5. Assuring and Improving Quality

5.1 Introduction

With the move towards knowledge-driven economies and societies, education has never been more important for the future economic performance and relative economic standing of countries, but also to allow individuals to perform and fully participate in the economy and society (OECD, 2007a). In this context, broad participation in tertiary education is only one side of the coin. The quality of education delivered is equally important to ensure that tertiary graduates are effectively equipped to participate in the new economy and society at large, and that they are prepared to subsequently engage in lifelong learning activities to update their knowledge and skills as the knowledge frontier moves further. As a result, the issue of quality provision has received growing interest from the various stakeholders over the past two decades.

In the meantime, tertiary education systems have faced dramatic overhauls with a trend towards mass participation and increasingly diversified and flexible types of provision (see Chapter 2). This explosion of systems which had been fairly stable since the 19th century has raised legitimate questions as to what tertiary education systems had become and has heightened the need for some form of quality assurance in tertiary education.

This Chapter reviews quality assurance in tertiary education. It starts by providing definitions and concepts in quality assurance. It then reviews current practices in tertiary quality assurance systems. The chapter further discusses the main issues at stake and the related policy challenges. It includes descriptions of policy initiatives in participating countries, and develops policy options for countries to consider. Although quality assurance is relevant to both the teaching and research missions of tertiary education, this Chapter focuses on quality assurance systems that assess the quality of teaching and learning as opposed to the quality of research. This latter aspect is covered in Chapter 7.

5.2 Definition and diversity of approaches

5.2.1 What is quality assurance and why does it matter?

Growing interest in quality assurance

Several trends have triggered stakeholders' interest in tertiary education quality, and by extension the policies of quality assurance designed to enhance it. First of all, the transition from elite to mass participation in tertiary education since the 1980s has increased the burden on national budgets across OECD countries. This pressure has heightened governments' interest in the cost-effectiveness of tertiary education given the

high level of public investment in the sector – at 1% of GDP on average in the OECD (OECD, 2007b). This motive has been especially pervasive in the context of disappointing economic growth and growing public deficits in many countries over the period (Vroeijenstijn, 1995a; El Khawas *et al.*, 1998).

In the meantime, many OECD governments have experienced structural shifts in conceptions of public service provision since the 1980s, including in tertiary education, and have embraced the *New Public Management* (NPM) approach imported from the private sector. NPM puts emphasis on leadership principles, incentives and competition between public sector agencies and private entities to enhance the outcomes and cost-efficiency of public services (Parker and Gould, 1999; Marginson and van der Wende, 2007). This move from a normative conception of the role of governments to a market State model has put the quality issue to the forefront (de Wit and Verhoeven, 2004). Quality assurance has become a necessity for policy makers to demonstrate that public funds are spent effectively and that the public purposes for financing tertiary education are actually fulfilled (Alderman and Brown, 2007).

The increase in scale of tertiary education systems has also made central management of tertiary education institutions (TEIs) increasingly inappropriate, especially in light of the rise of NPM. Governments have stepped back and agreed to provide more autonomy to TEIs to enhance the reactivity of the system, but in exchange for effective quality assurance procedures designed to demonstrate a wise use of public funds (see Chapter 3 and Cavalli, 2007). Quality control has been seen as a complement to the remote steering of the system (Goedegebuure *et al.*, 1994; Vroeijenstijn, 1995a; van der Wende, 1999; Woodhouse, 1999).

Another consequence of the massification of tertiary education and the trend towards deregulation has been the appearance and/or the expansion of private providers, and the emergence of a growing diversity of educational offerings, including distance learning. These new forms of provision and the development of private TEIs – some of which operating for profit – have called for better protection of consumers, notably through quality assurance (El Khawas *et al.*, 1998). From the perspective of TEIs, quality provision also matters as a way to attract students and secure revenues in increasingly competitive environments. Marginson (2004) distinguishes in this respect the situation of "elite" TEIs – whose prestige and appeal to prospective students derives from outstanding research performance and reputation – and "intermediate" or "second choice" TEIs which have to court students in more conventional ways and put more emphasis on the quality of teaching services.

The issue of quality in tertiary education has also been put under scrutiny from the perspective of its contribution to economic growth. The rise of the new economy in the 1990s has made research and innovation key to countries' competitive edge in the global economy. For instance, this awareness has been central to the Lisbon strategy which explicitly stresses the importance of excellence in research and development to turn the European Union into the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy by 2010 (Lisbon European Council, 2000). Given the unique position of tertiary education in training knowledge workers, quality assurance has a role to play, in the Lisbon perspective, in signalling excellence. And in fact both students and employers compete for elite TEIs' places and graduates at the top end of the tertiary education sector, given the strong signal of status and quality attached to these degrees (Morley *et al.*, 2006; Geiger, 2004).

At the same time, ensuring quality in tertiary education beyond the elite segment is equally important from the perspective of employment and social cohesion. The emergence of mass unemployment in the 1970s due to technological change associated with the 1990s' shift towards the new economy have progressively made tertiary qualifications the baseline standard to work in knowledge-intensive sectors. This general upgrading of skill requirements has lifted students and employers' expectations of tertiary education and raised questions as to the ability of TEIs to produce graduates with the relevant knowledge and skills to meet labour market needs (van Vught and Westerheijden, 1994). Quality assurance is therefore an important tool to provide signals to the labour market on the skills and competencies held by graduates, to guarantee that certain minimum standards are met and to ensure that the qualification awarded is fit for its intended purposes. This is especially important for intermediate and/or new TEIs that cannot rely exclusively on their reputation and status as a signal mechanism – unlike older/elite institutions (Alderman and Brown, 2007).

The need for quality assurance has also become more pressing in the context of the growing internationalisation of tertiary education. The significant growth in international student mobility over the past three decades (OECD, 2007b) and the more recent surge in various forms of cross-border provision of tertiary education (OECD, 2004a) have raised questions of quality standards, reputation of cross-border TEIs and called for a closer monitoring of cross-border education quality (van der Wende, 1999; El Khawas *et al.*, 1998).

The impact of internationalisation is not limited to aspects of consumer-protection. Indeed, internationalisation also takes the form of a growing convergence of tertiary education systems and degree structures, *e.g.* through the Bologna Process. The convergence of tertiary education programmes is also driven by the globalisation of professions and the impetus of some professional organisations to set common standards through global accreditation activities (Peace Lenn and Campos, 1997). Irrespective of the drivers and rationales of convergence, the trend towards similar systems of tertiary education yields common concerns across countries regarding the performance of their TEIs (Woodhouse, 1999).

Definition

Quality assurance can be broadly defined as the "process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provision (input, process and outcomes) fulfils expectations and measures up to threshold minimum requirements" (Harvey, 2004-2007).

This definition underlines the various aspects of quality assurance, which relate to inputs, processes and outcomes of tertiary education. But the process nature of quality assurance also bears a dynamic dimension whereby quality assurance not only seeks to ensure that minimum quality thresholds are reached at a point in time, but also aims at improving the quality of tertiary education provision over time. In this respect, quality assurance can also be described as a "systematic, structured and continuous attention to quality in terms of quality maintenance and improvement" (Vroeijenstijn, 1995a) and in more concrete terms the "policies, attitudes, actions and procedures necessary to ensure that quality is being maintained and enhanced" (Woodhouse, 1999). The concept of quality assurance is therefore complex insofar as it encompasses the multiple dimensions of inputs, processes and outcomes as well as the way these dimensions change over time.

Another complexity results from the diverse perceptions of quality itself. In abstract terms, quality can be defined as the distance between an objective and a result, with the implicit assumption that quality improves as this distance shrinks. Yet, this leaves scope for multiple interpretations depending on who sets the objectives and judges of their intrinsic value. In addition, the objectives themselves may vary depending on national needs – *e.g.* industrialised *vs.* developing economy – or types of TEIs being considered – *e.g.* elite research university or local TEI geared towards regional needs.

Watty (2003) identifies two schools of thought with respect to definitions of quality. The first attaches quality to a context, with references to the quality of assessment, student intake, academic programmes, teaching and learning, the student experience and programme design (Baird, 1988; Fry, 1995; Nordvall and Braxton, 1996). The second way of thinking relates quality to a variety of stakeholders with an interest in tertiary education (Middlehurst, 1992; Harvey and Green, 1993). In this second approach, employers tend to see quality of tertiary education from the prism of the knowledge, skills and attributes obtained by tertiary graduates during the course of their studies. Students are more interested in the contribution of tertiary education to fulfilling their personal interests, fostering their individual development and preparing them for an effective participation in society. Academics see quality in relation to the effectiveness of knowledge transfer, the value of the learning environment and the level of interaction between teaching and research. Finally government authorities are more concerned with value for money and accountability towards taxpayers (Vroeijenstijn, 1995a).

These differences in perceptions of quality by different stakeholders are at the root of misunderstandings and conflicts between the different actors of quality assurance systems. Harvey and Green (1993) argue that the problem "is not a different perspective on the same things but different perspectives on different things with the same label". They have attempted to deconstruct the abstract concept of quality and to focus on its various dimensions in order to reconcile the different ways of thinking about quality. The result is a multi-dimensional matrix of quality focusing on five key aspects:

- *Exception*, where quality is defined in terms of excellence, passing a minimum set of standards;
- *Perfection*, with quality focusing on the process and aiming at zero-defect;
- *Fitness for purpose*, where quality relates to a purpose defined by the provider;
- *Value for money*, where quality focuses on efficiency and effectiveness by measuring outputs against inputs; and
- *Transformation*, where quality conveys the notion of a qualitative change that enhances and empowers the student.

In fact, Lomas (2001) finds on the basis of a small-scale survey that senior managers of TEIs tend to consider fitness for purpose and transformation as the two most appropriate definitions of quality whereas Gatfield *et al.* (1999) argue that the growing competition for fee-paying and international students in many countries has put more emphasis on consumers' perceptions of quality. In addition, Watty (2003) suggests removing the dimension of perfection on the grounds that higher education does not aim at producing defect-free graduates. Overall, Sachs (1994) condenses Harvey and Green's multiple views of quality into two broad types, namely:

- *Quality assurance for accountability*, characterised by external locus of control and associated with centralised administrative structures and external auditors measuring quantitative indicators of success; and
- *Quality assurance for improvement* characterised by an internal locus of control and associated with facilitative administrative structures which use peer review to assess more qualitative indicators of success.

5.2.2 Diversity of approaches to quality assurance

In practice, quality assurance activities take many forms and cover a wide spectrum of processes designed to monitor, maintain and enhance quality. These activities range from generic guidelines and guidance to internal processes of self-reviews and external reviews. Different approaches can be taken by quality assurance systems. These different approaches are not mutually exclusive, and quality assurance agencies/bodies can adopt one or more of these according to different educational systems and traditions (Woodhouse, 1999). Although terminologies used vary across countries, it can be considered that there are three main approaches to quality assurance besides the ongoing monitoring of the system.

Accreditation

An accreditation is the establishment of the status, legitimacy or appropriateness of an institution, programme or module of study. It is the result of an assessment of whether a TEI, programme or module of study meets a threshold standard and qualifies for a certain status. The focus of accreditation is comprehensive, examining the mission, resources, and procedures of a TEI or programme (Dill, 2000). The output of an accreditation process is a yes/no decision, though graduations are also possible (Woodhouse, 1999). Obtaining accreditation may have implications for the TEI itself (*e.g.* permission to operate, access to public funding) and/or its students (*e.g.* eligibility for grants).

The subject of accreditation may include all existing TEIs and programmes, or be limited to new TEIs or programmes only.[86]

Assessment (or evaluation)

An assessment is the process of evaluating the quality and appropriateness of the learning process, including teacher performance and pedagogic approach. It results in graded judgements about quality and in this respect goes beyond accreditation which only provides a binary judgement (Dill, 2000). Assessment asks "how good are your outputs?" and the outcome is a quantitative evaluation, a grade (whether numeric, literal or descriptive with more qualitative insight) (Woodhouse, 1999).

This process of examining and passing a judgment on the appropriateness or level of quality is also often referred to as evaluation in some national contexts.

86. In some countries, the process of creation of a new TEI and/or programme of study also involves a licensing process, *i.e.* a mandatory procedure resulting in the formal granting of permission to operate. Licensing usually takes place at the very initial stages of creation of the TEI or programme – before the first students graduate – and the process is intended to ensure quality control through compliance with minimum threshold standards, *e.g.* in terms of infrastructure and building facilities or staff qualifications.

Audit (or review)

An audit, in the context of quality in tertiary education, is a process for checking that procedures are in place to assure quality, integrity or standards of provision and outcomes. A quality audit checks the extent to which an institution or programme is achieving its own explicit or implicit objectives, asking "are your processes effective?" and the outcome is a description of the extent to which the claims of the TEI or programme are correct (Woodhouse, 1999). For instance, ISO (Standards New Zealand, 1994) defines quality audit as a three-part process checking: 1) the suitability of the planned quality procedures in relation to the stated objectives; 2) the conformity of the actual quality activities with the plans; and 3) the effectiveness of the activities in achieving the stated objectives.

Such explorations of quality that do not result in judgements or decisions are also referred to as reviews in some countries.

5.2.3 Ambivalence of purposes

To some extent, these different forms of quality assurance reflect different purposes. Indeed, Sachs (1994) has shown that broadly speaking, quality assurance procedures can serve two major purposes: accountability and improvement.

In the accountability perspective, a central aspect is that of "rendering an account" about what one is doing in relation to goals that have been set or legitimate expectations that others may have of one's products, services or processes, in terms that can be understood by those who have a need or right to understand "the account". For this reason, accountability is usually linked to public information and to judgements about the fitness, the soundness or level of satisfaction achieved (Middlehurst and Woodhouse, 1995). This summative approach is the view prevailing from the perspective of governments, where quality assurance is seen as a way of providing an objective measurement of quality (*e.g.* through reaching a threshold on a selection of performance indicators) in order to demonstrate that public funds are spent effectively. Where the summative approach predominates, reports include explicit statements of outcomes and are published to inform the public of the performance of TEIs (Middlehurst and Woodhouse, 1995; Billing, 2004). Reflecting this emphasis, Stamoulas (2006) states that a basic objective of quality assurance is to safeguard the social interests in upholding the standards of higher education by publicly providing independently verified information – qualitative and quantitative – on programmes and TEIs.

In the improvement perspective, by contrast, a formative approach is privileged and the purpose of quality procedures is to promote future performance rather than make judgements on past achievements (Thune, 1996). Yet, definitions of what is regarded as improvement have changed and perspectives regarding the purpose and the focus of improvement can vary according to different stakeholders. But this approach prevails in the academic world, where quality assurance is seen as a means of improving the effectiveness of tertiary education delivery by allowing academic staff to revisit their approaches, methods and attitudes to teaching through an analysis of strengths and weaknesses and recommendations from peers. Where this approach is predominant, the reports are written for an academic audience and the emphasis is on recommendations.

From the perspective of tertiary education systems as a whole, both purposes are essential. The difficulty lies in combining them in the design of the quality assurance framework and its implementation. A wide body of literature discusses the relationship

between the accountability and improvement purposes of quality assurance and in particular whether they are compatible and whether a balance could be found between them and if so how this could be done. Vroeijenstijn (1995a) argues for instance that it is difficult for quality assurance to serve two or more masters, working on improvement for the faculty and on information supply and accountability for the outside world. The incompatibility between accountability and improvement is also often asserted on the ground that there is a conflict in terms of method between them (Thune, 1996). Several authors argue by contrast that accountability and quality improvement may be combined in a balanced strategy. For instance Woodhouse (1999) claims that accountability and quality improvement are "so closely linked that it is more sensible to have the same agency sensitively attempting both than to try to separate them" and maintains that "accountability can always be re-phrased to focus on improvement".

And indeed, a deep conflict is embedded in current developments of quality assurance worldwide. The emphasis is shifting in many countries from external control and regulation to greater responsibility by TEIs for their own quality monitoring, thereby leaving greater scope for internal mechanisms geared towards improvement. Meanwhile, changes in the governance of tertiary education and current trends towards remote steering of TEIs imply that effective accountability mechanisms be put in place (see Chapter 3). As a result, there is some ambivalence in the role and functions of quality assurance in addressing the two purposes of accountability and improvement.

The ambivalence of quality assurance also results from dual objectives of tertiary education systems themselves. On the one hand, the importance of tertiary education for employment and social cohesion implies to improve quality for all, in an improvement perspective. On the other hand, the growing importance of innovation and technological advance for economic growth requires safeguarding the national competitive edge and entails to signal quality and identify champions. In Europe, the Bologna and Lisbon Processes reflect the co-existence of these dual objectives. While the Bologna Process emphasises comparability as a means towards the cross-recognition of qualifications and competences, in a democratisation and employability perspective, the Lisbon Strategy puts more emphasis on the search for excellence as a way to enhance the competitiveness of the *European Research Area* (Lisbon European Council, 2000; Stamoulas, 2006). Quality assurance systems thus have to find ways of addressing both goals.

5.3 Current practices in tertiary quality assurance systems

All countries taking part in the Review have put in place quality assurance mechanisms in some form. However, the dual requirement of accountability and improvement and the ambivalence of purposes are tackled quite differently across countries. This Section therefore describes current practices in terms of the approaches chosen, the key agencies and organisations of stakeholders involved, the methods and instruments used and the outcomes of quality assurance processes.

5.3.1 Approaches to quality assurance

The scope of quality assurance varies a great deal across countries. Not only have countries adopted different approaches to quality assurance, but these approaches also differ with respect to the institution or programme focus of the quality review, its territorial coverage and the types of TEIs encompassed, as well as the frequency and initiation of quality assurance procedures.

Typology of quality assurance systems

The dual requirement of accountability and improvement is tackled through the recourse to three main approaches to quality assurance, namely accreditation, assessment and audit. Table 5.1 summarises the key features of each approach in terms of the questions being asked to the TEI, programme or module of study under scrutiny, the emphasis of the quality investigation and the type of outcomes it produces.

Table 5.1. Typology of quality assurance approaches

Activity	Question	Emphasis	Outcomes
Accreditation	Are you good enough to be approved?	Comprehensive (mission, resources, processes)	Yes/No or Pass/Fail decision
Assessment (Evaluation)	How good are your outputs?	Outputs	Grade (including Pass/Fail)
Audit (Review)	Are you achieving your own objectives? Are your processes effective?	Processes	Description, qualitative

Source: Based on Woodhouse (1999).

To some extent, accreditation mechanisms appear well-suited to serve accountability objectives due to their essentially external locus of control, the graded judgements they produce and the possibility they give to set a pass mark reflecting minimum quality standards to be met. By contrast, the more qualitative outcomes of audit procedures, their emphasis on processes rather than outcomes and their greater internal locus of control make this approach more compatible with improvement-driven objectives. Assessment mechanisms lie between these two approaches, with graded judgements and an emphasis on outcomes which make them suitable for quality signalling – in an accountability perspective – while at the same time leaving scope for improvement recommendations.

Although the reality is certainly not as clear-cut as these conceptual models suggest, the approaches chosen by the countries participating in the Review suggest that accountability-driven approaches dominate, even though a number of countries have adopted mixed systems in which audit mechanisms complement accreditation or assessment processes (Table 5.2).

The United Kingdom is the only tertiary education system where quality assurance follows a predominantly improvement-driven approach for all types of TEIs. It should be noted however that this approach has been developed after a series of external subject reviews over the period 1992-2000 and the quality assurance framework allows for *ad-hoc* subject reviews should the need arise. In addition, accountability is addressed indirectly through the granting of university title and corresponding degree-awarding powers as well as through the publication of standardised performance data to assist student choice (Box 5.4).

The improvement function is however present in other systems. Quality improvement approaches are often found in association with accountability-driven mechanisms, essentially in countries of the Asia-Pacific region (Australia, China, Japan and New Zealand), the Nordic European countries (Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) and a few European systems (Czech Republic and in Portugal and a few Spanish regions where the arrangements are currently under discussion).

