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Quality Assurance in the United Kingdom with Particular Reference to Scotland's Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR)

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Abstract

In the past few years the United Kingdom has been undergoing a process of reassessment and development of its approaches to quality assurance, in particular there is a growing recognition amongst researchers that many commonly used quality assurance methodologies do not necessarily result in increased quality.

This paper reviews recent research and the strengths and weaknesses of the main quality assurance methods that have been used in the UK in recent years, including inspection, institutional review, collaborative provision audit, professional accreditation and academic review.

The paper then focuses on enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) currently being piloted in the Scottish higher education sector. The underlying philosophy of ELIR is examined and the five main elements of ELIR are explained:

A comprehensive framework of internal review at the subject level within the higher education institution. An agreed set of public information provided by the institution. The effective involvement of students in quality management. Quality enhancement engagements. These take the form of a structured programme of engagements each year which will involve the sector in a series of developmental activities on themes selected by the sector.

The institutional review process.

Finally the paper considers the benefits and costs of ELIR and what the Ethiopian higher education sector may learn from the Scottish experience.

Introduction:

The United Kingdom's Higher Education sector is devolved to the four constituent countries of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland (NI). Each country has its own funding system and quality assurance regime, with the UK's national quality

assurance agency, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), having oversight of all quality assurance within higher education in the UK.

In line with many other countries, the UK's higher education sector has been required to give increasing attention to the management of quality assurance. Becket and Brookes (2006:123) suggest various reasons for this:

- a growing climate of accountability;
- an expansion in the size of student populations;
- an increasingly diverse student population resulting from widening participation initiatives and targeting international markets;
- diminishing resources with which to deliver programmes of study;
- the increasingly competitive nature of higher education;¹
- greater expectations of students as paying customers;
- more flexible provision at both undergraduate and postgraduate level; and
- An increase in collaborative provision between institutions.

Most of these will be familiar to those working in higher education in Ethiopia and most, in varying degrees, will apply to the Ethiopian Higher Education sector, both public and private.

Although the need and benefits of some kind of quality assurance system both across the sector as a whole as well as internally within higher education institutions (HEIs) is now almost universally accepted in Ethiopia, there is still debate about what kind of quality assurance system should be implemented, what should be the particular purposes and focus of a quality assurance system and what methods would work best.

¹ This may already exist for private higher education institutions but does not yet exist for public higher education institutions in the way that it occurs in the UK for example, where universities have to actively compete for students and where funding depends upon student numbers. However with the establishment of the new public universities in Ethiopia prospective students in some areas of the country will have two or three possible universities close by.

Becket and Brookes (2006) review various approaches to quality assurance in the UK HE system and suggest that there is no consensus on how to measure quality in higher education and quality can be interpreted and measured in a number of different ways.

Both Whalen (2004) and Harvey and Newton (2004) suggest that assessing the impact of external quality evaluations in terms of quality improvement is difficult and that there is no clear evidence that the various quality assurance methods currently being used actually result in the raising of quality or lead to the effective transformation of the student learning experience. Elton (2001) suggests that assurance in itself is a negative concept:

...which can at best ensure that things are done well, but it can never ensure that things are done better or that better things are done (Elton 2001 quoted in Hodgkinson and Kelly 2007:79).

On the other hand, the main stakeholders in higher education expect some kind of evaluation in regard to the quality of provision offered by higher PHEIs and want reassurance that this provision is meeting their needs and expectations. For example Government will want to know that public money is being spent effectively and that PHEIs are meeting Government goals (in the case of Ethiopia, ESDPIII and the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme (SDPRP)). Employers will want reassurance that PHEIs are producing graduates that meet the needs of the country's industries and services. For faculty, quality assurance processes should be seen as an opportunity to promote and share good practice and to learn from others. (For more discussion on stakeholder expectations and the tensions that might occur in Ethiopian higher education see Rayner and Teshome, 2005).

