarly, a central database, with nodes in the state open universities, will facilitate co-ordination by making available a dependable body of information on the distance and open education system in the country.

In order to start a process by which awareness of the need to maintain high standards in the distance and open education system can evolve, the DEC has taken a number of steps. Some of these are:

- Funding to support staff training and development activity in the state open universities.
- Funding to computerise certain crucial operations in the state open universities.
- Funding to establish desktop publishing systems in the state open universities.
- Grants to the staff of the state open universities to attend academic activities in India and abroad.
- Grants to the staff of the state open universities to publish important research work.
- Funding to establish audio-visual production facilities in the state open universities.
- Launching of validation and quality assurance activities in the open universities in the country.
- Institution of research fellowships in distance education.
- Launching of the COL/DEC, India Quality Assurance and Credit Transfer Project

**COL/DEC INDIA QUALITY ASSURANCE AND CREDIT TRANSFERS PROJECT**

The Indian distance education scene at the higher education level consists of seven single-mode open universities and about 42 correspondence/distance education units in the conventional universities. This complex and multi-faceted system, in which each component is, by law, academically and functionally autonomous, presents four major challenges:

- The assurance of quality in the educational provision made by each of the institutions.
- The acceptance of the quality of the educational provision of institution by the others.
- The assurance of flexibility with regard to the movement of students across institutions.
- The development of credibility with regard to the educational provision made through the distance and open education modes.
In order to address these and related issues, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and the DEC agreed to set up a COL/DEC, India Quality Assurance and Credit Transfer Project.

The first stage in this project was the visit of the Senior Consultant from the Commonwealth of Learning in February, 1993.

The second stage was the development of a technical paper surveying programme and course validation procedures used in various parts of the world and bringing out their implications for a similar activity in India. This paper was used as a basis to start pilot validation exercises in the state open universities.

As the next development, two consultants from the UKOU visited India in May, 1993.

In November-December, 1993, a three-member delegation from India, representing the open university as well as the correspondence institute sector in the country, visited higher education institutions in Australia, Canada and the U.K.

In February, 1994 the Senior Consultant, COL visited India to plan future activities. These plans have now been finalised and the activities will consist of:

- A publication on quality assurance activity in Australia, India, and the U.K.
- Two videos documenting major features of the quality assurance activity in Australia, Canada, the U.K. and India.
- A set of training materials on quality assurance procedures in distance and open education.
- A documentation centre on quality assurance.
- A series of round-tables and training workshops preliminary to the launching of quality assurance activities in the Indian open universities.
- Launching of quality assurance projects in the open universities and in select correspondence courses institutes in India.
- Dissemination of these activities to certain other countries in the Commonwealth.

VISIT OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION

The Indian Delegation visited the following higher education institutions:

Australia: Deakin University in Melbourne and Geelong, University of South Australia in Adelaide, the Open Learning Agency of Australia at Monash University in Melbourne, and University of Queensland at St Lucia, Brisbane.

Canada: University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, the Open Learning Agency of British Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Learning.

U.K.: The Open University Validation Services in London, The Quality Support Centre, Higher Education Quality Council, the U.K. Open University in Milton Keynes, Havering College, the University of Greenwich, and the International Centre for Distance Learning.
MAIN OBSERVATIONS OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION

Quality in Education is a Universal Concern

The Indian Delegation was gratified to find that the Indian pursuit of quality assurance in education is consistent with an almost universal trend.

Australia

Official concern for quality assurance has been very prominent in Australia, particularly since October 1991 when the Government published a paper called *Higher Education: Quality and Diversity in the 1990s*. In quality terms, the principal purposes of the Australian universities are said to be:

- the education of appropriately qualified Australians to enable them to take leadership in the intellectual, cultural and economic and social development of the nation and its regions;
- the creation and advancement of knowledge; and
- the application of knowledge and discoveries to the betterment of communities in Australia and overseas.

So far as the definition of *quality* is concerned, the Australian scene generally accepts that "*quality* is based on judgements and judgements sometimes rely on ill-defined evidence." (Higher Education Council, 1992) Despite this, it is accepted that there is a basic set of characteristics of a quality programme "that it is internationally recognised, is competitive in attracting participants to it, and that it satisfies learners' needs."

Although emphasis is placed on *outcomes* as characteristics of quality, the importance of latency and unpredictability is also taken into consideration — and graduates are seen as *time bombs* programmed to go off unexpectedly in the future and to act as engines of change.