Table 5.2. Quality assurance of teaching and learning, 2007

	Approaches used in quality assurance	Initiation of the quality assurance procedure	Entity carrying out the quality assurance activities (number of entities involved)	Rationale for having more than one quality assurance agency (whenever this is the case)	Differentiation of monitoring criteria according to the type of provision	Actors involved in external monitoring panels	Publication of the report from the quality assurance procedure	Formal follow-up process by the quality assurance agency after the initial procedure	Link between assessment results and public funding decisions
Australia[1]	**Accreditation** (TEIs and programmes)	Mandatory (when new TEI is established for universities); Mandatory periodic (for new and existing private TEIs and programmes[2])	Government authorities (9); Intermediate agency (1)	Separate accreditation agencies for different jurisdictions (State, Territory and Federal Government); approaches; types of TEIs	No differentiation	Domestic and foreign academics, employers' representatives	No (private TEIs); Yes (all cases for universities)	Yes (some cases: conditions attached to the accreditation)	*a*
	Audit (TEIs)	Mandatory periodic (every 5 years)					Yes (all cases)	Yes (some cases: recommendations for improvement)	
Belgium (Flemish Community)	**Accreditation**[3] (programmes)	Mandatory periodic (every 8 years)	Intermediate agencies (3)	Separate agencies for different types of TEIs; pyramidal structure[4]	Type of study programme (professional *vs.* academic)	Domestic and foreign academics, students, employers' representatives, stakeholders from professional bodies	Yes (all cases)	No	*a*
Chile	**Accreditation** (TEIs and programmes)	Voluntary; Mandatory non periodic (for medicine and teachers' education)	Intermediate agencies (more than 4)	Separate agencies for different disciplines, level of study, pyramidal structure[5]	Type of TEI (university *vs.* non university)	Domestic and foreign academics, stakeholders from productive sector, professional societies and associations of Deans	Yes (all cases)	Yes (all cases)	*a*
China	**Accreditation** (TEIs and programmes)	Mandatory periodic (every 5 years)	Government authorities (*m*); Intermediate agencies (*m*)	Separate agencies for different approaches; disciplines	No differentiation	Domestic academics, graduates	Yes (all cases)	No	Direct link (*m*)
	Assessment (programmes)	Mandatory periodic (every 5 years)					Yes (all cases)	Yes (some cases: negative evaluations)	
	Audit (TEIs)	Mandatory non periodic					Yes (positive results only)	No	
Croatia	**Accreditation** (TEIs and programmes)	Mandatory periodic (every 4-5 years)	Intermediate agency (1)	*a*	No differentiation	Domestic and foreign academics, students, employers' representatives, accreditation agency representative	Yes (all cases)	Yes (all cases)	*a*
Czech Republic	**Accreditation** (programmes[6])	Mandatory periodic (at least twice the standard length of programme, at least every ten years for PhD programmes)	Intermediate agencies (2)	Separate agencies for different types of TEIs	Type of TEI, discipline	Domestic and foreign academics (in some cases: employers' representatives, students, regional authorities)	Yes (all cases)	Yes (all cases)	*a*
	Audit (TEIs)	Initiative of the intermediate agency (for higher education institutions); Voluntary (for tertiary professional schools)					Yes (all cases)	Yes (some cases: depending on findings)	
Estonia	**Accreditation** (TEIs and programmes)	Voluntary[7]	Intermediate agency (1)	*a*	Type of programme (professional *vs.* academic)	Foreign academics, students (in some cases: employers' representatives)	Yes (all cases)	No	*a*
Finland	**Assessment** (TEIs, the output is a development target rather than a grade)	Mandatory non periodic	Intermediate agency (1)	*a*	No differentiation	Domestic and foreign academics, students, graduates (in some cases: employers' representatives)	Yes (all cases)	Yes (all cases)	No direct link
	Audit (TEIs and programmes)	Voluntary[8]					Yes (all cases)	Yes (some cases: negative evaluations)	
Greece[9]	**Accreditation** (TEIs and programmes)	Mandatory periodic (at least every 4 years)	Intermediate agency (1)	*a*	No differentiation	Domestic academics, researchers, students, stakeholders from a professional or scientific organisation	Yes (all cases)	No	*a*
Iceland	**Accreditation** (TEIs and disciplines)	Mandatory (when new TEI or discipline[10] is established)	Independent agent (assigned by the Ministry of Education)	*a*	No differentiation	Domestic and foreign academics, students, employers' representatives	Yes (all cases)	Yes (all cases)	*a*
	Audit (faculties)	Mandatory periodic (every 3 years)					Yes (all cases)	Yes (all cases)	
Japan	**Accreditation** (TEIs)	Mandatory periodic (every 7 years[11])	Government authorities (1); Intermediate agencies (7)	Separate agencies for different approaches, types of TEIs, disciplines, pyramidal structure	Type of TEI, discipline	Domestic and foreign academics, stakeholders from industrial world	Yes (all cases)	No	*a*
	Audit (TEIs, only national university corporations)	Mandatory periodic (every 6 years for teaching and learning, every year for management)					Yes (all cases)	Yes (all cases)	
Korea	**Accreditation** (TEIs and programmes)	Voluntary	Government authorities (1); Professional agencies for some programmes (8)	Separate agencies for different types of TEIs (2 years *vs.* 4 years), disciplines	Type of TEI, discipline	Domestic academics and employers' representatives	Yes (but not all detailed information)	No	No direct link
Mexico	**Accreditation** (private TEIs and programmes)	Voluntary (for private TEIs and programmes); As a result of a complaint (for programmes)	Intermediate agencies (33)	Separate agencies for public and private TEIs, disciplines	Type of TEI, discipline, level of study	Domestic academics	Yes (positive results only for TEIs); No (for programmes)	No	Direct link (10%, public state universities only)
	Assessment (programmes)	Voluntary					No	No	
Netherlands	**Accreditation** (programmes)	Mandatory periodic (every 6 years)	Government authority (1); Intermediate agencies[12] (3)	Separate agencies for different types of TEIs, pyramidal structure, stages of accreditation procedure	At the discretion of quality assurance agencies in accordance with the accreditation framework	Domestic and foreign academics, student, employers' representatives	Yes (all cases)	Yes (some cases: negative evaluations)	No direct link
New Zealand	**Accreditation** (programmes)	Mandatory (when new TEI or programme is established)	Government authorities (2); Intermediate agencies (3)	Separate agencies for different types of TEIs[14]	No differentiation	Domestic and foreign academics, employer/professional's representatives[15]	Yes (positive results only)	Yes (all cases)	*a*
	Audit (TEIs)	Mandatory periodic[13]					No (results made public but not necessarily the reports)	Yes (all cases)	
Norway	**Accreditation** (TEIs and programmes)	Mandatory (when new TEI is established or changes of category; when new programme is established for non university TEIs)[16]	Intermediate agency (1)	*a*	No differentiation[17]	Domestic and foreign academics (in most cases: from another Nordic country for linguistic reasons), students	Yes (all cases)	Yes (some cases: negative evaluations)	No direct link
	Assessment (programmes and disciplines, results are expressed in general terms rather than in a grade)	Mandatory non periodic					Yes (all cases)	Yes (some cases: negative evaluations)	
	Audit (TEIs)	Mandatory periodic (every 6 years)					Yes (all cases)	Yes (some cases: negative evaluations)	

Table 5.2. Quality assurance of teaching and learning, 2007 (continued)

	Approaches used in quality assurance	Initiation of the quality assurance procedure	Entity carrying out the quality assurance activities (number of entities involved)	Rationale for having more than one quality assurance agency (whenever this is the case)	Differentiation of monitoring criteria according to the type of provision	Actors involved in external monitoring panels	Publication of the report from the quality assurance procedure	Formal follow-up process by the quality assurance agency after the initial procedure	Link between assessment results and public funding decisions
Poland	**Accreditation** (programmes)	Mandatory (when new TEI or programme[18] is established)	Intermediate agency (1); Sectoral agencies (6)	Separate agencies for different types of TEIs (sectoral agencies)	No differentiation	Domestic academics, students (in some cases: foreign academics and employers' representatives)	Yes (all cases)	No	No direct link
	Assessment (programmes)	Mandatory periodic (every 5 years); Voluntary (carried out by sectoral agencies); As a result of a complaint					Yes (all cases)	Yes (some cases: negative evaluations)	
Portugal[19]	**Accreditation** (TEIs and programmes)	Mandatory (when new TEI or programme is established)	Intermediate agency (1)	*a*	No differentiation	Until 2006: Domestic academics (in some cases: foreign academics and employers' representatives); From 2007: Foreign academics and stakeholders	(*m*)	*a*	Direct link (*m*)
	Assessment (programmes)	Mandatory non periodic					Yes (all cases)	No	
	Audit (*m*)	(*m*)					(*m*)	(*m*)	
Russian Federation	**Accreditation** (TEIs and programmes)	Mandatory periodic (every 5 years)	Government authorities (1); Intermediate agencies (1)	Separate agencies for different types and stages of accreditation procedure	Type of TEI	Domestic and foreign academics, employers' representatives, stakeholders from the Ministry and Rectors	Yes (positive results only)	Yes (all cases)	*a*
Spain[1]	**Accreditation** (programmes, not started yet)	Mandatory periodic (every 6 years)	Intermediate agencies (*m*)	Separate agencies for different jurisdictions (regions)	No differentiation	Domestic and foreign academics, employers' representatives	Yes (all cases)	*m*	No direct link
	Assessment (*m*)	Voluntary					Yes (all cases)	Yes (all cases)	
	Audit (*m*, in some regions, not started yet)	Voluntary					Yes (all cases)	*m*	
Sweden	**Accreditation** (programmes and disciplines)	Mandatory (when new programme is established[20])	Intermediate agency (1)	*a*	No differentiation	Domestic and foreign academics, students (in some cases: employers' representatives)	Yes (all cases)	Yes (all cases)	No direct link
	Assessment (programmes)	Mandatory periodic (every 6 years)					Yes (all cases)	Yes (all cases)	
	Audit (TEIs)	Mandatory periodic (every 6 years)					Yes (all cases)	Yes (all cases)	
Switzerland	**Accreditation** (TEIs and programmes)	Voluntary (for universities); Mandatory periodic (7 years for universities of applied sciences); Mandatory non periodic (when new college of higher VET is established)	Government authorities (2); Intermediate agencies (*m*)	Separate agencies for different types of TEIs	Type of TEI	Domestic and foreign academics, students and employers' representatives	Yes (positive results only)	Yes (some cases: negative evaluations)	No direct link
United Kingdom	**Audit** (TEIs)[21]	Mandatory periodic (every 6 years for Eng.,Wal. and N.Irl.); Mandatory periodic (every 4 years for Scot.)	Intermediate agency (1)	*a*	No differentiation	Domestic academics (for Eng.,Wal. and N.Irl.) Domestic academics, students (for Scot.)	Yes (all cases)	Yes (all cases)	*a*

Definitions: This table deals with the formal external procedures used to assure the quality of teaching and learning in public and private tertiary education institutions at the under-graduate level (ISCED level 5). Quality assurance of research activities in tertiary education is excluded from this table.
Quality assurance refers to systematic, structured and continuous attention to quality. In this table, three main approaches of quality assurance are distinguished, namely: accreditation, assessment and audit.
Accreditation refers to a quality assurance procedure which monitors the quality of teaching and learning and results in a decision as to whether a tertiary education institution or programme meets a threshold standard. The output is a yes/no decision.
Assessment refers to a quality assurance procedure which monitors the quality of teaching and learning and results in a graded judgment about the quality of a tertiary education institution or programme. The output is a grade (*e.g.* 'poor – excellent', '1 – 5'). Assessment is also frequently called evaluation.
Audit refers to a quality assurance procedure that focuses more on the internal mechanisms adopted by a tertiary education institution to monitor and improve its teaching and learning quality, rather than the direct monitoring of this quality. It also checks the extent to which the institution is achieving its own explicit or implicit objectives.
Mandatory refers to a legal obligation to undertake the quality assurance procedure.
Periodic refers to a system where the procedure is repeated at regular intervals.
External monitoring panel refers to a group of people external to the programme or institution being reviewed (*i.e.* non staff members), invited by the quality assurance agency to undertake the quality monitoring.
Follow-up refers to a process that reviews the actions taken by the tertiary education institution or programme monitored in light of any recommendations contained in the quality report.
Direct link refers to systems where the results of the quality assessment are included in funding formulas. Where such link exists, the percentage of the annual budget of the institution or programme that typically depends on quality results is indicated in parentheses.
No direct link refers to cases where the results of the quality assessment are not directly connected to funding decisions. Situations where assessment results are used in project-based funding allocation, in negotiations of block grants, or where continuing poor performance leads to funding being stopped should be considered as no direct link.

Notes: *a*: Information not applicable because the category does not apply; *m*: Information not available; *TEI*: Tertiary education institution.
1. Information concerns universities only and does not account for the non-university sector.
2. Once established Australian universities are autonomous institutions with responsibility for the quality assurance of new programmes.
3. The quality assurance process consists of three major steps: internal quality assurance resulting in a self-evaluation report, an external quality review resulting in a public report and the accreditation.
4. There is only one accreditation intermediate agency and two quality assurance agencies which carry out the external quality reviews. The accreditation decision is based on the reports produced by the external quality review teams.
5. The central agency (*i.e.* National Accreditation Agency, CNA) carries out the accreditation activities for TEIs and some programmes (*i.e.* only for undergraduate medicine, teacher training and Ph.D. programmes). Private agencies validated by the central agency are responsible for the accreditation of other programmes.
6. Only for higher education institutions, programme accreditation is not fully implemented for tertiary professional schools .
7. The interval usually observed in practice is 7 years since accreditation is required to receive public funds and diploma recognition. The Ministry of Education and Research and the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council can initiate accreditation procedure when required.
8. In practice, all TEIs participate in the national audit activity conducted by the Higher Education Evaluation Council.
9. The new provisions for the quality assurance of teaching and learning adopted in July 2005 are not yet implemented due to ongoing debate about the legal reform of the present framework. Under the new framework, external evaluation is conducted by the External Evaluation Committee nominated by the Independent Administrative Agency (ADIP) which is funded and approved by the government. The Agency was to be set up in May 2005 and the legislation on its composition has already been approved.
10. However, all TEIs must apply before July 2008 to be accredited in each discipline.
11. Accreditation procedure is initiated by the government authority at the establishment of a new TEI and then certified evaluation is carried out every 7 years by intermediate agencies.
12. Accreditation by the independent supranational agency (government authority) is required at the establishment of a new programme. Existing programmes are accredited based on a 3-step procedure: 1) internal evaluation, 2) external peer-review by independent bodies 3) accreditation by supranational agency.
13. Audit cycles vary and can differ according to the sector, the length of time a TEI has been in operation, and the nature of its operation (including any significant changes made).
14. The New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee has responsibility for universities while the New Zealand Qualifications Authority has responsibility for all other TEIs and delegates most quality assurance of polytechnics to the Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality agency.
15. Students are typically consulted by panels.
16. Except disciplines for which the TEI has a right to award PhDs.
17. Accreditation is voluntary for private TEIs. A preference for accreditation by study programme is usually observed in practice.
18. Accreditation is mandatory at the establishment of new programmes for those public TEIs that are not authorised to confer the doctor degree in at least 4 disciplines.
19. Portugal has just established a new legal framework for quality assurance which has not been implemented yet.
20. Mandatory only at the establishment of new master programmes at university colleges or professional programmes at universities or university colleges. Accreditation is required to change the status of university colleges to full or partial university status.
21. Monitoring principally comprises peer-review based audits and reviews of TEIs, with the opportunity for subject-based review as the need arises.

Source: Derived from information supplied by countries participating in the project. The table should be interpreted as providing broad indications only, and not strict comparability across countries.

By contrast, a number of countries have adopted essentially accountability-driven approaches to quality assurance – through the use of accreditation and assessment mechanisms. This is the case in Latin America (Chile and Mexico), Korea, Eastern European countries (Croatia, Estonia, Poland and the Russian Federation) and in the rest of mainland Europe (Belgium – Flemish Community, France, Greece, the Netherlands and Switzerland).

Countries with more accountability-driven approaches – either alone or associated with improvement-driven mechanisms – differ in the processes followed to assure that minimum standards are met.

Accreditation processes

The vast majority of countries use some form of accreditation process: this is the case of Australia, Belgium (Flemish Community), Chile, China, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Greece, Iceland, Japan, Korea, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland (Table 5.2).

But while accreditation applies uniformly to existing and new TEIs/programmes alike in some countries, it is limited to new TEIs and/or programmes in Australia,[87] Iceland, New Zealand,[88] Norway, Poland,[89] Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland (where it only applies to new colleges of higher vocational education and training).

A number of countries also have different accreditation requirements depending on the type of TEI delivering the programme considered. In some countries, certain TEIs are exempted from the obligation to get their courses and programmes accredited. In Norway for instance, a TEI accredited as a university is given the right to establish all types of study programmes including those at doctoral level. A similar situation is found in Australia and the United Kingdom for universities, in Mexico for autonomous TEIs and in Sweden for public TEIs. In other countries, accreditation of TEIs and/or their programmes is generally mandatory for all TEIs irrespective of their type/status. The only exceptions are Chile, Estonia,[90] Korea, Mexico and Switzerland (where accreditation is voluntary with the exception of vocational tertiary programmes), some disciplines in Chile (medicine and teacher training) or in the event of a complaint in Estonia and Mexico.

Accreditation is typically required for TEIs to be allowed to operate and/or offer a programme. In Australia, Belgium (Flemish Community), Iceland, Korea, New Zealand and the Russian Federation for instance, registers of approved TEIs and quality-assured

87. In Australia, accreditation is limited to new universities but applies periodically to new and existing private TEIs and their programmes. The revised national protocols will apply to both existing and new TEIs from 2008.

88. The approval process for new private TEIs and new programmes involves some follow-up reviews through a "graduating year review" whereby the TEI must report to the quality assurance body on a number of indicators after the initial cohort of students has completed the programme. Once that review has been completed, however, there is no systematic subsequent external review.

89. Similar to New Zealand, new programmes undergo an evaluation after the first diplomas have been issued.

90. Although accreditation is voluntary, it is required for diploma recognition and to receive public funds.

qualifications are maintained. Permission to operate is also conditional upon accreditation of the TEI and/or programme in the Czech Republic, Estonia,[91] the Netherlands and Poland. By contrast, the results of accreditation processes are dissociated from permission to operate in Mexico.

Accreditation is also a prerequisite for TEIs to receive public funds in most countries where it is mandatory, but also in Estonia where it is voluntary. By contrast, the results of accreditation processes are dissociated from funding in Korea and Mexico.

Assessment processes

Quality assessment approaches are used in China, Finland, France, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden – in association with accreditation mechanisms in all cases but Finland (Table 5.2).

In Norway, Poland, Portugal and Sweden, the recourse to assessments allows countries to meet the ongoing need for accountability despite the fact that accreditation is only required at the establishment of new TEIs and/or programmes. Subsequent quality assurance mechanisms therefore take the form of mandatory assessment, on an *ad-hoc* basis in Norway and Portugal (*e.g.* subject reviews) and on a periodic basis in Poland and Sweden.

Mandatory assessments also take place in China on a periodic basis and in Finland on an *ad-hoc* basis. In Mexico and Spain by contrast, quality assessments are carried out on a voluntary basis. In the case of Spain, ongoing accountability objectives are nevertheless met given that periodic accreditation of programmes is to become mandatory.

Audit processes

A number of countries have also adopted more improvement-driven processes in the form of quality audits. Australia, China, the Czech Republic, Finland, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom have such audit mechanisms in place, as well as Japan for national university corporations and Spain in some regions (Table 5.2).