In the past few years, the UK has been undergoing a process of reassessment and development of its approaches to quality assurance. Recent research (see for example Becket and Brookes 2006, Hodgkinson and Kelly 2007 or Harvey and Newton 2004)

suggests that ‘it is quality as transformational that is most closely aligned with quality enhancement activities’ (Becket and Brookes 2006:127) and that ‘Quality assurance should follow from quality enhancement’ (Hodgkinson and Kelly 2007:79). This has meant moving away from a system largely based on external inspection to one which encourages an internally-driven system that encourages HEIs to be more self-reflective and fosters a culture of continuous improvement and enhancement.

Traditionally the main quality assurance methods used, in various combinations, in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have been inspection, institutional audit, collaborative provision audit, professional accreditation or academic review.

Inspection

The use of inspection, where provision is assessed against externally set benchmarks, is largely being phased out in the UK higher education sector, except for initial teacher training but even for inspection-heavy regimes such as the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) which looks at teacher training provision the penetrative element of inspection is being replaced by a ‘lighter touch’ inspection and a more reflective approach. One of the problems with inspection is that it is based on the assumption that the ‘centre knows best’ and can determine content and methodology better than institutions themselves. This is untrue in a system where the centre does not have enormous experience and capacity in the subjects being looked at. In addition, a regime of inspection tends to lead to uniformity, a lack of innovation and a tendency to aim for mechanical compliance, where what gets measured is fixed (usually in the short term) to meet inspection targets.

It is also a methodology that is often seen as threatening and therefore unlikely to foster an atmosphere of cooperation, innovation or improvement. It is heartening to see that in Ethiopia the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance

Agency (HERQA) has chosen not to develop as an inspection body but rather as an Agency that ‘aims to support an HEI by recognizing its good practices and by indicating areas where changes in practice can enhance the quality and relevance of its activities.’(HERQA 2006:5

Institutional audit

HERQA is currently in the process of undertaking a series of institutional quality audits of public HEIs and like HERQA much of the quality assurance system in England, Wales and NI is based on some kind of institutional audit based on the institution’s own internal self-evaluation.

This is a methodology that focuses on institution’s own quality assurance systems and the extent that the institution’s faculty and managers ‘know’ what is going on. Institutional audit looks mainly at processes and systems and their follow up rather than actual provision. Although in the case of HERQA there is some observation of teaching, the observation is not to evaluate teachers but to gain some knowledge of the teaching/learning situation. A problem identified in (say) minutes will be followed through an audit paper trail in order to ensure that the institution has followed up, monitored and rectified the problem identified. The same goes for institutional policies. Minutes and other documents will be looked at to see if there is evidence that policies are understood, being implemented and monitored. Some interviews with academic and support staff as well as students will occur to verify the written record.

This methodology is particularly suited to a mature higher education system where there is already a reservoir of experience and understanding in regard to quality assurance principles and practices and where, for example, everyone is confident that the content and methodology is satisfactory or better. This implies that all staff at all levels are at least familiar with, and hopefully committed to, the principles of quality assurance.

For example, in England where virtually all subject level assessments showed good quality, it is safe to assume that looking at institution-wide systems would be sufficient.

Ethiopia's HEIs may not yet be sufficiently mature in internal quality assurance attitudes and processes for this institutional audit to provide reassurance as to the quality thresholds in individual HEIs. However, it is a good starting point and when used in conjunction with institutional self evaluations the institutional audit seems to offer a good basis to start building awareness of quality assurance issues amongst managers, faculty, support staff and students and will hopefully eventually lead to a more mature sector and more robust quality assurance attitudes and processes.

Collaborative provision audit

England and NI also have a process called collaborative provision audit. This looks at how a university monitors and assesses quality in its partner organizations (generally further education colleges, the equivalent of TVET. In the UK these offer some higher education equivalent to years 1 and 2 of a degree – called foundation degrees). This already occurs in one or two instances in Ethiopia where courses and qualifications are 'franchised' from overseas universities such as Curtin University of Technology in Australia. Currently it is the awarding university that takes responsibility for assessing quality thresholds for its courses taught at Addis Ababa University (AAU) for AAU students. Another example is the joint MSc in Forestry run at Wondo Genet College of Forestry, this was originally franchised by the Swedish Agricultural University who had responsibility for ensuring satisfactory quality but over time this responsibility has been taken over by Wondo Genet College itself.