Canada

In Canada, higher education is called post-secondary education when the reference is not limited to the university system. Nearly all university-level institutions are public institutions in that their establishment derives from an act of the provincial legislature and they receive most of their funds from the government of the province. Attention to quality appears to have been motivated by:

- under-representation of the disadvantaged groups (Native peoples, francophones, women, the disabled, certain minorities);
- inadequate opportunities to part time students;
- weakness in liberal and general education; and
- absence of effective co-ordination and linkages between colleges and universities.

An important publication brought out by the Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education considers that improving the relationship between higher education and other parts of the society is a major motivation. (Naudeau, 1992) In other words, Canadians seem to place a great deal of emphasis on improving communication, both within the institutions, between the institutions and between the institutions and the social milieu. There is increasing demand for indicators of quality and excellence to prevent institutions from merely making pronouncements and declarations of intentions.
The United Kingdom

In the UK, the Further and Higher Education Act, 1992, not only led to the creation of new universities (England now has 74, Scotland 12, Wales two, and Northern Ireland two) but also to greater and more deliberate attention to assessment and assurance of quality.

The Higher Education Quality Council (HiQc) came into existence in May 1992 as a result of the Government White Paper Higher Education — A New Framework. The HEQC functions as a quality audit unit for UK higher education, it is a company limited by guarantee and owned by the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals, the Conference of Scottish Centrally Funded Colleges and the Standing Conference of Principals.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is, by statute, required to secure that provision is made for assessing the quality of education. The objectives of quality assessment are:

- to assess the quality of teaching and learning;
- to produce reports on the assessments which will be published; and
- to advise the HEFCE on the quality of provision so that quality can be taken into account in funding institutions. The areas on which the assessments were based in eight pilot projects were:
  - aims and the curricula
  - academic management and quality control
  - resources
  - staff development
  - the quality of teaching and the standard of students' work
  - nature of student intake, support systems and progression.

Wales has a Quality Assessment Division as an organ of the Welsh Funding Council and it started a substantive programme of assessments in April 1993.

Scotland has a Directorate of Quality Assessment under the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council.

Europe

The European Commission (EC) issued in 1991 an EC memorandum on higher education and is mounting a pilot series of quality assessments within EC member states.

The Netherlands

A joint study to develop a valid, reliable and efficient method for comparisons of quality across higher education systems in several European Countries compared courses in economics in Germany, the Netherlands and the U.K. (Brennan, 1992)

Another study supported by the Ministry of Education and Science compared chemical, civil and mechanical engineering programmes in the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany and Switzerland. This study used five qualitative features as the basis for comparison:

- the course and programme pre-requisites, including entry and selection processes;
- the balance of theoretical and applied content in the programmes;
the depth and breadth of programmes and their component parts;
the way in which programmes achieved engineering integration and synthesis; and
the expected academic and industrial competency of graduates.

The comparisons were made through peer reviews, supported by an extensive data
collection procedure. (Goedegebuure, 1993)

Sweden

The National Swedish Board of University and Colleges conducted a study which
examined programmes in business administration and economics in Finland, France,
Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The purpose of the study was to
gain an insight into the nature, level and quality of Swedish business administration and
economics studies in relation to similar programmes operated at some of the leading
educational establishments in Europe. (National Swedish Board, 1992)

A report conducted by the University of Twente contains brief descriptions of the quality
assurance arrangements currently in place in each of the member states of the EC. The
report relies heavily on the quality assurance bodies in three countries: the Comité
National d’Evaluation in France, the Council of the Higher Vocational Institutions in the
Netherlands, and the Council for National Academic Awards and the Vice Chancellors
Academic Audit Unit in the U.K. (Vught and Westerheijden, 1992)

Why is Quality Important?

There seems little doubt that although universities have always been implicitly
considered repositories of high scholarship and excellence of academic pursuits, overt
concern for quality is a recent phenomenon. Discussions with various senior academics
and a study of available materials from the institutions visited by the Indian Delegation
revealed the following to be the major reasons:

Student Decision Making

In a competitive environment, institutions can only attract students if their image projects
a commitment on the part of the institutions to offer the best that is available. A report of
a study conducted in Britain concludes by identifying two underlying problems:
• the preparation of students for higher education is inadequate and inconsistent; and
• the experience within higher education for students could be improved with more
training for the staff in both teaching and management skills, and a greater focus on
the needs of the students as consumers. (Roberts and Higgins, 1992)

Government Concern

There is a universal phenomenon of the government bodies responsible for funding
requiring the universities to demonstrate their commitment to quality in their educational
provision.