Processes of internal self review and quality monitoring

Finally, the quality enhancement function is sometimes addressed through legislative provisions requiring TEIs to put in place internal quality assurance mechanisms and to engage in internal quality evaluations. This approach is followed by Belgium (Flemish Community), the Czech Republic, Finland, Iceland, Japan, New Zealand and Poland. In the Czech Republic higher education institutions are requested to publish the results of these internal quality evaluations as an incentive for them to focus on quality enhancement (this does not apply to tertiary professional schools).

In some cases, external audits of these internal quality assurance procedures take place. This is for instance the case in Australia, Norway and the United Kingdom where universities – as self-accrediting TEIs – are responsible for ensuring the quality of their

91. Accreditation is voluntary but once it is required, the TEI must cease operations and/or terminate the programme if accreditation is denied.

own academic standards and external quality assurance mechanisms hence audit their procedures for doing so.

As the above typology illustrates, the two objectives of accountability and quality improvement are not necessarily mutually exclusive. There is indeed a degree of accountability in approaches relying primarily upon audit mechanisms – as illustrated by the United Kingdom – while by contrast the improvement function is generally covered in one way or another in countries operating accountability-driven processes. Not only do a number of countries implement dual approaches, but in Korea where the quality assurance approach is based on accreditation mechanisms only, the improvement function of quality assurance processes has long been achieved by limiting access to detailed evaluation results to the sole administrators of TEIs while the public was only told whether the TEI/department was accredited or not. The publication of evaluation results is also limited in Mexico. Such provisions allow evaluations to serve as a self-diagnosis and reference tool for TEIs.

Overall, countries participating in the Review display a wide range of approaches to quality assurance. Not only do arrangements differ across countries, but the approaches followed have also evolved over time. Several countries have recently seen the focus of their quality assurance arrangements evolve towards greater accountability. This is for instance the case in the Netherlands and Spain where quality assurance arrangements have moved towards a system of accreditation. Likewise, the focus of Australian quality assurance has moved over the past decade beyond self-monitoring by TEIs to include the improvement of efficiency and effectiveness with a heightened awareness of public accountability and benchmarking. In general, this shift has been justified by the significant level of taxpayer investment in tertiary education and the need to ensure that public funds are spent wisely in a new environment of partial deregulation and greater diversity of tertiary education providers.

In the meantime, a number of countries have also moved from inspection and control to strengthen the improvement function of their quality assurance systems. This is for instance the case of Portugal where audit mechanisms have been introduced in 2006/2007 or the Netherlands where the criteria for accreditation include an obligation for each programme to strive for constant improvement. In Sweden, the new cycle of evaluations that started in late 2007 is placing greater emphasis on internal systems of quality monitoring than in the past. A number of countries also require TEIs to establish internal quality assurance mechanisms by law with a view to reinforce the improvement function of quality assurance. Belgium (Flemish Community) is an example of this approach.

Level of quality evaluation

The level of quality evaluations varies from one quality assurance system to another. In general, quality is addressed either at the institutional or at the discipline/programme level. Subject to wide debate is whether quality evaluations should focus on TEIs (horizontal focus) or instead on departments and academic programmes within TEIs. According to Vroeijenstijn (1995a), institution-wide evaluations have the advantage of requiring fewer experts and being less time-consuming, hence less expensive. However, this comes at a cost since the limited involvement of experts at grass-roots level limits the scope for recommendations on curriculum improvement. Conversely, programme-wide approaches allow going into more depth and detail, involving more specialised experts and individual staff members and may yield more useful recommendations for improvement but they are more time-consuming and expensive.

Practices vary widely with respect to the level of quality appraisal among countries participating in the Review (Kis, 2005). The situation is further complicated by variations within countries in the level of quality evaluation depending on the type of quality assurance approach used and the type of TEI being considered. It is therefore useful to develop a taxonomy of quality assurance approaches according to these variables in order to summarise the key features of the various quality assurance systems (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3 Taxonomy of quality assurance approaches

FOCUS OF QUALITY REVIEW	EMPHASIS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE: Accreditation mechanisms (Accountability-driven)	Assessment mechanisms	Audit mechanisms (Improvement-driven)
Comprehensive	Australia (Priv) Chile China Croatia Estonia France Greece (not started yet) Iceland Korea Mexico (Priv) New Zealand (Priv) Norway (Voc, Priv) Portugal[1] (focus to be determined) Russian Federation Switzerland	Finland France	Australia (Voc) Finland
Both Institution and Discipline/Programme			
Discipline/Programme only	Australia (Voc) Belgium (Fl. community) Czech Republic (Uni, Priv) Netherlands New Zealand Poland Spain Sweden[2] (Voc, Priv)	China Mexico Norway Poland Portugal Sweden United Kingdom[3]	
Institution only	Japan		Australia (Uni) China Czech Republic Japan (Uni[4]) New Zealand Norway Sweden United Kingdom
Other		Spain: staff, library facilities	Iceland: faculties Portugal (focus to be determined) Spain (some regions, not started yet)
Specific			

Notes: Whenever an approach applies only to a specific type of TEIs, this is indicated in parentheses. Abbreviations are used in reference to universities (Uni), vocationally-oriented TEIs (Voc) and private TEIs (Priv).

1. Portugal had just established a new legal framework for quality assurance at the time of the preparation of this Table. Some aspects were still to be determined.

2. For master's level and professional degrees.

3. Subject reviews as the need arises.

4. Only for national university corporations.

Sources: Derived from information supplied by countries in Table 5.2, Country Background Reports, Country Review reports and Kis (2005).

This analysis shows that disciplines and/or programmes tend to be the focus of quality assurance processes with greater emphasis on accountability objectives, with the notable exception of Japan where TEIs are the sole focus of attention. A number of countries also have accountability-driven mechanisms focused on TEIs as well as their disciplines/programmes. By contrast, quality assurance mechanisms that are more geared towards improvement tend to focus more on TEIs, with the exception of Australia (for

vocational TEIs), Finland and Iceland. In general, institutional evaluations focus more on administrative processes while department and programme evaluations put more emphasis on the educational quality of programmes in each field of study.

With respect to accreditation mechanisms, emphasis is placed on the sole disciplines and/or programmes in Australia (vocational programmes), Belgium (Flemish Community), the Czech Republic (although not fully implemented for programmes offered by vocational TEIs), the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Spain and Sweden (for programmes offered by vocational and private TEIs). The accreditation of programmes also takes place – in association with TEI accreditation – in Australia, Mexico and New Zealand for private providers and in Norway for vocational and private TEIs. A number of countries have adopted mixed approaches relying on the accreditation of TEIs as well as departments and/or programmes within them. For instance, Korea carries out quality evaluations of both departments – on a rolling basis with eight disciplines examined each year throughout the country – and comprehensive evaluations of TEIs. Chile, China, Croatia, Estonia, France, Greece,[92] Iceland, Portugal, the Russian Federation and Switzerland have similar accreditation processes at both institutional and programme level.

The emphasis of assessment processes is also geared at disciplines and/or programmes in most countries where they exist. China, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Portugal and Sweden have such mechanisms in place, whereas Finland and France are the only countries to carry out assessments at both institutional and programme level.

By contrast, audit mechanisms tend to put more emphasis on TEIs, as illustrated by Australia, China, the Czech Republic, Japan (for national university corporations), New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Quality audits are performed at both institutional and programme level in Australia (for vocational TEIs) and Finland.

With respect to trends, El Khawas *et al.* (1998) indicates that many countries have begun with institutional evaluations but have shifted the emphasis of their quality assurance systems towards programme-wide approaches as their systems experienced growth in professional fields of study. Such a trend is for instance taking place in Croatia, the Russian Federation and Spain. By contrast, Australia and the United Kingdom moved in the 1990s from a discipline to a whole-of-institution approach to quality evaluations. Some form of accreditation mechanisms at programme-level remains, however, as part of the licensing processes performed by the regulatory bodies of some professions (*e.g.* lawyers, medical practitioners, engineers).

Scope of quality evaluation

The scope of quality assurance also varies considerably between and within countries. A first categorisation can be made according to the territorial level of organisation of the quality assurance system, *i.e.* territorial, national or even supranational in a few instances. In addition, a second categorisation relates to the differentiation of the quality assurance mechanisms according to the type of TEI considered, *i.e.* between universities and vocationally-oriented TEIs as well as between public and private TEIs.

92. Although the provisions for accreditation have been adopted, they are not yet implemented.

Territorial scope

Quality assurance agencies may carry out evaluations of TEIs and/or their programmes in a determined territorial jurisdiction, as it is the case in some countries where responsibility for tertiary education lies with state/provincial entities. In other countries, by contrast, national quality assurance agencies operate over the entire national territory. Yet a few countries have adopted various mechanisms allowing international quality assurance bodies to operate on the national territory, thereby resulting in what could be called a supranational organisation of quality assurance.

In the large majority of countries participating in the Review, quality assurance agencies operate on a nation-wide basis. The national organisation of quality assurance usually follows the national organisation of the tertiary education system itself, and is often justified on the grounds that similar standards need to be met across the national territory. France, Iceland, Japan, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Russian Federation, Sweden and Switzerland can be said to have a national quality assurance framework.

The organisation of quality assurance is also essentially national in scope, but with some supranational elements in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland and the Netherlands. Indeed, some studies report on the feasibility of cross-border transfer of quality assurance systems (Billing and Thomas, 2000). In the Czech Republic, Estonia and Finland, TEIs are in principle allowed to use the services of any authorised international quality assurance agency for external evaluation – *e.g.* one included in the *European Quality Assurance Register of Higher Education*. There is evidence that some evaluations of Czech higher education institutions are carried out by the *European University Association* (EUA) or American accreditation agencies for faculties of medicine – however, these cannot substitute the mandatory accreditation by the national agency. In Estonia, however, Tomusk (1997) reports resistance by academic communities to implement imported quality assurance procedures. But the most accomplished expression of a supranational organisation of quality assurance is found in Belgium (Flemish Community) and the Netherlands where a joint accreditation body shared between the two systems is responsible for the accreditation of all bachelor's and master's programmes (Box 5.1). In Europe, the establishment of the *European Quality Assurance Register in Higher Education* (EQAR) as of March 2008 is likely to change this picture in the years to come, by providing greater scope for supranational quality assurance activities wherever national arrangements permit.

Lastly, a number of countries can be said to have a territorial organisation of their quality assurance system, even though some quality assurance activities and standards apply at national level. This is the case of Australia, Belgium (between Communities), China, the Russian Federation, Spain and the United Kingdom. In Australia for instance, quality audits are performed by an agency that operates across the national territory while the establishment of universities and the accreditation of non-self-accrediting TEIs is essentially the responsibility of states and territories. In China, the distinction lies between universities – for which quality assurance is monitored at national level – and vocational TEIs where individual provinces are in charge of quality assurance activities. The situation of the United Kingdom is atypical to the extent that a single quality assurance agency operates different procedures in the different countries, albeit with a common understanding of principles, values and academic standards. Belgium is also peculiar as its tertiary quality assurance system organisational features are both territorial – with different quality assurance systems between the Flemish and French

Communities – and supranational as a result of the joint accreditation body between the Flemish Community and the Netherlands.

Box 5.1. The joint accreditation organisation of the Netherlands and Belgium (Flemish Community)

The Accreditation Organisation of Belgium (Flemish Community) and the Netherlands (NVAO) is a joint accrediting body with responsibility for the accreditation of all bachelor's and master's programmes from publicly-funded and private TEIs wishing to offer degree programmes in the Netherlands and Belgium (Flemish Community). The NVAO (*www.nvao.net*) is an independent body financed by the Netherlands and Belgium (Flemish Community) in proportions of 60 and 40% respectively.

The idea was started in 2000 when the Netherlands and Belgium (Flemish Community) expressed their intention to establish a joint accreditation organisation. Both parties were endeavouring to implement the Bologna Declaration and regarded a well-functioning and internationally acceptable accreditation system as a precondition for furthering international comparability of their tertiary education programmes. This bi-national accreditation organisation was formally established in 2003 by the Dutch and Flemish Ministers and started its operations in 2005.

In the Netherlands, the NVAO accredits existing study programmes, validates new study programmes and advises on the possible lengthening of master's degree courses in university education. In Belgium (Flemish Community), the operation of NVAO grants accreditation and carries out the validations of all new study programmes.

Type of TEI

A second categorisation relates to the quality assurance processes applicable to different categories of TEIs. In some countries all TEIs undergo the same quality assurance procedures. This model applies uniform standards, criteria and procedures throughout the system and is known as "one-size-fits-all" approach. Its main advantage lies in the possibility of learning within the system as quality assurance agencies have more opportunities to identify and spread good practice and innovation across organisational borders. In a number of countries however, the monitoring criteria are differentiated across sectors – usually for universities and vocationally-oriented TEIs – or disciplines. Some countries also have different quality assurance agencies/bodies responsible for different types of TEIs. In both cases a further distinction can be made between public and private TEIs (van Damme *et al.*, 2004).

A number of participants in the Review have different quality monitoring criteria for different categories of TEIs. This pattern is found in Australia (for accreditations), Chile, the Czech Republic, Japan, Korea, Mexico, the Netherlands,[93] the Russian Federation and Switzerland. In Belgium (Flemish Community) and Estonia, the quality monitoring criteria are also differentiated between academic and professional programmes. By contrast, there is no differentiation of monitoring criteria between different categories of TEIs – *i.e.* both universities and vocationally-oriented TEIs – in China, Croatia, Finland, Greece, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal (since 2007), Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom for higher education provision (Table 5.2).

In some instances however, different quality assurance agencies/bodies are responsible for different subsectors and categories or TEIs even though they implement similar quality monitoring criteria (Table 5.2). This is the case in New Zealand and in Australia where universities are audited by the *Australian Universities Quality Agency*

93. One quality assurance agency, the accrediting organisation NVAO, accredits all programmes at all kinds of TEIs according to one set of criteria which incorporates a criterion for distinction between academically-oriented *vs.* vocationally-oriented programmes.

(AUQA) while vocationally-oriented TEIs are audited by state and territories registering bodies. France also has a differentiated system, with the *National Agency for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education* (AERES) responsible for the accreditation and assessment of universities and most study programmes whereas separate commissions have responsibility for the evaluation of engineering, business and some other specialised programmes. Different quality assurance agencies/bodies also cover different types of TEIs but with different quality monitoring criteria in Belgium (Flemish Community), the Czech Republic, Japan, Korea, Mexico and Switzerland. In the Netherlands, in practice, different types of TEIs use different quality assessment agencies for the external peer reviews of programmes, on the basis of which the NVAO decides on accreditation for all TEIs.

Lastly, countries also differ in the extent to which they impose differentiated quality assurance obligations to their public and private TEIs. On the one hand, New Zealand requires private TEIs to be accredited in addition to the accreditation of programmes which applies uniformly to public and private providers. Conversely, accreditation is voluntary for private TEIs in Mexico and in Norway for institutional accreditation, although non-accredited private TEIs in Norway need to apply for accreditation for each programme offered. By contrast, the same rules and quality assurance obligations apply for public and private TEIs alike in Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Iceland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Spain, Switzerland and Sweden in the case of quality audits.

Initiation and frequency of quality evaluations

Quality assurance procedures can be carried out either on a compulsory (*i.e.* imposed on TEIs by public authorities) or on a voluntary basis (*i.e.* initiated at the request of the TEI). If the procedure is compulsory, it can be either repeated at regular intervals (cyclical) or initiated by the quality assurance agency on an *ad-hoc* or on demand basis.

Initiation: compulsory *vs.* voluntary monitoring

All countries participating in the Review impose some form of quality assurance process on a mandatory basis, with the sole exceptions of Chile (for programmes other than medicine and teacher education), Estonia, Korea, Mexico and Switzerland for universities (Table 5.2).

These mandatory quality assurance exercises consist in accreditation procedures in Australia, Belgium (Flemish Community), China, Croatia, the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Iceland, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland for vocational TEIs (Table 5.2). In addition, mandatory quality assessments take place in China, Finland, France, Norway, Poland, Portugal and Sweden. Lastly, a number of countries also impose mandatory quality audits, as is the case in Australia, China, Iceland, Japan (for national university corporations), New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The Dutch situation illustrates the compelling nature of some of these quality assurance systems. Indeed, an unsuccessful application for accreditation means that a TEI cannot offer a new programme or has to cease offering an existing programme. Moreover, the criteria for accreditation require TEIs to have an internal quality assurance process in place.

By contrast, some quality assurance processes may be carried out at the initiative – and discretion – of TEIs themselves. This situation is found in Chile, Estonia, Korea, Mexico and Switzerland as indicated above, but also in the Czech Republic, Finland, Poland and Spain for some specific quality assessments or audits.

Lastly, quality assurance procedures may in some instances be initiated by complaints from students, as is the case in Estonia, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Poland (Table 5.2). In the Netherlands, an inspectorate which is part of the Ministry has responsibility to examine problems with particular programmes or TEIs identified through student or staff complaints and/or press reports. Similarly, an independent review authority investigates complaints against public-sector TEIs in New Zealand, while the quality assurance agency considers complaints against private TEIs.

Frequency: cyclical *vs.* non cyclical

Most countries participating in the Review have adopted provisions whereby at least some of their quality assurance procedures are repeated periodically, and cycles of quality assurance take place. For accreditation processes, this means that accreditation (or registration, licensing) is granted for a specified period and can be revoked if performance standards are not sustained over time. Processes of cyclical evaluations are usually justified on the ground that they give TEIs an incentive to strive for continued quality improvement. Their main disadvantage however lies in the administrative burden and costs of the process if it is carried out too often or yields insufficient quality improvement and progress. Chile, Estonia,[94] Finland, Korea and Portugal are the only countries where no such provisions formally exist.

Yet, quality assurance systems vary in the frequency of their quality review cycles. Most systems operate on five to six years rolling cycles. This is the case in Australia, China, France (for engineering and business programmes), Japan (for evaluations of national university corporations), the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, the Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. However quality reviews are less frequent in Belgium (Flemish Community), the Czech Republic (for doctoral programmes), Japan (for evaluations by certified organisations of all TEIs) and in Switzerland while they occur more often in Croatia, France (for universities), Greece, Iceland and Scotland where they are repeated every third or fourth year (Table 5.2).

Estonia, France, Poland and Switzerland have put in place an interesting approach, whereby the duration of the accreditation period which is granted to TEIs and/or their programmes is adjusted to reflect the confidence that the quality assurance agency has in their internal quality systems. Accreditation is granted for less than the regular period – three years instead of the usual seven years in Estonia and Switzerland – whenever the outcome of the application is a conditional approval. France also has provision allowing for accreditations of reduced duration in cases where rapid changes are needed whereas in Poland, positive and outstanding assessments result in a longer cycle of six years. New Zealand has a similar policy regarding the re-accreditation of its private providers.

94. In practice however, the interval usually observed is seven years since accreditation is required to receive public funds and diploma recognition.

5.3.2 Key agencies and stakeholders involved in quality assurance

Several stakeholder groups have an interest in quality assurance policies. From the supply side, Watty (2003) identifies four key groups in tertiary education, namely governments, quality assurance agencies, TEIs and individual academics. In addition, stakeholder groups reflecting the demand side of tertiary education include students, employers, parents and society at large. The role of these various groups in quality assurance policies and practices differs across countries.

Overall responsibility for quality assurance

Educational authorities, government bodies and autonomous agencies

Government bodies often play an important role in the quality assurance of tertiary education. In some countries they are directly in charge of the coordination of quality assurance procedures, while in others this responsibility has been devolved to one or more separate quality assurance agencies/bodies with varying levels of autonomy from government authorities. In the latter case, government authorities sometimes make final decisions regarding accreditation or corrective action on the basis of recommendations of the quality assurance agencies/bodies.

