



THAILAND-EUROPEAN UNION
Policy Dialogues Support Facility

Building a Quality Culture

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Preliminaries



A 'quality culture'

'...heavy-handed rules and regulations are the reality ...'.

'(Bureaucrats) expect departments to spell out their activities in mind-numbing detailed reports – hardly any of which result in any action'

'...there is ... a systemic distrust of academics'.

'...when we describe this system to business people they inevitably say that no business could survive with this level of monitoring and waste of resources. Academics have less and less time for students and research'.

'British academics seem to be stressed out like no others, and this is bound to diminish their effectiveness and reduce their levels of research output'.

Susanne Kord and Daniel Wilson, 'Drowning in Bureaucracy'

Quality Culture and Cultures of Quality

A **'quality culture'** (or sub-culture) is the QA-related 'customs, attitudes and beliefs of the members of (or a particular group of members within) an organisation'.

A **'culture of quality'** is...

'...one in which everybody in the organisation, not just the quality controllers, is responsible for quality' (Harvey and Green, 1993).

'...an organisational culture which contributes to the development of effective and efficient care for quality (Berings, 2010).

'It includes thinking processes, communication, action, and decision-making, which will lead to a better quality of the educational system and organization' (ONESQA, Thailand, 2012).

Quality and Standards

Academic **standards** are the standards that individual degree-awarding bodies set and maintain for the award of their academic credit or qualifications. They include the standards of performance that a student needs to demonstrate to achieve (an award)

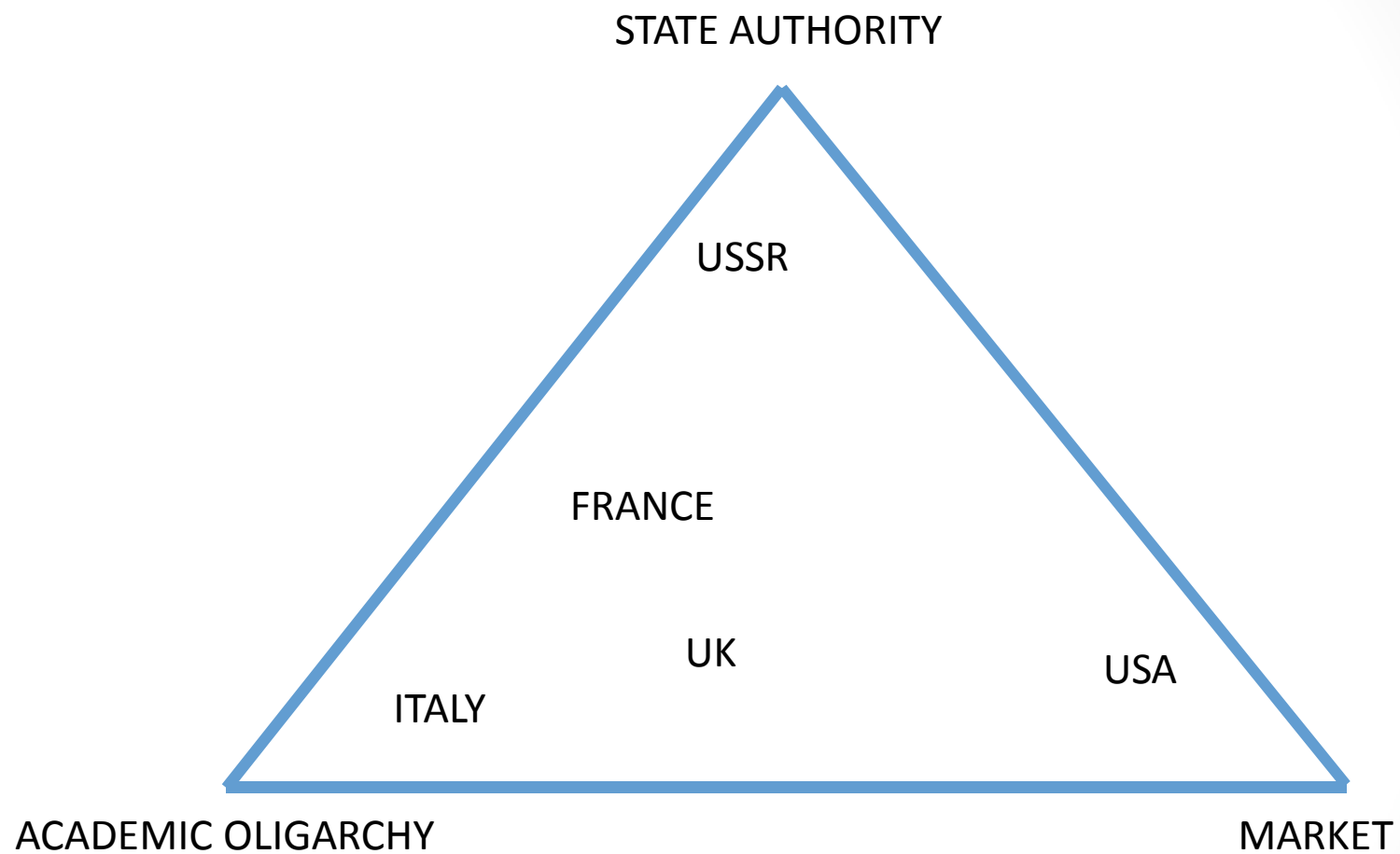
Academic **quality** refers to how and how well the higher education provider supports students to enable them to achieve their award. It covers learning, teaching and assessment, and all the different resources and processes provided by the institution.