AUSTRALIA

In Australia, a policy statement released in October 1991, Higher Education: Quality and
Diversity in the 1990s, set directions for the development of Australia’s higher education
system through the 1990s as a foundation for the country’s social, economic and cultural
development in the twenty-first century. The statement pointed to the need for credible
quality assurance arrangements in Australian higher education and proposed that about 20% of the operating grants (A$70 million annually) will be devoted to quality assurance and enhancement programmes. This is often referred to in Australia as *quality money* for which universities are encouraged to compete. However, the decision to compete or not is left to the universities. The Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, which has an advisory function, uses a process that places significant responsibility on the institutions:

- They may choose whether to participate.
- The procedure is reliant on self-evaluation.
- The institutions are expected to determine for themselves what evidence to present to demonstrate the effectiveness of their relevant policies and practices and the quality of their outcomes and there are no prescriptive guidelines on the content of portfolios.
- The context for the review relates to the institutional mission and objectives set by the institutions themselves.
- There is a focus on outcomes as well as the process.

**THE NETHERLANDS**

The Dutch government, out of concern about the quality of graduates being produced by the Dutch higher education system, supported important studies to compare the quality of its graduates with those produced by some other European Countries.

**THE UNITED KINGDOM**

The UK Further and Higher Education Act, 1992, places a statutory obligation that provision are made for assessing the quality of education provided in institutions for whose activities they provide financial support. The objectives of the quality assessment are:

- to assess the quality of teaching and learning;
- to produce reports on the assessment, which will be published; and
- to provide advice on the quality of provision so that quality can be taken into account in the funding of institutions.

Similarly a White Paper of the British government issued in 1991 proposed that institutions should establish a quality audit unit and accordingly, in May 1992, the Higher Education Quality Council came into existence.

**Public Accountability**

An influential paper written by a member of Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Australia proposes the following reasons for the current attention to quality:

- Public concern about the level of government expenditure.
- Questioning about levels of spending on higher education and levels of participation.
- Unprecedented increase in participation in schooling beyond the compulsory years.
- A rise in the expectations of the community about educational destinations.

*(Bradley, 1991)*
**Value Shift**

In many cultures, education in general and higher education in particular is losing the traditional aura attached to it and the resultant demystification has generated an expectation that educational institutions, like any other forms of service, should be answerable to the society which support them. In most European countries, there is a growing expectation that institutions demonstrate the *extrinsic value* of higher education; i.e., its services to the rest of society. Higher education institutions are increasingly confronted with the need to show their relevance, quality and accountability to society. (Vught and Westerheijden, 1992)

A similar finding appears in a Canadian study. The study lists 28 uses for quality indicators and the common theme is improving the relationship between higher education and other parts of society. Use No. 21 is “Responding objectively and scientifically to calls for quality and excellence from within and without.” The authors note that:

Calls for quality and excellence have origins within the institution whether coming from students, faculty, administrators, or service personnel. They also come from alumni, interest groups, the community, the media and governmental bodies, in many ways, shapes and forms. Responding with well-founded alternatives to alleged wrongful characteristics, with evidence anchored to quality and excellence indicators related to specific mission and objectives may be the most appropriate route to take for institutions who ... pride themselves on reason, scientific methodology, truth and the conscience of society. (Naudéau, 1992)

A study reporting on the work of an OECD group puts the situation admirably:

Turbulence in the system with change following change in implementing government policies — delegation of increased responsibility to the institutions, together with the requirement for more obvious public accountability. (Bethel, 1993)

**TECHNIQUES TO MANAGE AND ASSURE QUALITY**

**Institutional Structures: “Meta-Level” Agent**

The most elaborate and well developed structures for quality assurance can be found in the UK. As a result of the changes which have occurred because of the implementation of the Further and Higher Education Act, 1992, new arrangements have come up for the assessment and assurance of quality. Two parallel processes have emerged: quality assessment, which is the responsibility of the funding councils, and quality audit, which is the collective responsibility of institutions. Quality assessment is concerned with the quality of educational provision and the standard of students’ performance, quality audit is concerned with the mechanisms and structures which individual institutions of higher education have in place to assure themselves of the quality of their educational provision.
UK Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC)

Quality audit, as described above, is in the UK the responsibility of the HEQC. The HEQC has three divisions:

**HEQC Division of Quality Audit (DQA)**

This division consists of a directorate and about 60 part-time auditors. The function of the DQA is to carry out quality audit at the institutional level, throughout higher education in the UK. It is essentially concerned with processes, procedures and their operation and is not involved in any assessment or evaluation of the validity of objectives or of the appropriateness of outcomes. The audit process consists of three parts: the provision of briefing documentation, a visit and a subsequent report. The auditors scrutinise the five main areas of primary concern to the division:

- quality assurance in the design, monitoring and evaluation of courses and degree programmes;
- quality assurance in teaching, learning and communication methods;
- quality assurance in student assessment and degree classification;
- quality assurance in relation to academic staff; and
- verification and feedback mechanisms which take account of external examiners' reports, students' views on courses, and the views of external bodies such as professional accrediting bodies and employers.