As yet I am not aware of any similar franchising arrangements for Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) but hopefully this will come in the future and the management of the PHEIs need to be aware that they will be judged by the processes and

standards of the awarding (foreign) institution (see in particular the paper ‘Cross-border provision of HE: Challenges and Opportunities for private Higher Education Institutions in Ethiopia’ by Dr. Bob Campbell presented at this Conference.)

Collaborative provision might also occur in Ethiopia if or when public and private HEIs offer joint degrees. For example, if MicroLink Info-technology College offered the first two years of an IT course where students then transferred to AAU for their final year where would the responsibility for quality assurance lay? With AAU as the awarding body? With MicroLink Info-technology College? Or could HERQA play a role? The answer I suspect is that AAU would be required to take responsibility, that MicroLink Info-technology College would be happy to share this responsibility and that HERQA might have a ‘light touch’ oversight role to ensure that quality assurance was being undertaken as intended.

Professional Accreditation

Other methods of quality assurance in UK include professional accreditation systems which focus on content and skills development to meet criteria set by a professional body to do a particular job or enter a particular profession. This looks only at subject level and is less interested in the institutional arrangements. It is not undertaken by the state or its agencies but rather by professional or trade associations. For example, degree courses in the training of journalists at University of Gloucestershire (my university in the UK) are accredited by the National Council for the Training of Journalists, an industry-based organization that sets certain standards and criteria for the ‘proper’ training of journalists (this includes curriculum, technical resources, library facilities and the background and qualifications of the teaching staff). With this accreditation it is easier to recruit students, students are recognized within the industry, are seen to have reached defined levels of skills and knowledge and therefore have a better route into employment.

In Ethiopia, at present it is not clear as to the capabilities of professional bodies to undertake this type of work and it may be possible that some professional accreditation does take place. However it is something that should be developed further in the future. It may be that in the interim a trial programme of professional accreditation can be undertaken for one particular subject area, perhaps a branch of engineering or business studies, using contacts and expertise already available in Ethiopia, for example the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GTZ) and The Center for Excellence in Engineering (CEE) or the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA). The Ethiopian IT Development Association has been working at benchmarks for IT curricula while the Ministry of Health are looking to develop 'professional examinations' that graduates must gain before they can practice.

Academic review

All Higher Education provision in all four countries, England, Scotland, Wales and NI, was, until a few years ago, subject to regular review subject by subject. This was called academic review and still takes place for a few selected colleges in England and Scotland.

Academic review is the subject-level, peer review process that includes observation of teaching and direct observation of resources etc. This has now largely been superseded as it was found that nearly all university departments were qualifying for top or near top marks (21+ out of a possible maximum score of 24) and therefore it was no longer managing to discriminate between excellent and less satisfactory departments. It is still used in England however for directly funded Higher Education in further education colleges (TVET equivalent) offering higher education where quality remains variable and cannot be assumed. Academic review has been a useful mechanism to drive up standards, but it was found to be resource intensive and to take time and effort away from teaching and towards compliance, trying to anticipate the 'correct' answer.

For the Ethiopian Higher Education sector this might be too time consuming and expensive. Lack of staff expertise might also be a problem but academic review could perhaps be trialed in selected areas; for example, in health where organizations like the Carter Centre might be able to provide additional help and expertise.

Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR)

In Scotland the main emphasis is now on a methodology called Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) introduced in 2003. It was felt that a new approach was required because previous external quality assurance activities had demonstrated that, in general, Scottish Higher Education institutions had in place effective quality management systems relating to the experience of students and the standards of their awards, and that the subject provision experienced by students was highly satisfactory or better. This meant that the next phase was to try and develop a quality assurance methodology that, not only encouraged the sector to build upon existing strengths and good practice, but also imbedded a system and culture that aims to produce an ethos of continuous enhancement of current provision.

ELIR takes the aims of the HEI as the starting point and looks at both the systems for quality assurance and actual experience of students and the provision of teaching and learning. The measuring stick is not an external one, but rather what the institution is trying to do and how it is seeking to enhance its performance and standards. ELIR is based on the premise that individual HEIs can be trusted and should be allowed considerable autonomy in determining their own quality assurance thresholds. In Ethiopia public HEIs are still learning how to use the autonomy granted to them in the 2003 Higher Education Proclamation and this notion of autonomy also has consequences for the Ministry of Education and the way it interacts with the Higher Education sector (see Teshome Yizengaw, 2007).

