



UiO • Det utdanningsvitenskapelige fakultet

Quality Management of Norwegian Higher Education: complexities and visions on possible future developments

**Seminar: Søkelys på kvalitet i høyere utdanning
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Research Group:

'Expert cultures and institutional dynamics: Studies in higher education and work (ExCID)'



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Starting-point:

- What do we actually know about the quality of Norwegian higher education?

Quality of Norwegian HE: effectiveness of the quality system on education as a whole

Possible issues

- Strong in diagnosis, analysis, proposing measures for strengthening quality versus weak in implementation
 - Possible factors of relevance: lack of strategic priorities; limited capacity; organisational culture
- Reporting on quality issues more important than working on improving quality
 - Possible factors of relevance: low levels of trust (intra-institutional and between institution and environment)
- Fragmented, unclear, inconsistent organisation of academic responsibilities wrt study programmes (educational leadership)
 - Possible factor of relevance: administrative logics dominant in organisation of study programme

Historical dimensions

Consequence of dominance of German research university as main institutional template in higher education:

- HEIs' academic staff's two conflicting loyalties with diverse, often incompatible values:
 - To institution and colleagues (education)
 - To discipline and global community in area of specialization (research)

Historical dimensions

Example of complexity of conflicting loyalties:

- Research Councils' criteria (values, preferences) in deciding on their programme areas (and Calls within them) and on which projects should be selected for funding are decoupled from educational realities and capacity needs in HEIs and from quality criteria (values, preferences) in HEIs
- Academics preferences and values in producing applications for external funding of research are in general decoupled from their educational activities (preferences and values)
- Consequence
 - Quality management in Education decoupled from Quality management in Research within HE systems and institutions and systems

Quality Management of Education in European HE (since 1980s)

- Focus on quality of HE closely linked to four key policy agendas:
 - Reforming public sector governance (efficiency and effectiveness issues)
 - Challenges with massification (worries about quality and costs)
 - Internationalisation (mobility and transparency)
 - Economic competitiveness (Globalisation, innovation, job creation)

Effects on the HE sector incl.:

- Centralization of institutional governance in HEIs
- Professionalization of Quality Management (QM) of Education in HEIs
- Student empowerment
- Enhancing (some) knowledge on quality of education in HEIs
- But also increased decoupling of QM of education with QM of research.
- Possible consequences:
 - Decreased attractiveness of teaching role of academics with further academic decoupling?
 - Decoupling management/administration – academic staff?
 - Disengagement of students?

Three visions on the future of the quality (of education) agenda...

- 'Quality Management/Quality Systems' not drilling deep enough – we need to tone down (administrative) reporting and focus more on **student learning**
- 'Quality Management' as a way to realize institutional strategies – an instrument for **institutional branding**
- 'Quality Management' is taken over by external actors and understandings – stronger focus on **comparative and standardized metrics and indicators**

Quality Management and student learning

Possible transformative processes:

- Student evaluations of teaching changed from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning
- Curriculum design focus – study program leadership less oriented on «running» the program, putting more emphasis on «integrated planning»

Quality as institutional branding

Possible transformative processes:

- Study programs less in the hands of departments and individual academic staff, and more a (joint) responsibility of faculties and «schools» (Dutch example)
- Study programs more linked to strategic research ambitions, blurring disciplinary boundaries: major challenge integrating QM of education with QM of research!

Quality of education as another layer of metrics and indicators

Possible transformative processes:

- Due to difficulties in measuring learning processes, quality becomes more output-oriented
- Output quality linked to funding, and the administrative control over key metrics becomes tighter

Towards more effective Quality Management?

- The three perspectives are not mutually exclusive, but represent different logics that can be challenging to balance for the leadership
- The perspectives all represent potential promising paths towards the future quality of (higher) education agenda, but they also hints towards dangers and un-wanted side-effects
- A key challenge is that the ´paths´ may develop in ´isolation´, become professionalized and lead to further disengagement among staff and students