Validation by universities of courses at 'associated' institutions is a separate audit exercise.

**HEQC Division of Quality Enhancement (DQE)**

The DQE is the intelligence arm of the HEQC, gathering, analysing and disseminating information. The DQE's main activities are:

- gathering from a range of sources information which bears on quality, analysing and evaluating this information and circulating the outcomes to institutions;
- commissioning and conducting projects, reports, conferences and workshops devoted to quality enhancement, either independently or in collaboration with other interested parties;
- acting as a catalyst for discussion focusing upon quality enhancement theory and practice;
- working, where appropriate, with institutions on an individual basis;
- working with other organisations committed to the advancement of quality;
- developing a national and international compendium of knowledge about quality-related matters both within and beyond higher education; and
- contributing to the development of national policy on quality in higher education.

**HEQC Division of Credit and Access (DCA)**

The DCA has been established by the HEQC in recognition of the need for the assurance of the quality of access arrangements and the credit ratings made by institutions of learning achieved both within and outside conventional settings. The main activities of the DCA are:
• assisting higher education institutions in the development of credit and access-related activities e.g. institutional CAT schemes, access programmes, assessment of prior experiential learning (APEL), etc.;

• Identifying obstacles to the development of a system of portable credits as a significant feature of higher education provision and finding ways of overcoming them;

• liaising and working with appropriate bodies in developing ways in which portable credits in other sectors of education, particularly vocational education and training and 16-19 provision, can interlock with the CAT schemes in higher education;

• identifying, developing and implementing strategies for more effective marketing of portable credits to students, employers and institutions; and

• maintaining and developing the national framework for recognition of access courses e.g. database development, review of Authorised Validating Agencies (AVAs), support for the Standing Conference of AVAs.

Quality Support Centre

In the UK, this centre is attached to the Open University. The Quality Support Centre (QSC) exists to support the maintenance and enhancement of quality in higher education. It has been created by the Open University out of the research, development and information services of the Council for National Academic Awards.

QSC is an independent source of information and advice on quality assurance and assessment in higher education. It provides services to higher education institutions and to quality assurance and assessment agencies in the UK and internationally. Services will include:

• conferences, seminars and workshops;

• development projects;

• consultancy; and

• publications (including CNAA publications).

Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Australia.

This nine member committee is appointed by the Australian Higher Education Minister. The committee’s principal task is to conduct quality reviews of higher education institutions according to a quality review cycle. To assist in this task the committee forms a number of review teams. The committees approach is based on the following five issues:

• What quality assurance policies and practices does the institution have in place or is developing?

• How effective are these?

• How does the institution judge the quality of its outcomes?

• In what areas and in what ways are the outcomes excellent?

• What are the institution’s priorities for improvement?
A Conceptual Distinction Between Quality Audit, Quality Assessment and Quality Control

One of the most difficult problems in quality management and in assessing quality is how to strike a balance between external or off-board evaluators and internal or on-board evaluators. The current situation enjoys the benefit of nearly four decades of thinking in this regard, including the various conflicting approaches about whether attention should be given only to the output or whether both the inputs and the throughput should be taken into consideration. The current thinking appears to favour a distinction between Quality Audit and Quality Assessment. Quality Review usually appears to combine these features.

Quality Audit

The main features of Quality Audit procedures are:
- They operate at the institutional, rather than course/programme, level.
- They are concerned with processes, procedures and their operation.
- They are not concerned with any assessment or evaluation of the objectives or with the appropriateness of the outcomes.

An Australian government report recommends a national system of quality assurance based on the twin-pillars of self-assessment and external audit. (National Board of Employment and Training, 1992)

The UK Higher Education Council Division of Quality Audit examines the following aspects of an institution’s working:
- quality assurance in the design, monitoring and evaluation of courses and degree programmes;
- quality assurance in teaching, learning and communication methods;
- quality assurance in student assessment and degree classification;
- quality assurance in relation to academic staff; and
- verification and feedback mechanisms which take account of external examiners' reports, students' views on courses, and the views of external bodies such as professional accrediting bodies and employers.

Quality Audit Case Study: UK Open University Academic Audit

The UKOU subjected itself to an audit of its academic activity in June 1992. They invited the then CvCP Academic Audit Unit to undertake such an audit. The prominent features of this audit were:
- Examination of briefing documents specially created by the UKOU for audit purposes.
- Meetings with the staff and the students.
- Identification of major themes for the audit. A major theme was the relationship between the regional framework and the UKOU's central academic planning.
- Identification of the UKOU's quality assurance mechanisms, particularly with regard to programme design, teaching/learning process, communication, innovative teaching methods, academic staff feedback systems and external validation.
Quality Assessment

As the term is used in the UK, *Quality Assessment* is the responsibility of the funding agencies. The aim is to assess the social relevance of the institution’s programmes and the worth of its products in terms of societal goal. The objectives of quality assessment in England are:

- to assess the quality of teaching and learning;
- to produce reports on the assessments which will be published; and
- to advise the HEFCE on the quality of provision so that quality can be taken into account in the funding of institutions.