Adapted from the QAA Quality Code

Agenda

- Academic governance: how are institutions called to account for the quality of their provision?
 - Who (or what) controls institutions?
 - How is control exercised?
- How does the regulatory regime impact on institutions?
- What are the conditions for establishing a 'quality culture' and 'effective' quality management systems.

Sector Governance (1): Who controls?



'Buffer' bodies

Powers are often delegated by central government to another lower tier of government, to a specialised buffer body, or direct to institutions themselves. Delegation of powers to a buffer body has long been the preference in countries such as the U.K., India, and Pakistan, and is now being adopted elsewhere.

A range of powers can be delegated to a buffer body. The most common model is for the Ministry to pass all matters relating to funding and operational management to the buffer body, while retaining central control over functions, such as national strategy and the overall size and shape of the higher education system.

In Thailand, the Ministry of Higher Education has been abolished and a new agency, the Commission for Higher Education, has been created to take over its role. However, this is located within the Ministry of Education, so it is unlikely to be a truly independent “buffer” body.

John Fielden, Global Trends in University Governance. 2008

Sector Governance (2): How is control exerted?

Regulation: oversight and sanctions

- Oversight:
 - Direct evidence
 - Quality assessment
 - Quality audit
 - Verification and validation
 - Indirect evidence
 - Metrics
 - Self-reporting
- Sanctions:
 - Award or revocation of licence (accreditation)
 - Funding
 - Transparency and institutional reputation

QUALITY AUDIT

QUALITY ASSESSMENT

VERIFICATION

VALIDATION



Verification and validation

Validation refers to review methods that seek to establish whether a programme or quality management system is fit for the purposes set by the university itself.

Verification entails the evaluation of a programme or quality management system against some set of externally imposed criteria or standards.

Impact: Intrusion and trust



Objects and partners

Regulation as a ‘partner’ entails ‘working with the (the institution) in a responsive way to achieve a shared outcome’. It is expected to ‘engage cognitively and emotionally with the task at hand and to contribute constructively to achieving shared objectives’. This implies a degree of trust in the institution and a self- or co-regulatory arrangement.

An institution is regulated as an ‘object’ when it is subject to ‘prescriptive requirements’... ‘Compliance is uncomplicated The regulatee does what is required: no more, no less. Engagement is through obedience’. Regulation intrudes on any claims to institutional autonomy.

Lee Dow and Braithwaite (2013)

'Gold-plating'

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'Gold plating' entails the employment of unnecessary bureaucratic procedures in an attempt to guarantee a good audit outcome. 'Universities guilty of gold-plating didn't want to leave anything to chance ... (But) they are inflicting pain upon themselves that is not necessary. (QAA's) view is that they should not waste time and resources in this way. They should be looking at their own processes and making sure they are fit for purpose ... and not trying to second-guess us by putting in unnecessary bureaucracies'.

Peter Williams, THE, 24 April 2008

Unintelligent accountability

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‘(Accountability can be) the enemy of effective governance, and also of plain truth-telling. ... The more severe and detailed are accountability obligations, the less can they reveal the underlying realities for which the universities are being held accountable’.

‘...the habits of truth-telling erode, and reports flowing up from the field come to have less and less relation to the facts on the ground that they purportedly represent....(These reports) become less and less exercises in discovery or truth telling, and more and more public relations documents which are, shall we say, parsimonious with the truth’.