There is an underpinning assumption that the Scottish Higher Education is a ‘mature’ sector where:

- Institutions take a responsible approach to the maintenance of quality and standards;
- Ownership of quality and standards issues rests with the institutions and not with the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC), or with the QAA;
- Institutions are committed to the principle of continuous quality enhancement;
- Students should have a major involvement in internal and external quality processes;
- Students and other stakeholders should have access to relevant public information about the nature and quality of provision.

While there are commonalities of purpose, each Higher Education institution in Scotland has its own unique mission and will seek to meet the needs of its own particular students in its own particular ways. The ELIR strategies of individual institutions can, therefore, be designed to reflect these particular characteristics and the review process should engage with the enhancement of the particular learning experiences of students, in the context of the particular institution. This means that institutions are given both autonomy and responsibility to ensure quality provision but it is also the HEI’s responsibility to provide public information about the nature and quality of that provision.

ELIR requires HEIs to ask themselves 3 questions:

- **Where are we now?** How effective is the current learning experience of our students?

- **Where do we want to be in the future?** What are the patterns and mechanisms of supporting learning which the institution wishes to develop in order to enhance the learning experience of its students?
- **How are we going to get there?** How are we as an institution going strategically to manage the processes of enhancement that will allow us to move towards meeting our aspirations?

This new methodology is based upon a model of a high quality Higher Education system that is seen to contain the following key characteristics:

- A sector which is flexible, accessible, and responsive to the needs of learners, the economy and society;
- A sector which encourages and stimulates learners to participate in higher education and to achieve their full potential;
- A sector where learning and teaching promotes the employability of students;
- A sector where learning and teaching is highly regarded and appropriately resourced;
- A sector where there is a culture of continuous enhancement of quality, which is informed by and contributes to international developments.

This list may be contestable; for example, there is no direct reference to research and it is unclear to what extent research is implicit in the other activities listed. However, it does assume that HEIs are intrinsically committed to quality assurance and continuous improvement. It also puts learners firmly at the centre of activities.

ELIR does this by placing the student learning experience at the centre of its methodology. This is partly facilitated by the involvement of student members in review teams within the institutional review process; the requirement that students are represented at all levels within institutions and that there is training and support for student representatives on the review teams.

The ELIR model consists of five inter-related elements:

1. **A comprehensive framework of internal review at the subject level within the higher education institution.**

The nature of internal reviews will be decided by individual institutions but will share certain agreed features including the use of trained reviewers and as well as externality within review teams.²

For example, HEIs would need to ensure themselves that there is evidence that their quality enhancement systems are understood and used by all internal stakeholders, that there are processes in place for monitoring and adapting practice and that systems of consultation and participation are in place.

For Ethiopia to undertake this kind of review would require a pool of subject level specialists who were inducted and trained as peer reviewers and who could function as both internal and external reviewers. This will happen naturally as the work of HERQA develops but it would also be beneficial if national subject groups could be established to network, to share knowledge and practice and to perhaps set criteria for peer review. There could also be some discussion about the benefits of introducing something similar to the UK's system of external examiners. This practice already exists in faculties of medicine in Ethiopia but needs to be expanded, perhaps informally at first. This could perhaps be trialed in one or two particular subject areas such as Health (again perhaps with the assistance of the Carter Centre) and might be able to attract donor funding to assist in the development.

² The QAA guide to ELIR for staff in Scottish HEIs at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/education/ELIR/Staff%20leaflet%20version%202.pdf>.

An agreed set of public information provided by the institutions.³

For example HEIs are required to provide evidence that public knowledge of institutional practices and achievements is well founded and fair and that prospectuses tell students about how to be involved.