Only a few countries have government bodies directly in charge of the coordination or implementation of quality assurance activities. This is the case in Australia (for accreditation), China, Iceland, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Russian Federation and Switzerland (Table 5.2). In Iceland for instance, the evaluation of education is carried out by a division of evaluation and supervision in the Ministry. The Australian situation is peculiar. Indeed, as several other federal States, quality assurance is a joint responsibility of the federal and regional levels of government, with the federal State involved in the general steering and harmonisation of the quality assurance system while accreditation is delegated to states and territories for TEIs under their jurisdiction. However, the backbone of quality assurance audits is performed by the *Australian Universities Quality Agency* (AUQA).

But in most countries, quality assurance responsibility is shared between government authorities and one or more agencies coordinating and implementing quality assurance operations. Quality assurance activities are performed by a single agency in Australia (for university audits), Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom. By contrast, two or more intermediate agencies/bodies are involved in Belgium (Flemish Community), Chile, China, the Czech Republic, France, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Russian Federation, Spain and Switzerland. Professional and sectoral agencies are also involved in Korea and Poland[95] (Table 5.2).

Among countries where two or more agencies are involved in quality assurance activities, these separate agencies cover different categories of TEIs in Belgium (Flemish Community), the Czech Republic, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Switzerland. In the other countries, there are several rationales for having more than one agency. Some intermediate agencies are in charge of specific disciplines and/or levels of study in Chile, China, France, Japan, Korea and Mexico. Similarly, there are different agencies for different types of approaches in China, Japan, the Netherlands and the

95. However the *State Accreditation Committee*'s assessments are the only ones to be legally-binding.

Russian Federation whereas in Spain, the different agencies reflect the federal nature of the quality assurance system. Lastly, Belgium (Flemish Community), Chile, Japan and the Netherlands has a pyramidal organisation whereby some intermediate agencies are in charge of pre-evaluations which are subsequently examined by another intermediate agency.

Role of civil society: the growing importance of media rankings

The past few years have seen the emergence of civil society as a new player in quality assurance – albeit informally and outside of national quality assurance frameworks – through the development of institutional rankings and league tables for the most part produced by commercial publishing enterprises (Usher and Savino, 2006; Marginson, 2007). A growing number of such rankings have been developed at both national and international levels in order to compare tertiary education providers against a number of quality criteria. These rankings typically combine various quantitative variables into a single, all-encompassing "score" which is presented as a proxy for the quality of the TEI.

The precursor ranking is the annual US News and World Report's (USNWR) *Guide to America's Best Colleges* which has been published since 1983. Rankings of domestic TEIs are also published by the *Perspektyvy* magazine in Poland, the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper in Japan and the *Joong Ang Daily* in Korea (Salmi and Saroyan, 2007). In Norway, four newspapers cooperate on interviewing a substantial number of first-year students and publish the results on their perception of their programme and TEIs along a number of dimensions. Usher and Savino (2006) also report national rankings in Australia, China, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Rankings bring some credibility in terms of autonomy and independence of evaluators. They have however received wide criticisms from TEIs and quality assurance specialists due to their arbitrariness, sensitivity to the weightings of the different criteria considered, and lack of reliability and professionalism (Altbach, 2006). Usher and Savino (2006) also show – on the basis of a comparative analysis – that league tables consistently tend to be biased towards larger TEIs and those that have good inputs in terms of money and more talented students. In the context of the United States, critics have also shown that these rankings encourage TEIs to "game" the system by exaggerating the criteria that affect the final ranking, *e.g.* by recruiting the academic staff who drive improved performance in the ranking index, notably Thomson/ISI-classified "HiCi" researchers and Nobel Prize winners. Several authors also question their usefulness as proxies of quality (Dill and Soo, 2005; Astin and Lee, 2003).

Yet, there is strong empirical evidence across countries and internationally that institutional rankings have a strong signalling power and play a persuasive role in prospective students' choice of a TEI (Griffith and Rask, 2007). As noted by Merisotis (2002), rankings are here to stay. As imperfect as they are, they satisfy a public demand for transparency and information (Sadlak and Liu, 2007). This awareness has led the main organisations producing rankings and league tables to agree on a set of principles of quality and good practice – the so-called *Berlin Principles* (CHE, 2006). There are also a number of policy responses at national level. In China and the Russian Federation, the development of rankings within the framework of the quality assurance system is being envisaged as a way to avoid that these are done by non-specialists. In most countries however, policy makers have sought to counterbalance the impact of rankings by publishing quality-related information at institutional level to allow users to develop their own judgment and tailor-made rankings. Current work by the German Centre for Higher

Education Development is an interesting initiative in this respect (CHE, 2007). Yet, these quality databases are often plagued by gaps in the information base. In particular, few countries have objective measures of learning outcomes (Box 5.2).

Box 5.2. Assessments of tertiary education learning outcomes

Numerous indicators exist at both national and international levels on tertiary education outputs and outcomes in terms of the type and number of degrees awarded, the research outputs produced or the labour-market returns to tertiary education. However, for other aspects, and most notably for the learning outcomes of tertiary education, available data are much more limited.

Nevertheless, a few assessments of tertiary education learning outcomes exist, which measure the skills of tertiary graduates (Nusche, 2008). Brazil is the only country where testing takes place at the national level and is mandatory for graduates from all TEIs. The Brazilian national exam (ENADE) has been carried out since 2004 as a random-sampling test to assess both subject-specific knowledge and generic academic abilities. It is publicly funded and involves no cost for TEIs.

Standardised assessments of graduates' skills also exist in Australia, Mexico and the United States. In Australia and Mexico, TEIs may voluntarily subscribe to nationally developed standardised tests for graduating students, the *Graduate Skills Assessment* (GSA) in Australia, and in Mexico the *General Examination for Graduates of "Técnico Superior" Degrees* (EGETSU) for 2-year degrees and the *General Examination for Graduates of "Licenciatura" Degrees* (EGEL) for 4-year degrees. In the United States, private assessment agencies offer a vast array of different tests that are being used by hundreds of TEIs every year (*e.g.* the *Collegiate Learning Assessment* project).

However, no instrument allows a comparison of tertiary education learning outcomes across countries. This information gap attracted particular attention by OECD Education Ministers at their meeting in June 2006, and the OECD was invited to explore how this gap could be filled. In response, a high-level expert group was established to explore the feasibility of developing a new generation of comparative assessments of tertiary education learning outcomes and to develop a roadmap for future work in this field. Such a project would be similar to what the OECD is now doing on a routine basis for schooling outcomes through the *Programme of International Student Assessment* (PISA). If successful this assessment would provide stakeholders with better information on what tertiary students know and can do. A motivation behind this work is that this information could contribute to TEIs' knowledge of their own teaching performance, and thereby provide a tool for improvement.

The expert group has convened on three occasions in 2007, to review potential uses and users of benchmarks for the quality of tertiary education outcomes, to discuss options for defining and operationalising learning outcomes, and to discuss the design and implementation of a feasibility study. During an informal meeting in January 2008, OECD Education Ministers underlined the importance of establishing valid and reliable measures of learning outcomes and encouraged the OECD to carry out the feasibility study, with the aim of contributing to increased accountability and improvement of assessment methods of learning outcomes by governments, TEIs and quality assurance agencies.

The objective of the feasibility study is to determine whether an international assessment is scientifically and practically possible. The assessment will be done at the institutional level, and will be based on a written test of the competencies of students who are almost at the end of a bachelor's programme. Expert advice is that the feasibility study should look both at transverse critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are necessary for success in both academic and business contexts, combined with a subject specific test relating to one or at most two disciplines. It is expected that the feasibility study will be carried out in 2009. On the basis of its results, decisions on further action will be taken (for more information on how this project develops, see *www.oecd.org/edu/ahelo*).

Ownership of quality assurance agencies and implications

External quality assurance agencies are usually established either by the national or regional government or by the TEIs themselves, often at the requirement of the government. These different arrangements translate into varying balances of ownership and governance, each with different types of drawbacks. Woodhouse (1999) indicates that

systems in which quality assurance agencies are established by individual or groups of TEIs may be subject to suspicions of lenience. By contrast, agencies with closer links with government authorities may face critics for putting too much emphasis on funding and national priorities, and having less freedom of action. A third type of quality assurance agencies – those dealing with professional accreditation – are often criticised for being too cautious and conservative, and protecting the interests of insiders.

Several countries have quality assurance agencies established by the TEIs themselves. This is for instance the case in Belgium with the *Flemish Inter-University Council* (VLIR) and the *Flemish Council for Higher Non-University Education* (VLHORA), or in New Zealand for universities (*New Zealand Vice-Chancellors Committee*). In the United Kingdom the *Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education* (QAA) is an independent body funded by subscriptions from TEIs and through contracts with the major funding bodies. By contrast, the quality assurance agencies are established by government authorities in Australia, France, Japan, New Zealand (for the non-university sector), Norway, the Russian Federation or Spain. However, even when quality assurance agencies are established by government authorities they often benefit from a significant degree of autonomy.

A few countries also have part of their quality assurance activities carried out by professional associations, usually through the accreditation of some professional courses. Private professional accreditation boards are in charge of department evaluations in the engineering, medical and nursing disciplines in Korea, for programmes leading to accounting, engineering, medicine, nursing or teacher qualifications in New Zealand and for programmes leading to lawyer, doctor, engineer or pharmacist titles in Portugal. Professional accreditation also takes place in Australia and the United Kingdom.

Involvement of stakeholders

The role of stakeholder groups in the context of quality assurance is subject to discussion in the literature, in terms of whether they should be actively involved in quality assurance processes at all, and if so, what organisational implications this could have within quality assurance systems (Thune, 1998). The involvement of stakeholders in the design and implementation of quality assurance activities is important from the perspective of accountability to society at large – and not only to government authorities – but also to ensure that tertiary programmes best meet the needs of students and, further downstream, of the labour market. Involving students and employers in the governance of quality assurance agencies or at least in quality assurance activities is therefore crucial to ensure that their concerns receive due consideration in the processes put in place and their implementation.

The involvement of stakeholders in quality assurance activities is usually considered best practice, as illustrated by the standards and guidelines for quality assurance adopted in 2005 by the Education Ministers of countries part of the Bologna Process (Bologna Secretariat, 2005). The Bologna standards for quality assurance emphasise that "strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders" (ENQA, 2005). In practice, while the involvement of students in quality assurance activities is progressing among countries participating in the Review, other stakeholders such as graduates and employers generally have a limited role in quality assurance activities.

Students

Students can participate in quality assurance activities in several ways. The most common form is when they respond to internal evaluation questionnaires as part of TEIs' internal quality assurance procedures. At a second level, students may be consulted by experts during site visits of external reviews. At the next level, students may participate in the external reviews of TEIs and/or programmes themselves, either in expert teams, as observers in expert teams or at the decision making stage. Finally, at the last level, students may fully participate in the governance of national quality assurance agencies.

The Bologna Stocktaking exercise prepared ahead of the 2007 London Ministerial meeting highlights significant progress. Students participate in at least three of the four levels of student involvement in more than two-thirds of Bologna participating countries. Yet, a closer look highlights uneven progress across countries. Students participate in quality assurance activities at all four levels in Belgium (Flemish Community), Croatia, Estonia, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden and Scotland in the United Kingdom. Students participate in quality assurance activities at three of the four levels in Greece, Iceland, Portugal, the Russian Federation, Switzerland and the rest of the United Kingdom. However the level of student participation in quality assurance activities is more limited in the Czech Republic, France and Spain, with students involved at only two levels of participation (Bologna Secretariat, 2007a).

Outside of the Bologna area, there is also evidence of student involvement in quality assurance activities, through course evaluation questionnaires in Australia and China while in New Zealand students are represented on academic boards of most TEIs and are consulted or participate in the quality audits of universities and polytechnics. There is by contrast no evidence of significant involvement of students in quality assurance activities in Japan, Mexico and Korea where they have a minimal role in evaluations in spite of nearly universal course ratings. Indeed, these ratings are more symbolic than anything else and do not seem to have much influence on faculty promotions, attempts to improve quality, nor on TEIs' rankings.

Illustrating best practice, students in the Netherlands have an opportunity to be involved in an annual overview of all tertiary programmes aimed at future students. For this purpose they complete a questionnaire to assess the quality of their programmes on a standardised number of topics. The results are published together with other independent information on all programmes in an annual report – the *Keuzegids* (Higher Education Guide) – which is also made available through the Internet since 2006. In this way the *Keuzegids* not only gives information to prospective students on various aspects of the quality of a programme, but the information can also be used by TEIs as a benchmark instrument. The *National Student Survey* (NSS) in the United Kingdom serves similar purposes and has a like effect. Iceland and Poland are other interesting examples of student involvement. In Poland, the president of the students' parliament is by law a member of the *State Accreditation Committee* and student experts also participate in site visits. In Iceland, regulations stipulate that students must be involved in TEIs' self-evaluation teams as well as in site visits, typically through interviews of 8-12 students by peer review groups. Evidence suggests that Icelandic students are active participants in the development of internal quality systems.

Industry and employers

There is much less evidence of a significant involvement of employers and industry stakeholders in the governance of quality assurance agencies or in their activities, other than the role of some professional associations in the accreditation of some vocational tertiary programmes.

Employer surveys are only used in China and Korea where the government has systematised surveys to monitor employers' satisfaction as part of a broader endeavour to improve the overall quality of tertiary education. However, external stakeholders play a minimal role in quality assurance activities. A few countries also indicate including non-academics in their expert panels during quality evaluations. This is for instance the case in Finland, Iceland, Spain and Sweden. Employers are also interviewed during expert visits in Belgium (Flemish Community). In other countries, the role of industry stakeholders is more ambiguous. It is expected in the Netherlands and New Zealand that the views of industry and employers are built into the quality management system, but their actual impact is less clear. The same can be said of Estonia and Poland where employers' organisations are involved through their nominations of candidates for the *Higher Education Quality Assessment Council* (HEQAC) in Estonia and for the *State Accreditation Committee* (SAC) in Poland. The United Kingdom is one of the few countries where industry and employer representatives are directly involved in the governance of the quality assurance agency. Indeed, the Board of Directors for the *Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education* (QAA) includes membership from employers and the professions, who make up the largest single group of members and from whom the chair of the Board is always appointed.

Some programmes entail a greater level of involvement of stakeholders. In general, professional and industry bodies tend to play a very significant role in the quality assurance of courses preparing for occupations in which some form of professional recognition, registration or accreditation is required – *e.g.* in the professional areas of accounting, teaching, medicine, pharmacy, physiotherapy, nursing, architecture, engineering *etc*. This is the case in Australia or the United Kingdom, where professionals' views may be rather prescriptive in terms of curriculum content, teaching approaches, numbers and qualifications of teaching staff, and facilities. Similarly, professional organisations are involved in the definition of quality standards in cooperation with vocational tertiary education partners, the confederation and the cantons in Switzerland.

5.3.3 Methods and instruments

Range of methods

Quality assurance of tertiary education encompasses a range of different methods which can be used in subsequent stages. The majority of quality assurance agencies use a four-stage model which includes:

- Autonomous internal quality assurance system implemented independently;
- Self-evaluation;
- External assessment by peer-review group and site visit; and
- Publication of an assessment report.

This four-stage model is generally accepted as the shared foundation of international practice and has a prominent place in the tertiary education quality assurance standards and guidelines developed at European and international levels and adopted by the European Council (ENQA, 2005; INQAAHE, 2006; European Commission, 1998). Overall, countries with improvement-driven regimes tend to place more emphasis on the first element of internal quality assurance systems, but as far as external evaluations are concerned, the choice of approach to quality – *i.e.* accreditation, assessment or audit – does not fundamentally influence the latter three methodological elements.

Several countries encourage or obligate their TEIs to engage in internal quality assurance evaluations as part of their regular activities. This is for instance the case of Belgium (Flemish Community), the Czech Republic, Finland, Iceland, Japan, New Zealand and Norway.

In addition, the majority of countries participating in the Review have accountability-driven approaches in one form or another, in which external evaluations play a prominent role (Table 5.2). These external evaluations always rely upon a sequence of self-evaluation followed by a peer-review and the preparation of an evaluation report, which is published in the great majority of the cases.

Self-evaluations are a key element in external evaluation procedures. They provide a standard against which the TEIs can measure themselves, as well as a framework for building up a definition of quality. Self-evaluations thus help TEIs check how far they are achieving their strategic mission and goals, and allow them to prepare an action plan for further improvement (Thune, 1998). Self-evaluations are a nearly universal feature in TEIs, although their nature varies significantly (Brennan, 1997; ENQA, 2003; Brennan and Shah, 2000).

Peer-reviews – which have a long tradition in research evaluations – are also increasingly used in the evaluation of teaching and learning. These evaluations are carried out by one or more other academics, usually in the same discipline (Frederiks *et al.*, 1994). Increasingly, peer-review panels include foreign academics to ensure that international standards are met. In addition, non-academics are more and more involved in review panels. This method is then referred to as external review rather than peer-review (Eaton, 2004).

Instruments

When it comes to the implementation of these methods, several instruments are used to enhance the effectiveness of quality assurance processes, although the extent of their use is uneven across countries.

Guidelines

Guidelines are a useful tool to assist TEIs, in the design of their internal quality assurance systems, but also in carrying out their self-evaluations and preparing self-evaluation reports for the purpose of external evaluations. A number of countries have developed such guidelines for quality assurance activities, including Belgium (Flemish Community), China, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Iceland, Korea, the Netherlands, Portugal, the Russian Federation, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (MOESC, 2003). In addition, Poland is in the process of doing so.

Guidelines for quality assurance usually relate to the practical implementation of quality assurance procedures applicable at national level, like in Korea where guidelines for the self-assessment of departments detail the criteria to be appraised and the weight assigned to each one in the overall evaluation. This is also the case in Estonia (*www.ekak.archimedes.ee/eneseanaluusi_juhend_inglise_keeles.htm*). In addition, the *Accreditation Centre* in Estonia organises regular training seminars for TEI administrators with the purpose of improving the quality of self-evaluation reports.

But guidelines may also cover specific aspects of tertiary education activities where quality issues arise and need to be monitored. For instance, *Universities Australia* developed guidelines for the provision of education to international students (AVCC, 2005). Likewise, the United Kingdom has developed a comprehensive code of practice addressing a range of specific issues (Box 5.3).

Self-evaluation reports

Self-evaluation reports generally provide a foundation for peer or external-review teams. In Korea for instance, the process of university reviews – at institutional and programme level – is based in both cases on a self-assessment by TEIs which follows common guidelines and criteria established by the *Korean Council for University Education* (KCUE).

These self-evaluation reports are generally believed to raise awareness for quality issues at institutional level, and help academics and TEIs identify weak points where corrective action and improvement may be needed. International experience suggests however that self-evaluation is most effective in achieving improvement when TEIs are not required to publish their self-evaluation reports, and in fact few countries require TEIs to publish the results of their self-evaluations. The Czech Republic is one exception even if self-evaluation reports do not have to be published in full.

Box 5.3. Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, the *Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education* (the Code) provides guidance on maintaining quality and standards for universities and colleges subscribing to the *Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education* (QAA). It was prepared by the QAA between 1998 and 2001 in response to the Reports of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education and its Scottish Committee (the Daring and Garrick Reports). Revisions of individual sections began in 2004.

The Code is made up of ten sections, and covers issues of post-graduate research programmes; collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning); students with disabilities; external examining; academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters; assessment of students; programme design, approval, monitoring and review; career education, information and guidance; work-based and placement learning; and admissions to higher education.
(for more details see *www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/default.asp*).

Each section of the Code indicates the key issues that a TEI should consider in the respective areas of activity. The precepts encapsulate the matters that a TEI could reasonably be expected to address through its own quality assurance arrangements. The accompanying guidance/explanation suggests possible ways by which those expectations might be met and demonstrated.