Similarly the objectives of quality assurance in Scotland are:

- to assess the quality of educational provision and the standard of students’ performance;
- to analyse the findings of quality assessment in order to monitor trends in the general level of quality of provision and its relationship to course provision;
- to produce brief reports that would identify strengths and weaknesses, promote good practice, and stimulate necessary improvements;
- to advise SHEFC on the relative quality of provision in institutions;
- to monitor the implementation of recommendations in earlier reports and encourage progressive improvement by a programme of revisiting;
- to form the basis of advice to SHEFC on the promotion and maintenance of quality through innovations and developments in the curriculum, teaching, and student assessment practice; and
- to inform customers such as students and employers on the quality of educational provision on offer, thereby promoting competition and choice.

THE QUALITY ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

The following elements of an institution’s educational provision are examined:

- aims and curricula;
- curriculum design and review;
- the teaching and learning environment;
- staff resources;
- learning resources;
- course organisation;
- teaching and learning practice;
- student support;
- assessment and monitoring;
- students’ work;
- teaching and learning output and outcomes; and
- quality control.
THE PROCESS OF ASSESSMENT

Generally the process consists of the following:

- an assessment team is formed;
- the team scrutinises the documentation supplied by the institution. The documentation includes the institution's self-assessment. In doing this, an institution ranks its courses on a three-point scale as excellent, satisfactory or unsatisfactory; and
- the team visits those institutions claiming excellence and also those who, in the opinion of the team, need to be visited in the light of the documentation provided.

Quality Control

As applied to the functioning of universities, quality control is an operational function applied at all levels by an institution to its teaching activities and is concerned with the way these are organised, undertaken, and evaluated in order to ensure fitness for purpose, an optimised use of resources and the achievement of their identified goals.

The Portfolio Technique

Development of appropriate documents appears to be a common requirement for any quality audit or assessment activity. The most elaborate documentation approach was found in Australia, where each institution wishing to claim part of what is called the quality audit, develops compact but information rich portfolios. To quote a memorandum from the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic) to the Dean and Heads of Schools at Deakin University:

The portfolio need not be very lengthy but should provide the basis for developing the university submission ... separate portfolios should be developed for each school .. (providing) a comprehensive document encapsulating the full range of activities by which the faculty achieves its own mission and that of the University.

School/Faculty Portfolios

Deakin requires schools and faculties to develop portfolios containing the following:

- statement of mission, objectives, faculty context;
- contribution of activities/programmes to realising mission and objectives;
- identification of current quality assurance and enhancement process and how data/information is obtained and used to inform decision making and enhance quality on an on-going basis;
- identification of high quality outcomes from processes used above.
- discussion of how teaching and learning address the range and mix of student groups (e.g., on campus, off campus, mature age, industry based, Koori students, students with disabilities);
- attributes of graduates which enable them to operate at international standard in their fields;
• identification of specific areas of high quality, especially those of national or international standard or significance (i.e., the 'jewels in the faculty crown'); and
• a plan concerning the on-going enhancement of quality in relation to teaching and learning.

Institutional Portfolios

The Australian Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education provides the following guidelines regarding institutional portfolios:
• Documentation should be as concise and relevant as possible.
• The portfolio and supporting evidence represent the institution’s claim for additional funds.
• The onus is on the institution to demonstrate quality, not on the committee to prove or disprove it.
• The portfolio should identify the institution’s relevant policies and practices and outline the institution’s own assessment of its performance and outcomes, within the context of its goals.
• The achievement of the goals will not in itself be persuasive unless it can be shown that the goals are consistent with the Statement of Purpose and Goals set for the higher education system as a whole.
• While the institution’s goals should be achievable, they should not necessarily be simple.

The portfolio should contain:
• a report of about 15 pages reviewing the quality assurance processes and excellence of outcomes and containing an outline of the institution’s context, including its mission, objectives, governance, organisational and management structures; and
• an appendix incorporating the data used by the institution to demonstrate the effectiveness of the quality assurance process, the quality of outcomes and lists of any supplementary documentation which could be made available to the Committee on request.

While examining the portfolios, the committee will consider the following points:
• What quality assurance policies and practices does the institution have in place or is developing?
• How effective are these?
• How does the institution judge the quality of its outcomes?
• In what areas and in what ways are the outcomes excellent?
• What are the institution’s priorities for improvement?

