

Considering Impact of QA for Higher Education: The Perfect Way to Enhance Our Strategies

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Abstract

The European model of QA, including follow-up processes and recommendations to HE institutions, was thought to promote improvement plans. A recent survey on QA procedures conducted by ENQA in 2012 showed that QA and enhancement mechanisms is the first priority of European QA agencies, while QA and public information is in 2nd place. The majority of the European QA agencies self-assess their practices on QA as the most effective of their activities (this is not so clear in other cases, for example in the area of public information). However a multipurpose orientation of QA processes together with the dynamics of the EHEA and the external QA strategies, in constant evolution, makes it difficult to measure the impact.

The discussion on how to measure the impact of QA for Higher Education can be seen as an opportunity to reflect about the effectiveness and efficiency of the current QA strategies and methodologies in the sector of Higher Education.

The identification of impact and its measurement is well connected with the resolution of very relevant questions; for example “Why do we need QA for Higher Education?” or “What do we expect from our QA?”. After those first questions, agencies start to consider about the efficiency and efficacy of their current practices. At this point there is another interesting question “Do our well designed QA process at micro level can be expanded massively without losing efficiency?” or “Can our current multipurpose methodologies compete in front of other mechanisms?”. Strategies and policy coordination becomes essential when QA agencies start to think about the impact of their activities and the cost-effectiveness rate. Cost-benefit analysis can be positive but in times of public budget restrictions effectiveness is crucial.

The European Standards and Guidelines are very compatible with different QA orientations; this is seen as a positive feature, particularly because QA procedures can be adapted to different national realities. Nonetheless this is not assuring the appropriateness of national policies on QA for HE; to what extent those policies can be assessed? In fact, it is obvious that responsibility of impacts of QA is not exclusively in the hands of QA agencies. Similar procedures are received by Higher Education institutions differently. Advanced forms of governance show how to multiply positively the results of QA processes. That’s

why research on this area is so important and perhaps opens the chance for QA agencies for a reorientation of their current activities in favour of including more strategic components and more research oriented mechanisms.