In Ethiopia this might include

- information for prospective students including admission arrangements and requirements, details of curricula, flexibility of course choice and the career options available to students for individual awards;
- information for current students including the curriculum coverage of their course and how it is delivered and assessed, complaints procedures and much of what is covered by information for prospective students;
- information for employer and employer organizations such as what knowledge and skills graduates with different awards will have achieved; details of industrial links and how institutions ensure curricula are up-to-date; and
- information for HERQA including the program and outcomes of internal subject review and the institution's strategy for quality enhancement (these could be based on the institution's self evaluation).

Much of this is already provided in various forms and in variable quality by HEIs in Ethiopia but the question is how can this be improved?

2. The effective involvement of students in quality management.

This seems to represent one of the main innovations in the ELIR quality assurance process. The direct involvement of students in the review process would require similar

³ Guidance notes on public information for Scottish HEIs in provided at http://www.sfc.ac.uk/information/info_circulars/shefc/2003/he1903/he1903.html

induction and training to that undertaken by subject reviewers. In this case, it might be the Association of Private Higher Education Institutions and/or HERQA to undertake the necessary training for a trial group of student taken from the existing Student Councils to work as external reviewers. ELIR also presumes that there is systematic representation of students at all levels within institutions and that they have a place (and more importantly a voice) on the relevant committees.⁴

PHEIs would be expected to provide evidence that problems identified by students are addressed and rectified, that students have a variety of ways of reporting on their experiences, the role of the student representative is valued and rewarded and that learning and teaching is a positive experience for students.

Experience in Scotland suggests that students find involvement in a review of a positive experience (see the QAA interim report 'Learning from ELIR') but its success is dependant upon student representatives who are prepared to speak out and ask questions and check claims made by faculty and management. This might be difficult in a more deferential culture such as Ethiopia. There would certainly have to be checks to ensure that students did not feel threatened or penalized if they asked difficult questions.

3. Quality enhancement engagements.

These take the form of a structured program of engagements each year which will involve the sector in a series of developmental activities on themes selected by the sector. These themes may be drawn from the outcomes of internal and external reviews and the outcomes of these engagements are likely to impact on the reflections of institutions as they consider their own quality enhancement strategies.

⁴ The QAA has produced a student guide to becoming involved in ELIR is available at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/students/guides/Student%20Guide%20version%202.pdf>.

There are currently six themes for the period 2005-2010:

- Integrative assessment, in particular 'Optimizing the Balance between Formative and Summative Assessment'
- The first year and how it can be developed as a transformative experience for students.
- Research-teaching linkages or on enhancing the learning experience of students through (widely-defined) research activities
- The effective learner
- The inclusive curriculum
- Progression and success.

The outcomes from each of these themes will be circulated to the sector both as downloads but also in hard copy and should provide the sector with good quality guidance. HEIs will then be expected to show evidence that teaching staff have learned and developed their skills by using the enhancement themes as a resource and that there is a clear relationship between the enhancement themes and the institutional practices and policies.⁵

Again this might be something that would be useful to the Ethiopian higher education sector, for example the Association of Private Colleges and Universities or HERQA might, after consultation, nominate a particular theme and ask HEIs to focus on this for the next few years. It could, for example, be a means of getting all public information provided by HEIs up to a common format and satisfactory threshold. The Association of Private Colleges and Universities or HERQA could use their international contacts (such as the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

⁵ Details of the work undertaken so far on the first three themes is available at <http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/about/fiveYear.asp>.

(INQAAHE)) to provide similar material from other countries as examples of good practice.

4. The institutional review process.

This is a peer review process which, while providing information on the security of the institution's management of quality and standards, is focused on the institution's strategic management of quality enhancement.⁶

HEIs are required to provide evidence that schools and departments are pro-active in setting their own agenda for ELIR, that it is used to improve institutional systems for the support of teaching and learning and that there is connectivity and coherence between the various sectors of the institution and their activities in the pursuit of quality.

The guidance that HERQA supplies on the institutional review process may be more appropriate and useful than that offered by the QAA and as with internal review a pool of trained reviewers will need to be developed as the work of HERQA develops.