Martin Trow

'Rococo' quality management

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A narrow, orthodox definition of quality has become widely adopted and accepted which equates (it) with procedures of such baroque (even on occasion, rococo) elaboration that they resemble the wilder architectural fantasies of the 18th Century Tsars.

Peter Williams, Less is More, Higher Quality 16, 2004.

Accountability and trust

‘The apparent lack of trust between Government and higher education institutions ... seems to permeate some HEIs’ internal systems, resulting in a lack of trust between HEIs’ own quality assurance teams and their academic staff’.

Better Regulation Task Force, *Easing the Burden* (2002)

Intrusive review methods merely ‘induce compliance and window dressing’. The alternative is an approach based on trust – one that would ‘encourage institutions to develop an internal quality culture’ and ‘take ownership of (internal quality assurance)’.

Sursock (2002)

Effective quality cultures



Intelligent accountability (1)

Currently fashionable methods of accountability damage rather than repair trust. If we want greater accountability without damaging professional performance we need intelligent accountability. (This) requires more attention to good governance and fewer fantasies about total control. Good governance is possible only if institutions are allowed some margin for self-governance of a form appropriate to their particular tasks, within a framework of ... reporting. Such reporting ... is not improved by being wholly standardised or relentlessly detailed, and since much that has to be accounted for is not easily measured it cannot be boiled down to a set of stock performance indicators.

Onora O'Neill,

Intelligent accountability (2)

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The challenge is ‘to create a system of accountability that does not punish truth-telling and (merely) reward the appearance of achievement’, and in which compliance does not ‘resemble the reports by a civil service in a defeated country to an occupying power, or by state-owned industrial plants and farms to central government in a command economy’.

Martin Trow

Institutional (quality) culture

‘Openness to challenge is a critical cultural necessity for good risk management and compliance – it is in fact more important than any framework or set of processes’.

Paul Moore, *Evidence to Treasury Select Committee* (February 2009)

Cultural prerequisites

- The 'intelligence' (knowledge and ideas) brought to the institution by its 'front line' staff is valued;
- The production of frank reports is rewarded; anodyne reporting is discouraged;
- Support is targeted on areas in need; and scrutiny is applied proportionately in accordance with assessments of risk;
- Staff at all levels adhere to the principle of mutual accountability.

Success factors

- The university is self-confident and does not limit itself to definitions of quality processes set by its national QA agency;
- The institutional culture stresses democracy and debate and values the voice of students and staff equally;
- The institutional leadership provides room for a grass-roots approach to quality and avoids the risk of over-bureaucratisation;
- The definition of academic professional roles stresses good teaching rather than only academic expertise and research strength;
- Quality assurance processes are grounded in academic values while giving due attention to the necessary administrative processes.

Andrée Sursock, EUA Quality Culture Project, 2011 and 2012

Structural conditions (internal)

- The QA function must have a degree of independence, with primary accountability to Academic Board or Senate
- Ideally, responsibility for assurance should be combined with responsibility for enhancement (including the development of programmes and academic practice)
- The QA function must be influential, commanding the respect of staff at all levels within the institution.

Structural conditions (external)

- The university is located in an “open” environment that is not overly regulated and enjoys a high level of public trust;
- A developmental approach: QA approaches should aim at enhancing the institutions’ capacity to change in order to achieve their strategic goals.
- There should be a partnership between institutions and agencies, creating space and trust for critical self-reflection.
- QA processes should allow risk taking and failure, and should check whether an HEI is capable of reacting to abnormal circumstances rather than sanctioning occasional failures.
- Sharing experiences in QA is essential, although we should never aim to merely copy the practices of other institutions.

EUA Quality Culture (2012) and QAHECA Projects (2009) ...

The last word...

We can only hope that the approach to QA by agencies will continue (or in some cases evolve) to respect and reflect the principle of institutional autonomy. Diversity of institutional missions and cultures will require more trust and flexibility from QA agencies. As HEIs develop a more mature and better-embedded quality culture, QA agencies will hopefully be able to focus on the effectiveness of institutional systems and adapt more developmental approaches. One thing clearly demonstrated by the project is that all QA activities ... ultimately aim at having strong autonomous HEIs with mature quality cultures which enhance creativity and innovation, thus enabling HEIs to contribute better to the creation and development of a knowledge society.

QAHECA (2009), *Improving Quality, Enhancing Creativity*