THE PEDAGOGY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

A major shift can be noticed in many institutions in Australia, Canada and the UK in the increased attention now being given to the pedagogy of higher education as a part of improving the quality of educational provision. The following are some concrete examples:
Department of Teaching Excellence at Deakin University is basically a unit which provides training and reorientation in the techniques of teaching at the higher education level as well as in curriculum development and better student assessment techniques.

Centre for University Teaching and Learning at the University of South Australia in Adelaide is concerned with focussing attention of university academics on the need to employ innovative teaching techniques.

The Academic Staff Innovations Unit at the Tertiary Education Institute at the University of Queensland is concerned with raising the standard of teaching at the university.

There also appears to be a growth in the number of studies and supplementary materials addressed to issues in teaching at the higher education level. Experiences of students in higher learning were documented by a study. (Roberts and Higgins, 1992) Similarly a package produced by the Standing Conference on Educational Development (SCED) contains a series of handbooks aimed at improving teaching competencies required at the higher education level. The areas handled are:

- improving student learning;
- supervising projects;
- being a personal tutor; and
- evaluating your teaching.

Another work identifies a set of principles for effective teaching in higher education:

- organising the content of undergraduate courses;
- electing teaching methods;
- assessing student learning; and
- evaluating the effectiveness of teaching. (Ramsden, 1992)

Teacher Accreditation

In order to promote a high standard of teaching in higher education, the UK Standing Conference on Education Development (SCED) has produced a The SCED Teacher Accreditation Handbook, May 1992 and The ISCED Teacher Accreditation Year Book Vol. I, Sept. 1992. These publications describe a new accreditation scheme for courses for lecturers in higher education. It will recognise those courses which require lecturers to demonstrate the following objectives:

- designing a teaching programme;
- use of a wide and appropriate range of teaching and learning methods;
- acting professionally in a personal-tutor role;
- use of wide range of assessment techniques;
- use of a wide range of monitoring and evaluation techniques;
- performance of teaching support and academic administration tasks;
development of coping strategies within the constraints/opportunities of their institutions; and

making a plan for their continuing professional development

In addition, courses will be required to demonstrate SCED values relating to:

• understanding how students learn;
• recognising individual differences in learning;
• concern for students’ development;
• commitment to scholarship;
• team working;
• practising equal opportunities; and
• continued reflection on professional practice.

Commitment to Innovation

An institution’s commitment to innovation is often considered an indication of the institution’s sincere effort to achieve quality. Gibbs (1992) provides accounts of a number of case studies of innovations introduced into courses to improve the quality of student learning.

Total Quality Management in Education

A discussion document prepared by a working party of the Engineering Professors’ Conference proposes a model of quality assurance for higher education for higher education influence by the Total Quality Management philosophy. It identifies four aspects of quality:

• structure;
• objectives;
• quality systems; and
• review/continuous improvement.

The paper goes on to distinguish four main elements of the structure of higher education:

• the control institution;
• academic units;
• support; and
• administrative services.

The approach consists of:

• setting up of objectives by the control institution;
• identification of a quality policy;
• specification of quality systems and procedures;
• matching of objectives with customer requirements; and
• the use of review and audit processes and reports as the feedback path. (Burge and Tannock, 1992)

Another publication starts by describing a quality assurance system as primarily a self-regulatory, self-improving well run management system. In BS 5750 the quality standards are set by the customers. (Freeman, 1993)

Yet another publication claims that much of the TQM philosophy corresponds with the best educational management in practice. The theme is that an understanding of quality derived from industry’s experience is applicable to education. The major aspects of a TQM system are: leadership, teamwork, quality improvement and strategic planning. (Sallis, 1992)

A report produced by ERIC emphasises the need for continuous quality improvement. It presents a checklist of criteria to be used in the assessment of the use of TQM in education:
• leadership;
• information and analysis;
• strategic quality planning;
• human resource development and management;
• management of process quality;
• quality and operational results; and
• beneficiaries’ satisfaction.

It is interesting to note the sub-questions framed under beneficiaries’ satisfaction:
• Who are our beneficiaries?
• How do we determine their consent and future requirements and expectations?
• How do we provide effective management of our relationships with beneficiaries?
• How do we use information gained from beneficiaries to improve management’s strategies and practices?
• What explicit commitments do we make to our beneficiaries?
• How do we determine beneficiaries’ satisfaction both in itself and relative to competitors and how do we improve our methods for determining satisfaction?
• What are our trends in beneficiaries’ satisfaction and key indicators of dissatisfaction?
• How do they compare with those of competitors?
• How do we determine our beneficiaries’ future requirements and expectations?