'Benefits' and 'costs' of ELIR

According to critics, such as Harvey and Newton (2004), many external quality evaluation systems are too heavy-handed; they try to measure everything, they are expensive to implement (both for HEIs and the Agency), they are time consuming and are often punitive in character. External quality evaluation systems are also sometimes used as a means of ensuring compliance or, in the case of PHEIs, of control and as a limit to expansion. They also argue that they ignore 'the complexity and the wider socio-political context of the quality phenomenon' (Harvey and Newton 2004). They argue that

⁶ A copy of the handbook for ELIR is available at http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/ELIR/handbook/scottish_hbook.pdf.

it is unclear what evidence there is for supposing the extent to which external quality evaluations improve academic quality:

Much seems to be taken for granted. What is the fundamental object of the evaluation, for example? Is it the educational provider, or the specific program, or the learner, or the output of the program or institution? Often this is unclear. While talking about the quality of the learner experience, most approaches seem to examine the provision. That's a bit like evaluating the quality of a football match for spectators by examining the stadium, the pitch, the team sheet and the credentials of the coach. (Harvey and Newton 2004:150).

Others, such as Hodgkinson and Kelly (2007) and Elton (2001), suggest that a quality assurance model based on the notion of 'fitness for purpose' will focus largely on the quality of processes and in particular the learning experience for students rather than focusing on outcomes and what opportunities for enhancement can be identified and acted upon.

Many quality assurance systems have been criticized in that they do not encourage HEIs to improve or enhance current provision but rather result in them setting up complex systems that focus on the reporting on provision without engaging with it. According to Elton (2001),

- An institution dedicated to quality enhancement will provide quality assurance as a by-product; one dedicated to quality assurance has no incentive to extend this to quality enhancement.
- Quality enhancement can only happen if it is a credibly declared part of the mission of an institution. (Elton 2001 quoted in Hodgkin and Kelly 2007:79)

ELIR seems to offer the opportunity for the quality assurance process to form an intervention with current provision (part of the 'What are we doing now?' question) and

reflect on the ways in which this current provision may be improved (the ‘Where do we want to be in the future?’ question) and how to achieve those improvements (the ‘How are we going to get there?’ question). According to Harvey and Newton (2004) the outcome of the quality assurance process should be strategic and creative policies based on sound evidence rather than third-party reports.

It is also questionable how useful much of the data generated through current quality assurance methods are or the extent to which they are accessible and comprehensible to one of higher education’s main stakeholders, parents and students. They can find it difficult to work through large jargon-laden documents. This is why, for example, league tables are popular although I would not wish to endorse this practice.

It must, however, be recognized that there will be costs as well as benefits in choosing ELIR as a preferred method of quality assurance.

Enhancement comes about as a result of change which may include innovation and therefore risk. If properly designed and managed, institutions should be able to undertake new ways of doing things in a way that provides safeguards for current students and the overall health of the HEI. However, this is sometimes a tricky balance and the introduction of innovation can lead to short term difficulties before the longer term benefits are realized.

The state will have lesser control over content than with (say) inspection. The students and other stakeholders will have less information at subject level (except where a particular subject has been sampled in the review) than in an academic review. ELIR is more resource intensive (especially for the HEI) than institutional audit, and gives a qualitative picture of provision and its quality. This makes league tables and other simplistic comparisons impossible. It also frustrates some bureaucratic purposes, such as the funding of higher education according to quality assessments. Essentially the result is a subjective, but nonetheless valid, narrative about quality in the institution with

suggestions for areas to develop and improve and descriptions of good practice, rather a quasi pseudo objective 'score', or simplistic 'excellent', 'good', 'satisfactory', 'poor' results. Where the narrative uncovers a deep and systemic problem, the review can, nonetheless, require that the issue is rectified within a specified time or sanctions may be applied. The philosophy behind this review methodology is that, if the institution has identified its own weaknesses, and has a realistic plan to overcome them that is being implemented and monitored, it should be commended rather than criticized. This spirit encourages openness and collaboration rather than 'playing the game' which is often a problem with other methodologies.

In Ethiopia it seems unlikely that the Government through the Ministry of Education would relinquish all its power and influence over the higher education sector but it could, for example, exercise inappropriate influence over the higher education sector through HERQA and the 'themes' that the sector might be asked to address.