Each section of the Code has been prepared in consultation with the tertiary education sector and with the participation of key stakeholder groups. As such it represents a consensus of the providers and users of tertiary education.

Site visits

Typically, site visits follow the preparation of the self-evaluation reports. In Europe for instance, an ENQA survey found that only in two cases site visits are not used, in Norway for the accreditation of programmes and in the Netherlands for the benchmarking of programmes (ENQA, 2003). In Spain, the external evaluation of universities begins with an analysis of the self-evaluation report by the *External Evaluation Committee* (CEE). As a rule, the committee is made up of experts in the same field as the unit being assessed such as an academic, a person from outside the university world and an expert in assessment methods, none of which have any connection to the TEI being assessed. The CEE analyses the self-evaluation report and visits the unit being evaluated. During the visit, the committee members gather any data, opinions or judgments that help them make their own evaluation. Finally, the committee issues its recommendations and proposes improvements in an external evaluation report.

While site visits by expert teams are commonplace, the composition of these teams varies significantly across countries. The presence of experts in evaluations or in the academic field scrutinised is widespread, as illustrated by New Zealand where the external audit committees visiting TEIs usually consist of evaluation experts from the quality assurance agencies and academic experts from other TEIs. But the teams also include foreign academics, students or graduates, and representatives of industry or employers.

Foreign experts are incorporated in the external review teams in Australia, Belgium (Flemish Community), Chile, Croatia, Estonia, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal (since 2007), the Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and to a more limited extent in the Czech Republic and Poland.[96] By contrast, this is not common practice in China, Greece, Korea, Mexico and the United Kingdom (Table 5.2).

Students are typically involved in the external review teams in Belgium (Flemish Community), Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Iceland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland and Scotland, and in some cases in the Czech Republic (Table 5.2; Bologna Secretariat, 2007a). In New Zealand, Norway and Sweden, students are represented in the peer review team as ordinary members with full rights and obligations. Graduates are also involved in China and Finland.

Finally, the external review teams carrying out site visits also include professionals from industry and representatives of employers on a systematic basis in Australia, Belgium (Flemish Community), Chile, Croatia, Greece, Iceland, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Russian Federation, Spain and Switzerland, and in some cases in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Poland, Portugal and Sweden (Table 5.2).

Surveys of students, recent graduates and/or employers

Surveys of students, recent graduates and/or employers (questionnaires, interviews *etc.*) are typically produced in connection with an evaluation procedure.

Student evaluations of courses and programmes are the most common form of survey, found in Australia, China, the Czech Republic, Finland, Korea, Mexico, the Netherlands,

96. At present, the Polish *State Accreditation Committee* cooperates with some 50 foreign experts and its list is still being expanded.

Norway, Poland, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom. These student surveys provide valuable information to TEIs on their strengths and weaknesses. In some countries such as Korea or Mexico, these surveys are typically carried out by individual TEIs. In a few countries however, student surveys are carried out at the national level, which provides additional scope for quality improvement as a result of the possibility for TEIs to benchmark their performance on a number of criteria with the achievement of others. Nation-wide student surveys also serve accountability objectives as prospective students can assess the quality of various TEIs/programmes in a comparative way.

Illustrating this latter approach, Australia administers annual surveys of under-graduate and post-graduate students to monitor and benchmark their satisfaction with respect to teaching, goals and standards, workload, assessment, generic skills and skills development, supervision, intellectual climate, infrastructure, thesis examination and overall satisfaction. An annual *National Student Survey* also exists in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

In addition, a few countries carry out graduate surveys to better capture the adequacy of tertiary education to the needs of the labour market. To this end, tertiary graduates are surveyed in Australia, Belgium (Flemish Community), Estonia, Sweden and the United Kingdom, although Australia and the United Kingdom are the only countries where this is done in a systematic way. In Australia, a *Graduate Destination Survey* has been carried out since the 1970s with government funding. It provides useful comparative information to the public and benchmarking information to universities to help assess the success of their graduates in the competitive labour market. Likewise, the *Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education* survey in the United Kingdom provides information on the activities of graduates approximately six months after completing their degrees, including what sort of further study they may be engaged in, or what type of work, industry sector or occupation type they may have entered. The data allow analysis of destinations by students' gender, subject of study and qualification obtained. In other countries, similar graduate destination surveys are often carried out at the initiative of individual TEIs.

Performance indicators and statistical data

Lastly, performance indicators and statistical data on student progress, dropout and outcomes provide a valuable information base for understanding the performance of tertiary education at institutional level and may help TEIs monitor their performance and identify areas where to focus efforts from a quality improvement perspective. The most commonly used indicators in this respect relate to completion rates and time needed for degree completion to assess student progress, dropout rates, especially after the first year, and graduation rates as well as destinations and employment rates of graduates in specific fields of study. According to Ewell (1999), there has been a remarkable development worldwide of performance indicators as policy tools in tertiary education, principally as a result of growing pressure for public accountability. However Cave *et al.* (1997) remark that the extent of the use of performance indicators in quality assurance is far from systematic, and varies significantly across countries. In some, TEIs specify their performance indicators while in other systems they are expected to report their standing against a system-wide set of performance indicators (Woodhouse, 1999).

There is evidence of a systematic use of performance indicators in quality assurance processes in Australia, Belgium (Flemish Community), Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom (Box 5.4), while quality-related information systems are being developed in China and the Czech

Republic. In Korea and New Zealand, legal provisions require TEIs to disclose selected quantitative indicators on enrolments, faculty-student ratio, employment rate of graduates, proportion of part-time lecturers, budget and other data relating directly or indirectly to the quality of the system. In Australia, a range of performance indicators is used to assess the quality of outcomes as part of the *Institution Assessment Framework* (IAF). These quality indicators include graduate destinations, student satisfaction, student entrance scores, student attrition rates and progress rates. Mexico has also established standardised assessments of students – the General Examination for Graduates of "Técnico Superior" Degrees (EGETSU) and the General Examination for Graduates of "Licenciatura" Degrees (EGEL) – although participation is at the discretion of TEIs (Box 5.2).

5.3.4 Outcomes

Quality assurance processes result in several outcomes. The delivery of an evaluation report is universal, and this report is published in most cases. Some countries have also established formal follow-up procedures ranging from recommendations for improvement to more accountability types of decisions whereby the results of the quality evaluations sometimes have consequences in terms of permission to operate TEIs and/or deliver specific programmes or in terms of financing.

Report and publication of results

The reports produced by the quality assurance agencies on the TEIs or programmes they review are published in the overwhelming majority of systems (ENQA, 2003; Billing, 2004).

The publication of evaluation reports in all cases – *i.e.* irrespective of the positive or negative outcome – is the norm in Australia (for audits), Belgium (Flemish Community), Chile, China (for accreditation and assessment processes), Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland (at the end of the subject-area review cycles[97]), Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom (Table 5.2 and Box 5.4). Their release usually attracts significant attention from stakeholders and the media.

Moreover, the reports are posted on the Internet to enhance transparency and accountability to stakeholders in Australia, Estonia, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Other interesting initiatives to enhance transparency are the publication of evaluation reports in English as is done in Finland and the Netherlands. In countries with several quality assurance agencies – like New Zealand – transparency is however impaired for external stakeholders given that similar qualifications are offered by different types of TEIs whose quality assurance processes and outcomes are not necessarily comparable.

From the perspective of accountability, the Chinese periodic assessment of various disciplines is noteworthy since objective quantitative indicators and experts' perceptions of the reputation of particular programmes are graded with a view to rank TEIs in each discipline. In other countries however, rankings are usually avoided in order to safeguard honest assessments by TEIs. An exception is Sweden where rankings of the top-five TEIs take place – but only for thematic evaluations – with a view to highlight best practices on specific aspects of quality (*e.g.* gender equality, internationalisation, co-operation with surrounding community).

97. The Polish State Accreditation Committee publishes the summary reports on the assessment of quality of education in given fields of study after ending the cycle of assessment procedures (Box 5.4).

Box 5.4. Dissemination of reports in Poland and the United Kingdom

In **Poland**, the *State Accreditation Committee* (SAC) was established in 2002 as the central body for quality assurance in tertiary education. The SAC has independent authority and is responsible for assessing the quality of education in individual areas of study and providing advice to the Minister responsible for higher education on applications to establish new TEIs, organisational units or study areas.

TEIs are required to participate in subject-area reviews organised by the SAC on five-year cycles. These reviews include the preparation of a self-evaluation report by each programme, followed by a site visit by experts. On this basis, the SAC issues assessments that summarise results by categories as outstanding, positive, conditional or negative. In case of outstanding or positive assessment, the cycle is extended to six-years.

The review reports are submitted to the Minister responsible for tertiary education and TEIs scrutinised, whereas the assessment results are made public through the SAC Web site (*www.pka.edu.pl*) and have been widely reported in the media. Despite this relatively strict approach (issuing negative assessments that are publicly available and that carry consequences for TEIs), the SAC has gained general acceptance in Poland.

Moreover, the SAC publishes the reports on the assessment of quality of education in given fields of study after ending the cycle of assessment procedures.

In the **United Kingdom**, the Quality Assurance Agency for tertiary education (QAA) was formed in 1997 to rationalise the external quality assurance of tertiary education. It is independent of the United Kingdom government and is owned by the organisations that represent the heads of United Kingdom universities and colleges.

The QAA safeguards the public interest in sound standards of tertiary education qualifications, by judging how well TEIs fulfil their responsibility for managing the academic standards and quality of their awards. The QAA also encourages universities and colleges to keep improving the management of quality by conducting external reviews in universities at the institutional level (audit, review and enhancement-related institutional review, collaborative provision audit in England and the audit of United Kingdom overseas provision) and at the subject and programme level (academic review of tertiary education delivered in further education colleges, major review of healthcare education in England, review of foundation degrees).

All institutional audit and review reports and academic (subject) review reports produced by the QAA are available in hard copy and are also placed on the Internet (*www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews*). In addition, the reports are distributed widely to schools and further education colleges, public libraries and career services.

In addition, the United Kingdom government has also set up and supports a national Web site providing both quantitative and qualitative information on teaching quality for individual subjects at individual universities: the Unistats Web site (*www.unistats.com*). The Unistats Web site is geared at prospective students, families and employers, and includes the results of an annual national survey of students in their final under-graduate year (Alderman and Brown, 2007). However, further efforts are needed to maximise the impact of this initiative. Indeed, a recent survey of United Kingdom employers indicates that only 12% of them were aware of the existence of the Unistats Web site (Morley *et al.*, 2006).

On the other hand, a few countries limit the disclosure of evaluation reports. This is the case of China (for institutional audits), Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, the Russian Federation and Switzerland (Table 5.2). In most cases, the non-publication of detailed evaluation reports is justified on the grounds that this is a way of enhancing the improvement function of quality assurance. Hence evaluation reports are only released in case of a positive outcome in China (for institutional audits), Mexico, New Zealand (for accreditations), the Russian Federation and Switzerland. Another current practice is to release only partial information. For instance, only final decisions on accreditation are published in Korea, while the detailed reports are only sent to the TEIs or departments concerned. This is also the case for the detailed reports of institutional audits in New Zealand. In the same vein, the management recommendations attached to evaluation reports in the Netherlands are only sent to the TEIs.

Follow-up procedures

It is often argued that the enormous amount of time and money being put into quality assurance processes will be wasted unless these activities have a beneficial effect (Woodhouse, 1999). However Woodhouse points out that few external quality assurance agencies have thorough formal follow-up procedures in place, and many do nothing about it, or simply ask the TEI what it has done. Furthermore many quality assurance agencies are ambivalent about using sanctions in follow-up procedures, believing on the one hand that threat of police action is unlikely to foster quality, while recognising on the other hand that some TEIs are so weak that they are reluctant to even try to improve unless the agency can insist on action.

A number of countries lack any form of follow-up process. This is the case of Belgium (Flemish Community), Estonia, Greece, Korea, Mexico and Portugal (Table 5.2). In other countries, formal follow-up processes exist but they are limited to situations of negative or conditional evaluations. This is for instance the case of the Netherlands where the ministry's inspectorate may step in if quality assurance evaluations identify serious problems with a TEI or programme. China, Finland (for quality audits), Norway, Poland and Switzerland also have follow-up processes only in the event of negative or conditional evaluations. By contrast, systematic follow-up processes take place in Chile, Croatia, the Czech Republic (for accreditations), Finland (for accreditations), Iceland, Japan (for audits), New Zealand, the Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Yet, the type of follow-up and the implications of evaluation results vary greatly across countries. Evaluation reports usually include recommendations for improvement which are sometimes followed up. A number of countries also use a range of rewards and sanctions to enforce corrective action on the basis of these recommendations for improvement.

Recommendations for improvement

Some countries have adopted provisions allowing the quality assurance agencies/bodies to follow-up the implementation of their recommendations for improvement. This is for instance the case in Australia where TEIs are required to submit a progress report following their quality audits, which is reviewed by the AUQA (*Australian Universities Quality Agency*) and followed up as necessary. Under changes to the relevant legislation, the Minister now has the capacity to require a TEI to respond in respect of audit recommendations. In addition, audit reports may also be followed up as part of the *Institution Assessment Framework* (IAF).

Another approach – followed for instance by Estonia – is to grant the TEI and/or programme being scrutinised a conditional accreditation instead of a full accreditation status whenever major shortcomings are found that definitely need corrective action. TEIs and/or programmes granted a conditional accreditation in Estonia must address the shortcomings identified in the evaluation reports within three years. In case of failure to do so, they lose their conditional accreditation and can no longer continue operations. The Czech Republic, France, New Zealand, Poland, Sweden and Switzerland have adopted a similar approach whereby recommendations for improvement are enforced through conditional accreditations or reduced durations of the quality "stamp" to give TEIs time to improve their performance.

Rewards and sanctions

And indeed, the threat of sanctions is often used as an incentive for TEIs and departments to undertake corrective action on the basis of recommendations for improvement, although reward mechanisms are also used in some cases. Countries participating in the Review have introduced various schemes of rewards and sanctions to encourage TEIs and departments improve the quality of their educational delivery and implement the recommendations of the quality assurance agencies/bodies.

In several countries, a negative evaluation may result in the closure of a TEI, or the suspension of a programme. In Poland for instance, the *State Accreditation Committee*'s assessments are forwarded to the Minister in charge of tertiary education in the form of resolutions, and negative evaluations are sanctioned by the withdrawal or suspension of the permit to provide degree programmes in a given field and at a given level of study. Similar provisions exist in the legislation of Estonia, Iceland, Norway, Portugal, the Russian Federation and Sweden and there have been instances of TEI closures in Estonia, Poland and the Russian Federation in the past. In Switzerland, negative evaluations may also result in the merging of some programmes.

Incentives also take the form of financial sanctions and rewards in some countries, through reductions or possible loss of public funding in the event of a negative evaluation or conversely rewards for outstanding performance. Yet, the issue of linking the allocation of public funds to TEIs with the results of evaluation processes – either wholly or partially – is highly controversial (Thune, 1998). Woodhouse (1999) reports that although quality reviews of research are often directly linked to funding decisions, there is a general view inside academia that basing funding for teaching solely on the basis of evaluation results would lead more to problems being concealed than solved as TEIs would have incentives to hide weaknesses so as not to risk losing their core funding. And in fact, China and Mexico are the only countries in which there is a direct link between quality assurance evaluation results and the level of funding received – albeit limited to 10% in the case of Mexico (Table 5.2).

In addition, the results of quality evaluations may have an indirect impact on funding in several systems where the accreditation of a TEI and/or programme conditions the availability of public funds. In these situations, positive quality evaluations constitute a pre-requisite to receive public funds whereas negative evaluations may have serious financial consequences if the TEI or programme loses its accreditation. Australia, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden are examples of such an approach where the availability of public funding is tied to compliance with accreditation procedures.

A few countries have also put in place specific financial incentives to reward outstanding quality in teaching, although the amounts involved are usually marginal. Illustrating this approach, Poland awards additional funds to TEIs whose programmes are of particularly high quality although the funds allocated for this purpose cannot exceed 0.5% of the basic subsidy. Australia has adopted a similar policy in 2006 through the *Learning and Teaching Performance Fund* to reward universities on the basis of measures of student satisfaction and success as well as graduate outcomes while the performance-based funding mechanisms used in New Zealand give due consideration to quality issues (see Chapter 4).

Non-monetary rewards are another tool to steer TEIs' behaviour towards greater awareness and attention to quality. Sweden has adopted an interesting initiative in this respect, whereby TEIs can apply for a label of "excellent learning environment". An external evaluation then assesses whether the course or department offers a learning environment of a high standard. The label is intended as a driver for quality and an example to inspire other TEIs.

5.4 Issues at stake and related policy challenges

The above analysis has shown great variation between countries in the way quality assurance is apprehended and implemented. Still, all countries face similar challenges in developing their quality assurance systems and policies, but several aspects of the quality assurance framework are subject to debate in the literature as well as in academic and government circles. These issues of contention challenge policy makers in designing a quality assurance framework that is effective in achieving the overarching goal of ensuring high quality provision in tertiary education. These challenges as well as the underlying points of debate are reviewed in this Section.

The five key challenges of quality assurance systems relate to the design of the overall quality assurance framework in a way that combines the accountability and improvement functions, the imperative need to build consensus and trust among all stakeholders with an interest in tertiary education quality, the need to enhance the cost-effectiveness of the quality assurance system, the necessity to address the implications of the growing internationalisation of quality assurance, and the overarching challenge of maximising the impact of quality assurance processes on tertiary education outcomes.

5.4.1 Designing a framework that combines accountability and improvement functions effectively

A recurrent theme in the literature relates to the purposes of quality assurance and whether (and how) the purposes of accountability and quality improvement may be combined in a balanced strategy (Thune, 1996; Dano and Stensaker, 2007). On the one hand, some argue that accountability and improvement are incompatible as the openness essential for improvement will be absent if accountability is the purpose of the quality procedure (Woodhouse, 1999). By contrast, others consider that accountability and improvement are closely linked and cannot be addressed separately, in which case the challenge for policy makers is to find effective ways of combining these two functions in the design of the quality assurance framework.

The debate is made more complex as there is a common confusion between the purposes of quality assurance and the instruments and methods used to accomplish those purposes. Indeed, Stensaker (2003) notes that the accountability *vs.* improvement debate has contributed to a simplified view on how change in tertiary education occurs. Instead of seeing change as a dynamic process where interaction between actors and stakeholders takes place in a continuum, this debate has contributed to the development of a simple cause-effect model implying that internal processes are related to improvement, while external processes are associated with accountability. And indeed, the debate on accountability *vs.* improvement has to a large extent translated in terms of whether quality would be better addressed by external or internal mechanisms. Several arguments have been advanced in support of both external and internal evaluations.

Several authors contend that the involvement of an external body is necessary to address accountability and ensure the integrity of tertiary education through mechanisms similar to an accreditation process (Thune, 1996; Middlehurst and Woodhouse, 1995). Harvey (2002) adds that the context and stage of development of the tertiary education sector also matters as the need for some form of external accreditation increases with the development of private TEIs. External quality assurance is also seen by many as a way to provide information to various stakeholders that is impartial, credible, authoritative, comprehensive, consistent and transparent (Thune; 1996; Harvey, 2002).