Regarding the academic staff the following questions are proposed:
• To what extent and in what ways are faculties comfortable treating students as beneficiaries?
• Is it feasible and useful to emphasise the improvement of quality and an orientation toward process in assessment, rather than an orientation toward accountability and outcomes?
• What would be the implications of relaxing departmental boundaries to encourage more serious examination of the multidisciplinary process of education as students experience it?
• Can and should faculty incentive systems become more responsive to the faculty’s efforts to improve instruction? (Chafee and Sherr, 1992)

Peer Reviews

The use of peer reviews to evaluate the quality of educational provision is an approach enjoying general approval. This approach has been extensively used in studies comparing the quality of higher education courses in European countries. Some examples are:
• Dutch Engineering Programmes in a European Context: A comparison of Chemical, Civil and Mechanical Engineering Programmes in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland (1993).

Learning Contracts

Learning contracts are a means of involving students in planning, carrying out and assessing their own work. Two papers by the UK Standing Conference on Educational Development (SCED) provide a theoretical perspective. The papers point out that learning contracts are used for the following purposes:
• to plan and describe a relationship between course, student and employer;
• to develop a concept of the ownership of the learning process and achievements; and
• to help the staff to plan and carry out their work. (Brown and Baum, 1991)

ISSUES IN QUALITY INITIATIVES

Assessment of student performance and evaluation of educational programmes have had long and fairly successful history in educational practice. Comparatively, quality management and quality assurance procedures are recent concerns. The following major issues appear to dominate the practice of quality management and quality assurance in educational settings:

What is Quality in Education?

The greatest lack of convergence of opinion, not surprisingly, is on the issue of what constitutes quality. A publication of the Australian Higher Education Council accepts that one person’s view of quality will differ from another’s according to their perspective
and beliefs (i.e., the concept of stakeholder). However, the basic characteristics are described as:

that it is internationally recognised, is competitive in attracting participants to it, and that it satisfies the learners' needs.

The report also places emphasis on outcomes as characteristics of quality and prime among these are the attributes that graduates should acquire if exposed to a high quality higher education system. These are split into:

- generic skills, attributes and values to learn new skills and procedures, to make decisions and to solve problems; to work with minimum supervision, to communicate effectively;
- a body of knowledge; and
- professional/technical or other job related skills. (Higher Education Council, 1992)

Harvey et al (1992) publish the results of the first stage of a three year Quality in Higher Education Project funded by a consortium of education, government, and industry, and the UK lists ten key criteria endorsed by different stakeholders:

- there should be adequate physical resources (Library, workshops, information technology) to support teaching and learning;
- there should be adequate human resources to support teaching and learning and staff should be properly qualified;
- the programmes should have clear aims and objectives which are understood by staff and students;
- the subject content should relate to the overall aims and objectives of the programme;
- students should be encouraged to be actively involved, and be given responsibility for learning;
- the standard of the programme should be appropriate to the qualification awarded for its study;
- assessment (of students) should be valid, objective and fair;
- assessment should cover the full range of course aims and objectives;
- students should receive useful feedback from assessment; and
- students should leave with transferable knowledge and skills.

A Canadian work proposes that one aspect of quality is improved relationship between higher education and other parts of society. It says:

Calls for quality and excellence have origins within the institution whether coming from students, faculty, administrators, or service personnel. They also come from alumni, interest groups, the community, the media and governmental bodies, in many ways, shapes and forms...Responding with well-founded alternatives to alleged wrongful characteristics, with evidence anchored to quality and excellence indicators related to specific mission and objectives may be the most appropriate route to take for institutions who ... pride themselves on reason, scientific methodology, truth and the conscience of society. (Naudeau, 1992)
Quality as a Journey rather than as a destination

There is considerable discussion on whether in judging quality, the final product is more important or whether the process through which the final product is achieved is the real issue.

Performance Indicators

The concept of performance indicators has in recent years gained considerable support. However, the real issue seems to be the way the indicators are arrived at. At the moment, the emphasis is on the necessary research to arrive at dependable indicators.

The Stakeholder concept

It is now clearly acknowledged that there can be no single perspective to quality. The perception of what constitutes quality can and will change according to the nature of the stakeholders; i.e. the teachers, the students, the society, the government and so on.

Measurement of Value Added through Education

When judging the quality of the final product, it seems more important to compare the final product with the initial input. However, it is exceedingly difficult to isolate factors that would depend entirely on the formal educational process. The effect of experiential learning is being increasingly accepted.

The Tension between Autonomy and Accountability

On the one hand, decentralisation is leading to greater academic and operational autonomy of educational institutions. This is in line with the overall social trends. However, it is also appreciated that liberty must be tempered with responsibility and hence accountability is emerging as a major motivation to maintain quality in education.