ELIR will not work where the institutional ethos of a HEI is to be satisfied with mediocrity; ELIR is premised on the desire within an institution for continuous improvement.

Evaluation so far...

Whilst recognizing that ELIR is still at a prototype stage in Scotland and the results have yet to be fully assessed it is possible to suggest that some key lessons can be learnt, namely that there are clear advantages if the principles of enhancement and improvement are integral to quality assurance systems and built into the system from the outset. As Hodgkinson and Kelly note:

The most significant aspect...in taking forward these models, processes and approaches is the importance of organizational culture. It is argued that...introducing any model,

process or approach will not, in itself, create or sustain a quality enhancement culture. To achieve this, appropriate structures, communication channels, the involvement of all individuals at all levels and from all aspects of a school's work need to be included. The enhancement of the school's work must be accepted as an on-going priority by everyone. (Hodgkinson and Kelly 2007:84).

It is also clear that developing a culture of systematic quality improvement across an institution or across a sector is a long and difficult process. However, according to the QAA's interim report, the first three years of ELIR is resulting in the development of institutional strategies for quality enhancement that are driving policy development as well as practice that is increasingly learner centered.⁷

Lessons for Ethiopia

In Scotland, as in the rest of the UK, quality assurance is an established and mature system that can largely assume sophistication in HEIs regarding their quality assurance management and systems. This is not yet the case in Ethiopia.

In Ethiopia, HERQA is still a new organization and HEIs are still establishing their internal quality assurance systems. In the Ethiopian context quality assurance could be said to have a different focus and purpose i.e., to prove to stakeholders that the sector is accountable, has a sound and reliable quality assurance system and is training graduates to meet the needs of the country. However, there needs to be a continuing debate about what kind of quality assurance system would be best for Ethiopia, its particular purpose and focus and what methods would work best. (Clearly conferences such as this are an important contributor to that debate.)

⁷ The interim report is available at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/ELIR/learningFromElir/learningFromElir.pdf>.

It is important, therefore, that to this end all HEIs in Ethiopia, whether public or private, address the status of quality assurance within their institutions. There is much guidance available from both HERQA and the Educational Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP) either in person, through workshops or through documents available in hard copy or downloadable from the website www.higher.edu.et.

In addition HEIs need to ensure that:

- Quality assurance has clear lines of responsibility, reporting and accountability to senior managers (President and Vice President level) to ensure that a holistic view can be developed. In future, the HEI's committee structure might be modified to reflect a more collegiate approach to the learning experience, for example, by having a quality assurance committee of the Senate.
- Quality assurance has adequate resources (office, support, and staff) to do the job properly and quality assurance should not just be another tasks added to existing and already over-stretched resources.
- Quality assurance is understood and valued across the HEI and Faculty Deans play a particularly important role in ensuring that both 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' communication and understanding takes place.
- Quality assurance is collaborative with all staff and students developing a sense of ownership of the enhancement process.
- In public HEIs Academic Development and Resource Centers (ADRCs), although not responsible for quality assurance and enhancement in HEIs, are key resources and need to be funded appropriately.

Finally

Debates about quality assurance in Higher Education not only need to address questions of *what* is being reviewed but also *who* is doing it. Good and effective quality assurance systems will only really develop when those who review, the *who*, are also the *what* – in other words the quality assurance process has to be internalized, self-reflective and owned by those who make up the organization being reviewed. One of the central roles of HERQA is to ‘encourage and assist the growth of an organizational culture in Ethiopian Higher Education that values Quality and is committed to continuous improvement’ (HERQA 2006:3). In this context, ELIR may offer a useful model that could be adapted to the Ethiopian context.

ELIR claims to be unique in many respects:

- in its balance between quality assurance and enhancement;
- in the emphasis which it places on the student experience;
- in its focus on learning and not solely on teaching;
- in the spirit of cooperation and partnership which has underpinned all these developments.

ELIR presents an opportunity for Ethiopia to learn from the experiences of other more developed quality assurance systems, to learn from their philosophies, practices and methodologies, to decide what works for the Ethiopian context and to produce something that meets the needs of Ethiopia’s expanding higher education sector as well as contributing to the poverty-reduction program of the country.

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