It is also often argued that external evaluations should take place as a catalyst for internal improvement within TEIs. Empirical evidence shows that the most effective improvement seems to occur when external processes mesh with internal improvement activities. On this basis, Harvey and Newton (2004) conclude that the interaction between external and internal processes is thus essential to ensure that the results of evaluation processes are not just temporary adjustments but result in lasting improvement. Dano and Stensaker (2007) also stress the importance of external quality assurance for the development of an internal quality culture in tertiary education. This role of catalyst occurs in several ways. First, the context of an external evaluation provides an external motivation to academics and/or TEIs for realising their self-evaluation – a process widely recognised as quality-enhancing but which could be postponed in the absence of an external request given the considerable workload involved (Rasmussen, 1997; Saarinen, 1995; Thune, 1996; Smeby and Stensaker, 1999; Brennan and Shah, 2000; Harvey, 2006). The potential consequences of external evaluations are also an incentive to take the self-evaluation process seriously (Brennan, 1997) while external quality assurance agencies may assist the process through the provision of benchmarking data, external advice, research evidence and dissemination of best practice (Middlehurst and Woodhouse, 1995).

Finally, external evaluations are often advocated on the grounds that self-evaluations carry the risk of "write-ups" – *i.e.* self-evaluations for compliance – especially when self-evaluation is intended for external use (Harvey, 2002). De Vries (1997) warns against the risk that some TEIs use self-evaluations as a way to promote their reputation and image as quality providers, or in the case of self-financing TEIs to stay in business if self-evaluations may have external consequences. Also, Brennan (1997) argues that self-evaluations can be carried out with a view to influence external judgements rather than to inform "self" whenever they constitute the preliminary stage of a process of external appraisal.

By contrast, a number of authors privilege internal approaches to quality assurance. Primarily, they claim that sustainable improvement relies on internal engagement, and the best that can be hoped for without intrinsic motivation to improve quality is compliance with external requirements (Middlehurst and Woodhouse, 1995). Askling (1997) also argues that internally-initiated quality monitoring can be problem-driven and useful as a mean for improvement whereas externally-initiated processes tend to be more accountability-driven and less sensitive to internal needs. External evaluations are also criticised on the grounds that their conservative or rigid evaluation criteria may lead to excessive bureaucratisation and inflexibility, and hence inhibit innovation for fear that it will not be understood (Harvey, 2002; Williams, 1997). In this respect, Dano and Stensaker (2007) underline that external quality assurance can stimulate but also create obstacles for institutional improvement. Several studies also point to the cost of external evaluations – both in financial terms and in human resources (HEFCE, 2001; Stephenson, 2004; Graham, 2000) and their inefficiency in achieving lasting quality improvement

(Harvey, 2002). As a result, it is suggested that the significant resources spent on quality bureaucracies could be better spent on improving internal quality assurance mechanisms. Finally, several studies warn against the risk of "game playing" and "impression management" in external evaluations (Williams, 1997; Newton, 2001).

However, a number of authors argue that accountability and improvement may be combined – and should be combined since they are both among the aims of the government – and they advocate the combination of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms to build on their complementarities. For instance, Harvey (2002) suggests that an emphasis on internal processes does not exclude the use of external processes while Woodhouse (1999) considers that accountability can always be re-phrased to focus on quality improvement. Overall, Middlehurst and Woodhouse (1995) recommend the integration of improvement and accountability in some areas – *e.g.* guidelines, performance indicators linked to the benchmarking of best practice, research leading to recommendations for improvement – whereas improvement would be best kept independent of accountability in the areas of public information, training and staff development.

The practical implementation of quality assurance processes is important to successfully combine the accountability and improvement functions of quality assurance. In this respect, it is also often argued that peer-reviews are one way of bringing more legitimacy to external evaluation mechanisms, since academics are more likely to listen to their peers' opinion than to "control" by administrators or inspectors (Vroeijenstijn, 1995b; Finch, 1997), although Brennan (1997) notes that one of the most important issues in this respect is the selection of peers to assure the legitimacy of the evaluation. The above analysis of current practices in countries participating in the Review has shown that a number of them have adopted dual regimes with both accountability and improvement-driven mechanisms in place. Moreover, the recourse to peer-reviews is sufficiently widespread to ensure some form of legitimacy in external evaluation processes carried out at national level. Yet, Harvey (2002) notes that the role of external evaluation mechanisms as a catalyst for improvement requires dialogue and advice to develop a trusting relationship between the external quality assurance agency/body and the TEIs. This highlights the importance of building consensus and trust over the quality assurance framework and processes.

5.4.2 Building consensus and trust among various stakeholders

Indeed, another key challenge from the perspective of the design and operations of quality assurance systems is to build consensus and trust among all stakeholders with an interest in quality. Middlehurst and Woodhouse (1995) remind that improvement relies upon individual or group engagement with the desired objectives and commitment to their achievement. They further suggest that without intrinsic motivation, compliance with external requirements may pass for improvement in the short term but old habits are likely to re-emerge as soon as the need to display improvement has passed. The role of academics is critical in this respect, since they are ultimately the frontline actors of knowledge transmission. Ensuring the trust and cooperation of the academic community in the quality assurance system is therefore crucial to ensure that quality assurance mechanisms yield the desired outcomes and improvement over time.

Ensuring successful implementation

A large body of literature examines the reasons why effective quality assurance systems are apparently difficult to implement. One reported reason is the difference of interests and conceptions of quality between stakeholders in tertiary education. Another problem identified is the "implementation gap" and finally the external ownership of quality assurance systems which often leads to compliance instead of improvement.

Different interests and conceptions of quality between diverse stakeholders

As indicated at the outset of this Chapter, different stakeholder groups with an interest in tertiary education tend to have different views of quality, and hence quality assurance. This lack of congruence between different approaches to quality has implications for the implementation of quality-induced change.

At the institutional level, several studies have reported evidence of distrust by academics for the quality assurance schemes and mechanisms designed by their administrators (Campbell and Slaughter, 1999; Everett and Entrekin, 1994; McInnes *et al.*, 1994). As put by Watty (2003), "academics, who do not conceive quality as fitness for purpose, are likely to question the value of such a system." There is similar evidence that this disbelief translates in a range of resistance and defensive responses to quality requirements (Vidovich, 1998). Vroeijenstijn (1995b) reports a similar mismatch between governments' and TEIs' approaches to quality assurance, with governments putting more emphasis on summative approaches while TEIs have more inclination for formative approaches. On the one hand, governments aim to demonstrate to society that they make justifiable decisions on tertiary education policy – such as the allocation of funding or termination of academic programmes. On the other hand, the main objective of TEIs is quality improvement within the conditions set by the government, and they aim to convince the public that the quality of their educational provision is the best possible.

These differences in conceptions of quality can make the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms more difficult. At the macro level, Rodríguez and Gutiérrez (2003) report for instance that one of the weaknesses of quality evaluation in Spain is the disconnection between definition of the objectives of quality assurance between the government, the universities and the autonomous regional governments which inhibits the effective implementation policies. In addition, micro level case studies suggest that there is little evidence that the majority of academics are embracing quality-led initiatives, and they adopt a variety of behaviours in response (Watty, 2003).

The "implementation gap"

An important feature of quality assurance policies relates indeed to the importance of the "implementation gap", defined as the difference between the planned outcomes of policy and the outcomes of the implementation process (Newton, 2001). Several reasons have been advanced to explain this gap.

The lack of preparedness of staff for quality assurance activities is a major reason for the weakness of some quality assurance systems. The lack of training may impair quality assurance at the stage of self-evaluation – *e.g.* due to insufficiently explicit indicators and standards (Silva *et al.*, 1997) – or during the external evaluation. In this respect, the selection process and training offered to evaluators is critical to ensure that the

information gathered during the quality evaluation is effectively analysed (Rodríguez and Gutiérrez, 2003).

In addition, a key feature of policy implementation is the discretion exercised by front-line workers, or street level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980; Prottas, 1978). These policy implementers, it is argued, are the real makers of policy since they have a relative autonomy at the point of implementation. As a result, the success of a quality assurance system may be less dependent on the rigour of application or the neatness of the dry documented quality assurance system *per se* and more on its contingent use by actors, and on how the quality assurance system is viewed and interpreted by them (Newton, 2001). The views of front-line academic staff engaged in the implementation of quality assurance policies are therefore crucial to ensure the success of their implementation. Consequently, the way quality assurance policies and procedures are received and decoded by academics seems to be of utmost importance.

Academics perception of and behaviour in response to quality assurance

The implementation of quality assurance mechanisms has affected the daily working lives of academics in various ways, and has resulted in negative perceptions of the process in a number of instances. The consequences of quality assurance processes for academics are four-fold.

First, there is much evidence of changing relationships within TEIs as a result of the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms. These include a gradual distancing of institutional leaders from faculty members, with an increasing gap in views between the academics who participate in management activities (as elected members of boards) and those who do not (Askling, 1997; Newton, 2001). Numerous academics see the new managerial prerogatives associated with accountability requirements as undermining traditions of collegiate decision-making and staff autonomy, and several studies suggest that quality assurance processes have resulted in declining morale and loss of job satisfaction among frontline academics as well as a decline of collegiality within departments (see Chapter 3; Newton, 2001; Baldwin, 1997; Harvey and Newton, 2004; Warde, 1996).

Second, several studies report a perceived loss of autonomy by academics as a result of external evaluations. Newton (2001) argues that the development of external quality assurance tends to induce senior managers to get involved more directly into the heart of the academic domain in terms of curriculum delivery, design, and standards. For academics, this suggests increased tension between the local level of department and the corporate requirement that the "product" should meet both institutional targets and external monitoring requirements. Also, some reports suggest that academics often feel that their integrity is offended by demands for increased transparency and by suggestions that quality might be improved (Askling, 1994; Bauer, 1994, 1996; Bauer and Henkel, 1996).

Third, complaints by academics over the considerable workload created by quality assurance mechanisms are commonplace. Excessive bureaucratic demands, the overwhelming volume of paperwork and increased time spent in meetings are the most common grievances (Rasmussen, 1997; Baldwin, 1997; Askling, 1997; Harvey, 2002; Stephenson, 2004).

At the same time, quality assurance instruments have generally been perceived more positively by academics. Although self-evaluations have sometimes been regarded as mere preparation for the external site visits adding little value in terms of improvement (Stensaker, 1999), there are a number of positive feedbacks from academics on the stimulating experience of self-evaluations and peer-reviews as a way to confront staff with their own educational practices, initiate discussion and incite reflection on change (Silva *et al.*, 1997; Rasmussen, 1997; Dill, 2000).

Building internal ownership and trust to induce improvement rather than mere compliance

There is extensive evidence that negative perceptions by academics of quality assurance mechanisms and their impact on their daily working life are to blame for the failure of some quality assurance systems. In the Australian context for instance Vidovich (1998) found that 69% of academics expressed varying levels of resistance to accountability requirements, ranging from verbal objections to outright refusal, careless responses or delaying tactics. Similar distrust has been observed in Korea, where evaluations are not seen as crucial to the development of TEIs but rather as a nuisance and a superficial formality. According to Barrow (1999), these resistances are to a large extent the result of a lack of internal ownership of quality assurance goals and processes. He argues that the imposition of quality assurance systems on academics encourages them to compliance behaviour rather than genuine improvement, a behaviour which is reinforced by the use of rewards and sanctions in many instances. Barrow concludes that "the ownership of the system, let alone its intended outcomes, is unlikely to be achieved when the development of the system is carried out at a distance from the academic to whom, and by whom, the system is applied."

The challenge for successful implementation is therefore to build a sense of ownership of the quality assurance framework among academics (see Chapter 11). According to Watty (2003), this is the best way forward to facilitate the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms and enhance their efficiency, since ultimately it is academics who are responsible for the performance of TEIs.

Yet, building ownership is no easy task. Evidence from the Review suggests that the legitimacy of quality assurance systems builds up over time as illustrated by the experience of precursor countries like New Zealand. Indeed, Harvey (2006) notes that over time, TEIs display increasing degrees of honesty and openness to evaluation surveys as they see the impact and value of quality assurance mechanisms. At the same time, even more recent quality assurance systems may reach the goal of legitimacy, as suggested by the Polish experience where there are indications that in spite of a relatively recent system and a strict external approach of the *State Accreditation Committee*, the quality assurance framework has gained general acceptance among academics and other stakeholders.

5.4.3 Enhancing the cost effectiveness of the quality assurance system

Another area where challenges lie ahead for quality assurance systems relate to enhancing their cost-effectiveness. Indeed, while thorough evaluations and strong accountability mechanisms may be justified at the establishment of a quality assurance system and/or when new TEIs and programmes are established, they incur large costs which may be less justified over time as internal quality assurance systems mature, leaving scope for more self-regulation (Harvey, 2006). The issue of cost-effectiveness is

also connected to the organisation of quality assurance activities between various agencies/bodies. The relationship that exists between the evaluation of teaching and learning and the evaluation of research, and whether synergies may be found to avoid duplication of quality assurance activities in these two areas is another determinant of the cost-effectiveness of the system. Finally, another challenge lies in the selection of methods and instruments to enhance the cost-effectiveness of the quality assurance system.

Costs of quality evaluations

A number of studies have pointed to the large costs of quality evaluations, although Stensaker (2003) observes that the economic efficiency of external quality assurance systems is a surprisingly little-researched topic. As described in Campbell and Rozsnyai (2002), costs of evaluation can be divided between direct and indirect costs. Direct costs include those related to the setting up of the quality assurance agency/body and the operation of the external evaluation procedures. In addition to these costs, there are also hidden costs related to staff time in preparing for external monitoring and the collection of information for the self-evaluation which need to be taken into account when determining the type and amount of information to be requested from TEIs. Quantifying these hidden costs is problematic given the difficulty in estimating the time devoted by diverse stakeholders to quality assurance activities in addition to the staff, space and operational costs of TEIs' quality assurance units (Stephenson, 2004). Another indirect cost relates to the detrimental effect that overly bureaucratic quality assurance procedures may have on the legitimacy of the system and staff morale. Indeed, Graham (2000) warns against "the frequency and burden of quality assessment in a resource-starved system which, paradoxically, detracts from the delivery of quality [and results] in a loss of professional trust and consensus."

A number of factors have cost implications. These include the number and types of TEIs operating in the national system, the institutional or programme focus of the quality evaluations, their frequency, and the extent to which the experts carrying out the external evaluations are paid for this task (Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002). Evaluations at programme level incur substantial costs compared to those focusing on TEIs while the costs of evaluations focusing on broader groupings of subjects/disciplines lie somewhere in between. Similarly, evaluations carried out as part of a periodic monitoring tend to be more costly than those performed on an *ad-hoc* or on demand basis, although it may be argued that periodic evaluations allow TEIs and/or departments to build capacity in the collection and analysis of quality-related information. The systematic involvement of foreign experts also incurs additional costs. Finally, quality assurance systems in which experts are recruited on a "volunteer" basis and only receive reimbursement for expenses related to the quality assurance activities tend to be less expensive than those in which they receive an honorarium for their task. The question then is whether this approach is more cost-effective as the requirements and level of commitment to be expected from volunteers cannot be as high as those to be expected from professional consultants.

Illustrating the tradeoffs facing policy makers, the Netherlands has adopted a system of periodic accreditation at programme level building upon evaluations of applications by independent accreditation bodies. This system is believed to be very expensive both in terms of resources required to develop the self-evaluation document and the charges imposed by the private accreditation bodies. Overall, it is estimated that the average internal costs for a TEI to get an existing programme accredited is in the range of

EUR 55 000 every six-years (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2005). These significant costs have been recognised, and the possibility to revise the legislation and to move towards a combination of an institutional focus and programme accreditation is now being investigated.

Similarly, the subject reviews that took place in the United Kingdom in the late 1990s proved to be a massive logistical exercise. A 2000 review of tertiary education in England identified an accumulation of accountability burdens on TEIs and concluded that the quality assurance system represented poor value for money for both TEIs and other stakeholders (HEFCE, 2001). These persistent concerns about the resources needed to organise the reviews and the time taken by universities and colleges to participate in them led to their abandon and a focus on institutional audit and review mechanisms in 2000. In 2005, an independent review of the new quality assurance mechanisms concluded that the institutional audits had achieved a very significant reduction in the costs of external quality assurance and had succeeded in reducing the burdens of the previous subject review process on university staff. Overall, the new procedures were deemed as both fit for purpose and cost-effective (Burslem, 2005; JM Consulting, 2005).

Concerns about the high level of costs and nuisances associated with quality assurance procedures have surfaced in other countries, for instance in Korea and New Zealand. In Sweden, the costs of quality assurance mechanisms are also believed to be high, but by contrast, evidence suggests that stakeholders seem satisfied with the current system. Other countries where the cost-effectiveness of the quality assurance system is also perceived positively by stakeholders and the public at large include Australia, Estonia, Finland and Iceland. And indeed, the issue of cost-effectiveness of the quality assurance framework requires looking into the elements of cost in the quality assurance procedures – focus, frequency, method, composition and remuneration of expert panels – but also the way these procedures are perceived and accepted by frontline actors and stakeholders. An expensive system of quality assurance may be justified as long as it meets the needs of stakeholders. However these needs may evolve over time as confidence in the quality of education builds up, leaving scope for more self-regulation. The above experiences of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom illustrate these changing needs, and suggest that over time the economic viability and effectiveness of evaluations at programme level tend to decrease – or be perceived as such. This raises the question of whether the responsibility for the quality of programmes ought to be shifted to TEIs and the focus of external evaluations be refocused on TEIs' processes for ensuring quality provision.

Rationalising the number of quality assurance agencies/bodies and the scope of their activities

The organisation of the quality assurance system in terms of the number of quality assurance agencies/bodies involved and the scope of their activities has also implications for the cost and effectiveness of the system. In this respect, a challenging mission for policy makers is to organise quality assurance in ways that enhance transparency from the perspective of stakeholders while at the same time respecting the diversity of tertiary education offerings and allowing capacity-building throughout the system.

In practice, some countries rely upon a single quality assurance agency/body for all types of quality assurance activities – *e.g.* accreditation and audits – and this unique agency covers all types of TEIs. By contrast, other countries have more fragmented systems of quality assurance with different agencies/bodies in charge of distinct types of

TEIs, different approaches or separate geographical jurisdictions. Both approaches are encountered in countries participating in the Review. Each one has its own merits and disadvantages.

There are three main arguments supporting the involvement of several quality assurance agencies. The first one is closely related to the debate on the compatibility of the accountability and improvement functions of quality assurance. As reported in Middlehurst and Woodhouse (1995), authors who believe that accountability and improvement are sometimes incompatible, argue that it is essential to have separate agencies because TEIs are likely to hide from accountability agencies information which is essential for achieving quality improvement. In this perspective, it is argued that having separate agencies allows each agency to have the structure and processes appropriate to its particular functions. Another frequent rationale for having several quality assurance agencies/bodies is to cover different types of TEIs and/or fields of study and adapt the focus and methodologies of quality assurance mechanisms to their different needs and missions. For instance, Parker and Jary (1995) are critical of the trend in recent years to standardise student experience as a result of uniform standards of teaching and evaluation processes, and warn against the risk of developing a "McUniversity". Finally, reliance upon several quality assurance agencies/bodies is sometimes advocated on the grounds of efficiency, especially in very large tertiary education systems.

The alternate view is that having separate agencies to better distinguish the accountability and improvement functions incurs a risk of duplication of the workload and unstable situation between the separate agencies. According to proponents of this approach, it would be inefficient to establish multiple agencies addressing different objectives separately unless the multiple agencies have clearly distinct spheres of responsibility (such as evaluation of research *vs.* evaluation of teaching). Moreover they argue that while it is possible to establish a separate system for improvement, it is not possible to have one solely dedicated for accountability as it will inevitably overlap with quality improvement. Some authors also support a more unified approach to quality assurance across different sub-sectors of tertiary education in order to bring more integration and coherence in the system and improve communication and co-ordination between quality assurance activities, educational authorities and TEIs. Another merit of having fewer agencies also lies in the potential to improve the organisational learning within the system as different types of TEIs are likely to face common problems and best-practice from other types of TEIs could be disseminated throughout the system. But the most pervasive rationale for limiting the number of quality assurance agencies is to enhance the transparency towards stakeholders, by offering them comparison tools of quality across the system irrespective of the quality assurance organisational structures.