The Application of Industry-derived Procedures to Education

The unique nature of education has always been acknowledged. While at one time, especially during the heyday of the objectives movement, any effort at overt indicators was considered over-enthusiastic, now it is being increasingly felt that some of the industrial practices could be suitably adapted to ensure quality in the educational provision.

CONCLUSION

The Indian Delegation found it gratifying to note that Indian efforts at assuring quality in education are consistent with current trends in the major educational systems in the world. It is important, however, to note the following.
Educational systems all over the world are still struggling to arrive at a commonly accepted definition of what constitutes quality in education. The emphasis, at this point, is on identifying a set of issues, hypothesising their possible characteristics in terms of quality and then conducting the necessary research. The Indian system will do well to encourage research projects to arrive at a commonly accepted set of characteristics of quality in education, particularly with regard to the distance education system. This would ensure a congruence of educational as well as social implications of the term quality in education.

The Indian economic and social scene is undergoing a profound transformation. The concern with quality in education is consistent with the major trends in this transformation. It is necessary for Indian educational institutions to realise that it would soon be necessary to charge economically viable fees for their services and under such circumstances, students will only be prepared to pay higher fees if they perceive the possibility of good returns for their investments. The possibility of getting high quality education will be an important consideration.

In most countries, the impetus for focusing attention on issues related to quality has come from governments and, even if indirectly, is related to funding patterns. Apex Indian bodies like the University Grants Commission, the All India Council for Technical Education and the Distance Education Council may consider using the Australian concept of quality money to encourage voluntary participation of educational institutions in programmes oriented towards quality.

Increasingly, educational institutions all over the world are accepting the fact that public accountability will become an important feature. Education is expected to represent not only a certain intrinsic value but also to deliver a certain extrinsic value in terms of social relevance. With increasing competition for limited government funding and general social perception that higher education in India is receiving a disproportionate amount of funding, Indian educational institutions would do well to voluntarily demonstrate their willingness to attenuate their autonomy in the interests of accountability. A commitment to quality assurance in their provision will, in public perception be a positive indication that educational institutions are not exempt from social accountability.

Most realistic initiatives in quality assurance appear to appreciate the importance of supporting micro-level activities with adequate macro-level mechanisms. In this context, the U.K. system presents an interesting model. The Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) is the overarching body for quality in higher education and has divisions devoted to quality audit (DQA), quality enhancement (DQA), credit and access (DCA), supported by a resource centre in the form of the QSC (Quality Support Centre). In this context, the Distance Education Council, a body performing the apex function for distance and open education in India, has recently established a Quality Assurance Panel and this would appear to be a welcome development.

The conceptual distinction between quality audit and quality assessment is an important aid to developing a quality assurance technology.

The portfolio technique, used both in demonstrating the organisation's commitment and achievements to its social mission and in evaluating a learner's prior learning, is a powerful method and can be used with profit by the Indian distance education system.

The concept of teacher training at the higher education level has been practised in India for some time, with mixed results. Initiatives taken in this regard — the compulsory M.Phil qualification, academic staff colleges, qualifying tests, workshops — have
unfortunately not been based on any empirical analysis of the required teaching competencies. In this respect, the work done at Deakin University in Australia, the future technologies initiative taken at the University of Queensland and the instructional package produced by the Standing Conference on Educational Development (SCED) in the U.K. can be of considerable relevance to the Indian scene.

Similarly, although the concept of technology parks, so enthusiastically adopted about a decade ago in India, has not really led to burgeoning contacts between the universities and the productive processes in the society, the current liberalised and market-oriented economic climate might give a new lease of life to that concept. Perhaps the Indian distance education scene could learn something from events at Deakin University, whose initiatives in conducting corporate training through the distance education mode have not only led to the establishment of a new and successful entity called Deakin Australia but has had a highly beneficial impact on its instructional design activity.

There are signs now in India that while we must recognise the essentially unique nature of educational activity, certain industry-derived procedures may be relevant in improving and assuring the quality of the educational provision. Their strategy of placing an equal emphasis on the processes as well as the products may make the ISO 900 approaches relevant to education.

The trend all over the world is in favour of quality oriented initiatives in education. The emphasis is on the need for research to arrive at an understanding of the issues involved and to gauge the outcomes. This seems to be an important lesson for the Indian distance education system, where traditionally the emphasis has been on production rather than on reflection and research. The decade-old Indian open university system and the four-decade old Indian correspondence education system seem now poised to enter a new phase, where research will not only be an academically respectable activity but also provide a basis for distance education policy-making and planning and also its practice.

References