In a number of countries visited as part of the Review, the analyses of the external review teams highlight that rationalising the organisation of the quality assurance system across a more limited number of agencies remains a challenge to be addressed. Yet, quality assurance systems relying upon distinct agencies may well be effective in some national contexts, for instance in very large countries, federal systems, or in situations where the TEIs' internal quality assurance systems have reached different levels of maturity in the various sub-sectors of tertiary education and where more differentiated approaches thus make sense.

Relationship between evaluation of education and evaluation of research

A related question in terms of cost-effectiveness is whether the quality of teaching and learning and the quality of research should be addressed separately or whether synergies could be found between these two aspects of TEIs' activities. This issue has generated debate in the literature, and Thune (1998) identifies two distinct viewpoints with respect to the need for convergence of evaluation of research and education.

On the one hand, Vroeijenstijn (1995a) argues that teaching and research should be assessed separately on the ground that they require different types of expertise, with highly specialised experts in the case of research while a broad overview of the discipline is sufficient in the case of teaching. Furthermore combining the evaluation of research projects and academic programmes would require very big committees and site-visits would be much more time-consuming. Thune also advocates the separation of teaching and research evaluations to allow good teaching to be identified and rewarded and to redress to some extent the imbalance between rewards and incentives for teaching and research. He also considers that focusing on teaching only would allow TEIs to focus on their particular strengths without focusing too much in being rated highly, which would allow the various customers' needs to be addressed more specifically (Thune, 1998). On the other hand, some authors stress the need for greater convergence of evaluation of research and teaching given the close connection between tertiary education and research. They argue that there is necessarily a link between teaching and research at a university, which needs to be taken into account during the evaluation of educational quality. Other arguments advanced in favour of enhanced convergence relate to the need to avoid duplication of quality assurance activities.

Overall, Vroeijenstijn (1995a) concludes that there are questions which cannot be avoided and must be answered during the evaluation of teaching, such as whether students come into contact with research, the role that research plays in the programme, or the extent to which the most recent developments in research are reflected in the curriculum. This is a particularly important aspect of the quality of teaching at post-graduate level where there is certainly a case to bring together the evaluation of post-graduate programmes and the research undertaken by the concerned departments. For other types of tertiary education provision, however, it is generally argued that the evaluation of research quality does not need to be part of the evaluation of teaching and learning, and the best way is to assess teaching and research separately, although it will be useful if each evaluation is planned with the other in mind.

In countries participating in the Review, this issue has been addressed in varied ways. While in France and Japan, the quality assurance of teaching and research are carried out by the same agency, the evaluation of teaching is disconnected from the evaluation of research in Sweden. Several countries have also adopted intermediate policies. For instance, the research base is included as one of the evaluation criteria considered in evaluations of teaching in Belgium (Flemish Community). Conversely, the number of research students is included as one of the criteria for the evaluation of research quality in China, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, Portugal the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom while Mexico also takes into account the supervision of post-graduate students and the Russian Federation considers the use of new technologies in teaching to assess research quality (see Table 7.4). Irrespective of the approach adopted, a challenge for policy makers is to ensure that policies related to the evaluation of teaching and the evaluation of research are co-ordinated, so that TEIs and academics do not receive contradictory incentives. Illustrating this challenge, concerns

have arisen in recent years in New Zealand, that the new funding mechanism for research may skew some TEIs' selection and promotion processes in favour of research and to the detriment of teaching performance.

Promoting the use of performance indicators

Another debated area relates to the advantages and disadvantages of data gathering instruments used in quality assurance systems, and in particular whether performance indicators ought to be used to assist quality monitoring.

A number of authors advocate the use of performance indicators as a way to ensure the objective measurement and comparability of quality. Illustrating this perspective, Alderman and Brown (2007) argue that if societies are to get best value from their TEIs, there is a need for sharpening the focus on student learning outcomes and published information about them. Performance indicators in a broader sense than the sole student learning outcomes are indeed often regarded as useful tools for accountability purposes – by providing an overall picture of what is happening in a particular TEI (Ewell, 1999) – and to inform policy-making (Vroeijenstijn, 1995b). But the usefulness of performance indicators is not limited to accountability and informed policy-making. Performance indicators may also contribute to quality improvement by helping TEIs diagnose problems through benchmarking. Ewell (1999) also sees performance indicators as useful to stimulate certain kinds of institutional behaviour. Indeed, the focus of the monitoring on desired outcomes and behaviours means that performance indicators may be used intentionally to encourage TEIs to increase their progress toward meeting certain standards. It is assumed that continuing poor performance, if widely reported, will constitute an incentive to stimulate quality improvement.

By contrast, many academics have been opposed to the increasing use of performance indicators, arguing that they are reductionist, offer inaccurate comparisons and are unduly burdensome (El-Khawas *et al.*, 1998). Middlehurst and Woodhouse (1995) argue for instance that popular discussion often trivialises comparisons, selecting only one or two aspects, reducing them to simplistic terms and paying little regard to whether the aspects are truly commensurate. In addition, some have warned against the risk of manipulation of data by TEIs to meet targets (Harvey, 2002; Knight, 2002). Another common criticism is that the link between performance indicators and quality is not evident. With respect to quantitative measures of quality, Rodríguez and Gutiérrez (2003) argue that quantitative performance indicators are often basic data (*e.g.* numbers of students, numbers of staff, drop-out rates) and tell nothing about performance. Vroeijenstijn (1995a) also questions whether a high success rate in education is a sign of quality, or reflects the reduction of standards. The link is even less evident when it comes to qualitative measures of quality, where the concept of performance indicator itself has generated heated debate on objectivity and subjectivity. For instance, Gray and Bergman (2003) underline the problems posed by student ratings, which have been shown to be influenced by irrelevant factors like the ease of grading, the joviality of the teacher, and sometimes even his or her looks. Obviously, these perverse effects constitute extreme manifestations that are more likely to appear if the information derived from indicators is used mechanistically, and are in no way systematically associated with the use of performance indicators.

In fact, these diverging views on the merits and pitfalls of performance indicators can be reconciled. It can be argued that indicators do not have to be burdensome and that it is possible to construct reasonable and meaningful indicators. Vroeijenstijn (1995b) also underlines the importance of the interpretation of performance indicators. Moreover,

some argue that the use of indicators can actually strengthen assessments if the information is used as a contextual backdrop for qualitative assessments. As put by Vidal (2001), performance indicators are never absolute measures and are only meaningful after a process of contextualisation. According to this approach, complementing other forms of assessment with indicators has the merit of allowing regular, more frequent and more cost-effective views of performance – which can inform discussion and which can perhaps identify in a timely way where qualitative assessment might be best directed.

In practice, extensive use of performance indicators in quality assurance activities takes place in some countries participating in the Review. For instance, Australia uses a range of performance indicators to assess quality of outcomes as part of the *Institution Assessment Framework* (IAF). These quality indicators include graduate destinations, student satisfaction, student entrance scores, student attrition rates and progress rates. By contrast, quality monitoring is hampered by a complete lack of benchmarking data in other countries, making it difficult for TEIs and external evaluators to diagnose problems and target improvement efforts in the most needed areas. This challenge remains to be addressed in many countries.

5.4.4 Addressing the implications of internationalisation for quality assurance

Another challenging task for policy makers is to address the multiple implications of internationalisation of tertiary education for quality assurance systems. On the one hand, the emergence of new – cross-border – modes of delivery in tertiary education raises quality issues and requires better systems of consumer protection (OECD, 2004b; OECD and UNESCO, 2005). At the same time, the remarkable growth in international student mobility over the past three decades (Figure 10.1) and the growing globalisation of the labour market for the highly-skilled call for enhanced transparency and improved systems of recognition of foreign courses and degrees. Both trends are likely to bring about more control on TEIs, *e.g.* through accreditation processes (Jeliazkova and Westerheijden, 2002). Illustrating this tendency, the decision by European Ministers of Education to establish a *European Quality Assurance Register in Higher Education* (EQAR) as of March 2008[98] is likely to reinforce accountability requirements in the future, in the Bologna area and beyond since the Register will be open to quality assurance agencies/bodies from all over the world. Finally, the Bologna Process and the increased convergence of tertiary education systems worldwide raise the question of whether quality assurance systems ought to converge as well. Indeed, the construction of a *European Higher Education Area* (EHEA) passes through the operation of quality assurance benchmarks and indicators that may serve to measure the efficiency of the continent's higher education structures (Stamoulas, 2006). In this respect, the EQAR is likely to bring about some convergence of quality assurance systems since quality assurance agencies/bodies will need to demonstrate compliance with agreed common standards to be listed on the Register.

The issue of consumer protection is treated separately in Chapter 10 hence this Section focuses essentially on international cooperation of quality assurance agencies/bodies and international comparability and recognition. Indeed, as education, research and some highly-skilled labour markets become more global, quality assurance

98. Although the European Quality Assurance Register has formally been established on 4 March 2008, quality assurance agencies/bodies will only have the opportunity to apply for listing on the Register from the summer 2008 (see *www.eqar.eu* for more information).

systems need to adjust so that national credentials can be understood and approved by international partners. Increased international transparency and comparability can be achieved in several ways.

The involvement of foreign academics in evaluation teams – although not initially deemed to enhance transparency and assure more international visibility of the national tertiary system – can however serve this objective by initiating quality-related discussions between academics of different countries. In this respect, the above analysis of current practices in countries participating in the Review has highlighted that the involvement of foreign experts in quality evaluations is common in Europe as well as in Australia, Chile, Japan and New Zealand (Table 5.2; ENQA, 2003).

In addition, a few countries publish the reports of their external evaluations in English in addition to the national language in order to enhance transparency towards international partners. This practice takes place in Finland and the Netherlands for instance.

But for the majority of countries participating in the Review, international cooperation between national quality assurance agencies/bodies is the principal channel to enhance transparency. Indeed, all countries but Greece and Korea are involved in international networks of quality assurance agencies/bodies (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4 Involvement in international cooperation on quality assurance, 2007

	Geographical focus						
	Global	Regional					
	International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)	European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA)	European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA)	Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEEN)	Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (NOQA)	Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN)	Eurasian Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN)
Australia	Member					Member	
Belgium (Fl. community)	Member	Member	Member				
Chile	Member						
China	Member					Member (quality assurance agencies of some provinces)	
Croatia	Associate member		Aims to join	Member			
Czech Republic	Member		Member	Member			
Estonia	Member		Member	Member			Member
Finland	Member		Member		Member		
France	Member	Member	Member				
Greece							
Iceland	Member				Member		
Japan	Member					Member	
Korea						Prospective member	
Mexico	Member						
Netherlands	Member	Member	Member				
New Zealand	Member					Member	
Norway	Member	Member	Member		Member		
Poland	Member	Member	Aims to join	Member			
Portugal	Member		Member				
Russian Federation	Member		Candidate member	Member		Member	Member
Spain	Member	Member	Member				
Sweden	Member		Member		Member		
Switzerland	Member	Member	Member				
United Kingdom	Member		Member			Observer	

Sources: Derived from information supplied by countries in background reports, country notes and Web sites of the different networks.

In the European context, this international cooperation has permitted the development of an agreed set of European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) on quality assurance (ENQA, 2005). These have been endorsed as part of the Bologna Process (Bologna Secretariat, 2005), and are having an impact on the continued development of quality assurance systems in the broader European area, as suggested by current reforms of the Swedish system for instance.

Other forms of international cooperation between national agencies/bodies of quality assurance include bilateral cooperation arrangements as between the Czech and Slovak *Accreditation Committees*, between the *Australian Universities Quality Agency* and a number of overseas audit and accreditation agencies, the United Kingdom *Quality Assurance Agency*'s cooperation agreements with agencies in other countries and continents, or in the most accomplished form, the operation of a joint quality assurance agency as in Belgium (Flemish Community) and the Netherlands (Box 5.1).

Finally, another emerging trend relates to the mutual recognition of national quality assurance agencies/bodies' decisions. At the moment, few countries participating in the Review have adopted provisions whereby TEIs have the possibility to turn to accredited international quality assurance agencies for external evaluation. Finland is one exception, as well as the Netherlands in the case of engineers (van der Wende, 1999). In addition, quality assurance agencies from nine European countries are currently working together through the *European Consortium for Accreditation*[99] (ECA) with an aim of recognising each other's accreditation decisions by 2007.

However the situation with respect to recognition is likely to evolve dramatically in the years to come, following the request by Bologna Ministers to the E4 group[100] in London to set up a *European Quality Assurance Register* of quality assurance agencies/bodies (Bologna Secretariat, 2007b). This Register was formally established in March 2008 and is deemed to allow all stakeholders and the general public open access to objective information about trustworthy quality assurance agencies that are working in line with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). And indeed, quality assurance agencies/bodies will have to undergo an independent external evaluation and to demonstrate compliance with the ESG to be listed on the Register. As a result, the general model proposed in the ESG is likely to diffuse internationally and to have a significant impact on the development of national systems of quality assurance. Countries part of the Bologna Process will need to strive to ensure that their quality assurance systems meet the ESG standards that allow their quality assurance agencies to be included in the Register. Outside of the Bologna area, the emergence of this Register raises the question of whether to join the convergence process or improve comparability by different means.

5.4.5 Maximising the impact of the quality assurance system

Finally, the last macro challenge for tertiary education quality assurance frameworks has to do with impact. Indeed, the overarching goal of quality assurance processes is to ensure that minimum standards are met and to improve the quality of tertiary education

99. Countries participating in the ECA are Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain and Switzerland.

100. The E4 group is a dialogue platform established to discuss tertiary education issues at the European level. It includes representatives of key tertiary education stakeholders, namely the European Universities Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the European Network on Quality Assurance (ENQA), and the European Students' Union (ESU).

outcomes over time. Yet, the impact of quality assurance mechanisms on tertiary education is difficult to assess, although there is evidence of effects on academics' behaviour and management within TEIs and on teaching and learning. The implementation of quality assurance mechanisms has also revealed a number of downsides. The question then arises of finding the right set of incentives to lead frontline actors to adopt quality-enhancing practices and limit the perverse effects.

Difficulties in measuring the impact of quality assurance

According to Barrow (1999), the measurement of the impact of quality assurance is complex given the difficulty in measuring the achievement of a quality definition, particularly in terms of student transformation. In addition, Brennan (1997) notes that investigations of the impact of quality assurance systems face several challenges due to the invisible, incremental and slow nature of educational change, and because it is often difficult to isolate the impact of quality assurance mechanisms from other forces affecting tertiary education.

As a result, organisational change – such as the effect of quality monitoring on staff, internal procedures, or management structures in TEIs – has been the focus of most impact studies because it is often easier to identify, even though many authors underline that the linkage between organisational and educational change cannot be assumed (Brennan, 1997; Cave *et al.*, 1990; Horsburgh, 1999; Harvey and Newton, 2004). Another obstacle lies in the difficulty to isolate the impact of quality assurance from other forces affecting tertiary education (Shah, 1997; Askling, 1997). Lastly, Stensaker (2003) and Zbaracki (1998) indicate that another methodological problem in the measurement of the impact of quality assurance systems is related to the risk of overly-optimistic reporting, as managers may have incentives to appear like "good implementers" of external quality management.

Impact on organisation and management within TEIs

A range of analysts point out that quality assurance activities may have an impact on organisation and management within TEIs. This impact is four-fold. To begin with, several studies have concluded that external quality assurance mechanisms affect the distribution of power within TEIs towards greater centralisation in procedures and decision-making (Askling, 1997; Stensaker, 1999; Stensaker 2003). Closely related to the trend towards centralisation is the tendency that TEIs have become more bureaucratic (Gornitzka *et al.*, 1996; Kogan *et al.*, 2000). There is also reportedly a trend towards a more autonomous role for the institutional management, including in giving managers greater responsibility for follow-up procedures (Stensaker, 2003). Alvesson and Willmott (1996) note in this respect that the rise in management is one explanation for the unwillingness of frontline academics to do more than comply with the quality assurance requirements. Finally, Stensaker (2003) argues that increased institutional transparency is a noticeable effect of external quality assurance in tertiary education.

Impact on teaching and learning

At first glance, a review of the literature on the medium-term impact of quality assurance processes on teaching and learning seems disappointing. According to Harvey and Newton (2004), most studies reinforce the view that quality is about compliance and accountability and has contributed little to the improvement of the student learning

experience. Vroeijenstijn (1995a) reports for instance that the quality of Dutch tertiary education did not improve substantially after five years of intensive external quality assurance in the Netherlands. This scepticism surfaces in a number of other studies (Harvey 2006; Newton 2000; Newton, 2001). Furthermore, even when changes in learning outcomes have been observed, these authors argue that they are not necessarily linked to the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms and other factors completely outweigh the impact of external quality evaluation (Horsburgh, 1999; Harvey, 2002).

Some authors are more optimistic though, and indicate evidence of a more concrete impact of quality evaluations on teaching practices. For instance, Brennan (1997) indicates on the basis of 53 case studies in the United Kingdom, that 65% of the teaching quality recommendations had been acted upon, especially when the assessment results fell below institutional expectations. Silva *et al.* (1997) also found outstanding improvements in the teaching environment in Chile, including curriculum reforms, higher standards and improved instruments for student assessments, innovations in professional programmes, upgrading programmes for instructors and improvements in the academic hiring and promotion system. But the most commonly reported benefit of quality assurance processes is a greater awareness of quality, and increased attention given to the teaching function within TEIs and academic communities, through discussions about teaching, monitoring teaching, and by implication the teaching act itself (Brennan and Shah, 2000; Vroeijenstijn, 1995a; Dill, 2000).

In the countries participating in the Review, evidence suggests that the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning in a number of cases. In Poland for instance, this positive impact is suggested by a rapid drop in conditional approvals and negative accreditation evaluations during the first few years of operation of the *State Accreditation Commission*. Similarly, student survey data in Australia indicate a 10 percentage point increase in bachelor's students' level of satisfaction between 1995 and 2005 which could result from a greater responsiveness of TEIs to the needs of students as a result of the increased focus on quality assurance in Australian universities. And in Switzerland, there is evidence that detailed evaluations in vocational tertiary education have had visible repercussions on the acceptance and recognition of these TEIs both nationally and internationally, even though they had no visible impact on dropout rates or the length of studies.

Overall, Dubois (1998) identifies some conditions under which evaluation can bring about lasting improvements on the basis of 31 European case studies. According to this study, the impact of evaluations depends on the extent to which it informs faculties on strengths and weaknesses, helps diagnose situations, brings about changes in values, enhances the sense of belonging to the TEI and legitimates those who have initiated the evaluation. Evaluations are also more likely to be effective when carried out by a powerful and legitimate board of directors, thereby contributing to a sense of ownership of the evaluation results. The establishment of internal evaluation mechanisms is also important. Finally, the presentation of results and the presence of sanctions matter, with widely-disseminated and precise recommendations most likely to have an impact, especially if potential financial implications exist. This last condition raises the issue – and challenge – of incentives as discussed below.

Undesired outcomes of quality assurance

At the same time, the implementation of quality assurance does not go without problems, and international experience has revealed a number of undesired outcomes or perverse effects of quality assurance mechanisms. For instance, Lee and Harley (1998) have found that the British research evaluation of the Economics discipline has reinforced a conservative mainstream approach and has been detrimental to alternative approaches to economics and the intellectual diversity of teaching environments.

In a different vein, another undesired outcome of the growing awareness and need for quality assurance has been brought to light, whereby the tertiary education world has seen a proliferation of self-appointed and rather self-serving accreditors and accreditation mills that simply sell "bogus" accreditation labels (OECD, 2004b). Knight (2005) argues that the need for accreditation status is bringing about the commercialisation of quality assurance, and incurs the risk that the weaker TEIs turn to rogue accreditors to acquire as many "accreditation stars" as possible and to boost their apparent legitimacy. This new situation entails serious equity issues since those most likely to be deceived by these false quality assurance labels are the students with no family tradition of tertiary education and less ability to decode information, *i.e.* most likely those from disadvantaged backgrounds. A challenge for quality assurance systems is therefore to enhance ethical principles and signal *bona fide* quality assurance agencies/bodies. In some countries like Australia and the United States, lists of accredited programmes and accreditation agencies – or conversely unaccredited ones – are published (CHEA, 2003) whereas at the international level, the establishment of the *European Quality Assurance Register* – which is open to any quality assurance agency/body worldwide – is an interesting step in the direction of enhancing the credibility of *bona fide* agencies.

Finally, another collateral damage of quality assurance mechanisms relates to the lack of preparedness of some users to process and deal with the information produced by quality assurance mechanisms. Illustrating this downside, there is evidence in a number of countries that international students – whose information on domestic providers is somewhat limited – all want to enrol in elite research universities of world-class standards. This pattern reflects the pervasiveness of rankings to demonstrate and signal institutional excellence, but can be destructive for users unable to read this information according to their profile so as to find the programme best-suited to their own needs.

The ensuing challenge for policy makers is therefore to ensure that the design and operations of the quality assurance framework limits the prevalence and minimises the risks of such perverse effects.

Incentives

Finally, the overarching challenge of maximising impact and limiting perverse effects naturally leads to the need for quality assurance systems to devise the right set of incentives to ensure that TEIs and academics not only comply with quality assurance requirements, but actually implement quality-enhancing teaching practices on a sustained basis. In this respect, a widely debated issue in the literature relates to the extent to which public funding allocations ought to be linked to the results of quality evaluations, as an incentive for TEIs and academics to enhance the quality of their programmes.

A number of analysts advise against linking results of quality assessments to funding. They argue that a direct link to funding undermines quality improvement, by encouraging compliance rather than improvement (Brennan, 1997). According to Vroeijenstijn

(1995b), "the direct link to funding is a threat to quality assurance, because every evaluation loses its value for improvement. Academics are smart people: so they will find all ways to beat the system and by doing so try to get the money." Harvey (2002) also draws attention to the risk of lack of openness in quality assurance, whereby TEIs may fear revealing weaknesses or problems in self-evaluation in countries where funding is used to reward strengths rather than combat weaknesses. In addition, these authors reject linking funding to the results of quality assessments on methodological grounds, arguing that the quality and outcomes of teaching are more difficult to measure (Middlehurst and Woodhouse, 1995). From a system effectiveness perspective, Woodhouse (1999) claims that rewarding the "successful" would involve the State paying more for an already "good product", while the reduction of funding is unlikely to improve low quality education. Brennan and Shah (2000) actually suggest the opposite, arguing that an improvement logic would advise giving more to the least good. Finally, these authors consider that linking funding to the results of quality assessments would be inefficient as it would create a compliance culture among TEIs and skew the system to follow the money (Middlehurst and Woodhouse, 1995; Thune, 1998).

By contrast, linking funding to the results of quality assessments has been advocated on several grounds. The first argument is that it is an incentive for improvement. Indeed, Ewell (1999) argues that linking funding to the results of quality assessments rewards excellence and stimulates lower performers to increase their efforts. However, subject to debate is what actions should follow from the results of the quality evaluations and, especially whether bad results should have financial consequences. Some advocate rewarding good performance only possibly through supplemental funding or incentive systems. Others would like to sanction bad results, for instance by withholding funds or not allowing a programme to enrol new students. Still others suggest shaping results so that they lead to voluntary improvements (El-Khawas *et al*., 1998). In addition, authors in favour of linking funding to the results of quality assessments argue that this is already fairly accepted among both governments and TEIs with respect to research funding (Middlehurst and Woodhouse, 1995; Harvey, 2002). Finally, these authors suggest that not linking funding to the results of quality assessments would not avoid the risk of compliance in any case (Thune, 1998; Brennan, 1997).

This debate highlights the challenges lying ahead for policy makers in devising the right sets of incentives to lead to quality improvement throughout the system. This challenge involves finding the right balance between reward mechanisms to encourage TEIs to strive for excellence in teaching, as well as direct funding to correct deficiencies and discourage TEIs to hide weaknesses. It also implies improving coordination with research funding mechanisms to ensure that academics and TEIs do not receive contradictory signals and incentives.

5.5 Pointers for future policy development

The practices and challenges of tertiary education quality assurance described in this Chapter point to several areas where policy development could help countries achieve their goal of ensuring high quality provision in tertiary education and adequately preparing their populations for participation in the knowledge economy.

The policy suggestions that follow are drawn from the experiences reported in the Country Background Reports, the analyses of external review teams, and the wider research literature. Not all of the policy implications apply equally to all 24 participating

countries. In a number of cases many or most of the policy suggestions are already in place, while for other countries they may have less relevance because of different social, economic and educational structures and traditions. The implications also need to be treated cautiously because in some instances there is not a strong enough research base across a sufficient number of countries to be confident about successful implementation. Rather, the discussion attempts to distil potentially useful ideas and lessons from the experiences of countries that have been searching for better ways to improve the quality of their tertiary education systems. However, some common themes are evident in the country reforms now underway. Policy recommendations are therefore grouped under several headings relating to the design of the quality assurance framework, the strengthening of internal evaluation mechanisms, the improvement of external evaluation mechanisms, the enhancement of quality assurance methodologies and the practical arrangements for the quality assurance system.

Design of the quality assurance framework

Design a quality assurance framework consistent with the goals of tertiary education

It is important, in order to build a national commitment to quality, that the aim of the quality assurance system be clear and expectations be formulated in alignment with the tertiary education strategy. A well co-ordinated quality assurance system might be expected to ensure that: each student is provided with quality education; the overall system is contributing to the social and economic development of the country; TEIs' activities foster equity of access and outcomes; and quality assurance contributes to the improvement of co-ordination within and integration of the overall tertiary system.

Build consensus on clear goals and expectations of the quality assurance system

An effective quality assurance system would need to gather consensus among the different stakeholders based on shared expectations on purposes and outcomes. Building consensus requires agreement on a comprehensive framework on conceptions and indicators of quality. In this respect, one way of reaching consensus could be to distinguish improvement and accountability conceptually and practically, while allowing for close contact between them. The comprehensive framework could also specify some elements – *e.g.* certain data requirements and institutional quality assurance mechanisms – applicable to all TEIs to strengthen the coherence of the system, while allowing specialised requirements for certain types of TEIs or adapted to their missions.

Ensure that quality assurance serves both the improvement and accountability purposes

There is also a balance to be struck between accountability and quality improvement. From an accountability point of view, it is important that quality assurance systems provide information to various stakeholders but quality assurance also needs to be/become a mechanism to enhance quality rather than simply force compliance with bureaucratic requirements. A balance between the two purposes of improvement and accountability is therefore crucial for the effectiveness of a quality assurance system and to maintain the support of academics by focusing on issues that are important to them.

Revisiting the balance between accountability and improvement periodically would be desirable, *e.g.* to put less emphasis on accountability over time once there is evidence of stronger adherence to baseline standards.

Combine internal and external quality assurance mechanisms

The balance between accountability and improvement is more likely to be successfully addressed through distinct evaluation processes, especially so in systems where some form of connection with funding exists. A combination of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms could be used to address the different purposes of quality assurance. One possible model for this may be to focus on improvement through external audits and internal quality assurance mechanisms while accountability would be addressed on the basis of performance indicators and verifying data in public databases. But clearly, other combinations are possible depending on countries' traditions and level of development of their quality assurance systems.

Build capacity and secure legitimacy

Legitimacy is a key factor determining the impact of quality assurance, since quality judgements which lack legitimacy in the eyes of those on the receiving end are not likely to be acted upon if action can be avoided. The nature of the involvement of the academic community as a whole is important to enhance the legitimacy of the quality assurance processes, especially when it comes to the composition of external evaluation teams. It would also seem important that the quality assurance agency/body in charge of external evaluations be independent of tertiary education authorities, and have trust in the TEIs and their internal quality assurance processes. Ideally, the collection of data and processing of quality indicators to be used in accountability checks would be best developed outside of the quality assurance agency/body in order to strengthen its perceived independence.

Some capacity building is necessary to capture the full benefits of external evaluations. Indeed, the development of dialogue and frequent communication between external experts and TEIs are vital to the quality enhancement process, through the dissemination of research, benchmarking data and best practices, but this cross-fertilisation of ideas requires a high level of professional expertise within the agency/body in charge of external quality assurance. It is therefore important for the strength and effectiveness of quality assurance that the staff involved in external evaluations be adequately selected and trained to analyse the information gathered during the evaluations.

Make stakeholders such as students, graduates and employers visible in the evaluation procedures

The legitimacy of the quality assurance system also lies in its ability to take into account the perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders with an interest in tertiary education, such as students, graduates, and employers. It would therefore be important to systematically include representatives of employers and students in external evaluation panels to enhance accountability to society. A wider use and analysis of graduate destination surveys would also help assess the success of graduates in joining the labour market and the adequacy of tertiary programmes to labour market needs.

Increase focus on student outcomes

The focus of quality assurance ought to be shifted on student outcomes – in terms of learning and labour market performance – relative to input factors (faculty and physical

resources). This can be achieved by describing the desired outcomes of tertiary education in national qualifications frameworks, and referring to these intended outcomes in the design and evaluation of tertiary programmes' curricula. The views of graduates and employers may also be sought during external evaluations, either through analyses of graduate destination survey data or participation of these stakeholders in the external evaluation panels. Indicators on the effectiveness of individual TEIs in preparing graduates for the labour market could also be developed and published as an incentive for TEIs to improve.

Student outcomes in terms of cognitive learning are equally important. It would thus be important to develop indicators of teaching quality – in the sense of value-added and how much the teaching at the institution adds to the cumulative learning of students – and include them in performance appraisals of TEIs. Indeed, in the absence of objective measures of learning outcomes, there is no way for students to judge the quality of TEIs except by reputation that does not necessarily reflect quality. A related issue concerns rankings of TEIs and programmes. One way that policy makers may choose to counterbalance the impact of unsound rankings and put more emphasis on teaching quality may be to publish quality-related information at institutional level – such as student evaluations of their learning experience.

Enhance the international comparability of the quality assurance framework

As education and research become global, quality assurance systems could be developed so that they can be understood and approved by international partners, *e.g.* by making quality evaluation results available in English in addition to the national language or involving foreign experts or foreign quality assurance agencies/bodies in the monitoring process. The continued implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines on quality assurance is also to be encouraged. In addition, quality issues arising in relation to internationalisation activities call for better systems of consumer protection and for the implementation of the OECD-UNESCO Guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education.

Internal evaluation

Develop a strong quality culture in the system

A strong quality culture in TEIs – shared by the academic leadership, staff and students – helps to reinforce the quality assurance system. To a large extent, this attention to maintaining and improving academic standards builds up over-time. However, evidence suggests that a strong quality culture may also develop as a result of public intervention, *e.g.* through the (mandatory) creation of internal quality assurance systems by TEIs or in response to appropriate incentives such as publishing student evaluations of their learning experience.

Put more stress on internal quality assurance mechanisms

More emphasis should be given to internal mechanisms to establish trust in and commitment with TEIs, take full account of the expectations and values of administrators and academic staff and trigger the intrinsic motivation of staff to achieve improvement. In addition, an approach mostly based on external quality assurance mechanisms is likely to be excessively costly and inefficient in achieving sustained improvement.

Ideally, internal evaluation systems would need to be shaped in such a way that academics in each study area can gather systematic feedback from students, assess their programme's effectiveness and identify and carry out improvements in areas where weaknesses are identified. To do so, they would need methods for obtaining fair and valid assessments of teaching and learning processes, and resources to help shape needed improvements. While full regard must be given to institutional autonomy and to the virtues of institutional initiative, the national quality assurance agency/body may be uniquely well placed to organise and disseminate a variety of technical assistance materials, sponsor workshops and best practice of internal quality assurance models to fit national circumstances.

Ensure that internal accountability is guided by some key principles

Quality processes ought to be non-burdensome and delegation of responsibility for quality go to those people able to effect change at the teaching-learning interface. In addition, research has found that informal internal quality monitoring seems to be the most valuable in terms of improvement and enhancement of student learning. Peer observation of teaching should therefore be encouraged in a way that is conducive to improvement, *i.e.* by being separated from other institutional processes for probation, under-performance or promotion, and with feedback to individual staff remaining confidential. These approaches could be assisted by the creation of centres of teaching excellence within TEIs to develop pedagogical strategies and training materials.

Undertake the external validation of internal quality assurance systems

It would also be important to bring legitimacy to internal quality assurance mechanisms by having them formally validated periodically by an external assessment. There should be the expectation that TEIs establish routines that lead to the continuous improvement of their internal quality systems.

External evaluation

Commit external quality assurance to an advisory role as the system gains maturity…

The development of the quality assurance system needs to be seen as an ongoing process. Whilst there is a clear need and rationale for external quality monitoring during the early stages of development to fulfil the need for accountability and ensure that baseline standards of quality are met throughout the system, this rationale is likely to fade over time. Indeed, the periodic external quality monitoring of TEIs and/or programmes with a comprehensive coverage of the entire tertiary education system entails prohibitive costs which are likely not to reflect the value gained from the process as the quality assurance system matures. It would therefore be important – once baseline standards are met – that external quality assurance evolves towards an advisory role to enhance improvement, *e.g.* by being available to TEIs for advice and consultation, undertaking research on quality, disseminating best practices and providing benchmarking data across the sector. This, however, requires a high level of professional expertise within the agency/body in charge of external quality assurance.

… but retain strong external components in certain contexts

At the same time, a more comprehensive approach to quality assurance, with a strong external component, may be needed in certain contexts such as less mature systems, systems in large expansion, or systems with large private sectors. In such contexts, it would be important to reinforce the role of external quality assurance, *e.g.* by introducing elements which are mandatory in nature or considering the launch of a single cycle of external assessments for TEIs and/or programmes which have never been previously assessed. The improvement function of quality assurance would seem to be best achieved by concentrating monitoring and improvement efforts on those TEIs most in need of improving their quality, *e.g.* through priority treatment or more frequent monitoring.

Implement adequate follow-up procedures and view quality assurance as a continuous process

Many countries carry out external monitoring at regular intervals on a compulsory basis to ensure that adequate and continuous attention is paid to quality. But regular compulsory monitoring does not automatically generate improvement, and the implementation of adequate follow-up procedures is a necessary condition for quality assurance activities to have an impact. Formal mechanisms for following up the results of the reviews would therefore need to be established and go beyond simply asking the TEI what it has done. For instance, the quality assurance agency/body could have a reactive role and step in whenever a TEI does not act on the evaluation recommendations. If so, the consequences of failure to implement corrective action would have to be clear.

Allow for selected assessments to be initiated by an external quality assurance agency

The quality assurance system should also be sufficiently flexible to allow selected *ad-hoc* external evaluations focusing on specific disciplines/programmes, a particular theme (*e.g.* transition of graduates to the labour market), or take place when problems are identified by the external quality assurance agency/body.

Avoid direct links between assessment results and public funding decisions

It would seem wise to avoid establishing direct links between quality evaluation results and public funding, so as not to encourage TEIs to hide weaknesses and undermine the improvement function of quality assurance. This would not discard the possibility to make public funding conditional upon reaching minimum quality thresholds. The quality assurance system could be designed in a way that minimum quality thresholds would need to be demonstrated *ex-ante* to become eligible for public funds while the results of ongoing assessment evaluations would then be disconnected from public funding decisions *ex-post*.

It would be preferable to limit the extent of indirect links such as financial rewards for institutional-level teaching excellence on the ground of effectiveness. Indeed, these resources might be more useful to assist low-performing TEIs improve their quality, and the challenge is for policy makers to find the balance between reward mechanisms and funding directed to correct deficiencies in low-performing TEIs.

Methods

Align quality assurance processes to the particular profile of TEIs

Quality assurance processes need to be aligned to the particular profile and mission of TEIs. Even in countries where a single quality assurance agency/body monitors the quality of different types of TEIs, every institution should not necessarily undergo the same quality assurance procedures. For instance the evaluation of vocationally-oriented TEIs could place a greater focus on issues of labour market relevance.

Improve co-ordination between the evaluation of teaching and research

In many countries, the evaluation of teaching and research require better co-ordination to minimise the volume and duplication of evaluation and the burden on TEIs. This can be achieved through a jointly evolved multi-year calendar of evaluations to avoid over-concentrations on specific TEIs, joint evaluations of particular aspects such as a doctoral programme, subject evaluations of teaching and research, *etc.*

Engage in constant innovation

Routine processes, bureaucratisation and window-dressing are likely to follow when the same type of evaluation processes have been in place for many years. There is a need for constant reflection and change in external quality assurance mechanisms to ensure their effectiveness, including periodic change in both objectives and in the quality assurance agencies themselves to counteract tendencies of diminishing returns to repetition.

Develop quality assurance expertise in new areas

Quality assurance expertise should also be developed in some new areas such as adult learning, e-learning, off-campus education and international education (export and import) as tertiary education becomes more pluralist and diversified. Also, more needs to be known about the use of student learning outcomes and value-added indicators in quality assessment and about the role of professional bodies in assuring quality in tertiary education.

Practical arrangements for the quality assurance system

Avoid fragmentation of the quality assurance organisational structure

Whenever possible, quality assurance responsibilities should be brought under the umbrella of a limited number of agencies to improve oversight from an outside perspective, and therefore provide more transparency and accountability to society. A more unified approach would lead to a better integration and coherence of the system and improve communication and co-ordination between quality assurance activities, educational authorities and TEIs. A smaller number of agencies would also help improve learning within the system as best practice from various sub-sectors could be spread across organisational structures. Another advantage is that the external accountability function could be further improved as it would be more accessible for external

stakeholders, *e.g.* through system-wide standards common to various types of TEIs with due consideration to different institutional aims and contexts. The possible existence of separate quality assurance agencies should correspond to a real need, and the scope and objectives of each agency should be clearly determined without unnecessary overlaps.

Avoid excessive costs and burdens

It would also seem important to avoid the costs of quality assurance outweighing the benefits. Thus the quality assurance system would need to be sufficiently light and flexible to avoid an undue burden in time and money. At the system level, the Review has identified several potential sources of excessive costs. Unnecessary costs may result from an organisation of tertiary education around a large number of small fragmented TEIs which individually need to undergo quality assurance processes, complex and overly bureaucratic quality assurance systems relying upon numerous quality assurance processes and involving duplication of work, or the recourse to private external examiners.

Improve quality information base

In many countries, there seems to be a significant lack of relevant national and institutional data to assess the performance of the tertiary education system as a whole, as well as the performance of individual TEIs. This deficiency would need to be addressed. In particular, baseline information on outcomes – including labour market performance of graduates in specific fields of study – would be needed, as well as information on student progress, dropout and completion rates and time needed for degree completion in each field and level of study. Although it is beyond the role of the national quality assurance agency/body to build a better national information system on tertiary students and their later employment experience, the agency could and should promote the development of such a system and could also be instrumental in identifying the most critical information gaps.

Improve information dissemination

The importance of providing users of tertiary education with information on the quality of educational offerings is fundamental to help prospective students make choices, provide feedback to current students and parents, and inform employers on the quality of graduates. As a result, many countries make the results of the external quality evaluations publicly available. But evidence suggests that in practice, they are mostly used by the TEIs themselves. An important aspect of the appropriateness of publications for accountability purposes is the extent to which the reports are easily accessible (*e.g.* Internet) and comprehensible to non-experts in the field. Beyond the results of quality evaluations, initiatives to publish quality-related information on the Internet are also to be encouraged.

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