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EVALUATING QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENTS

Abstract

Purpose Despite the abundance of research on quality management there is no universal consensus on how best to measure quality in higher education. This paper undertakes a critical evaluation of the different methods used to assess the quality of provision in higher education departments in the UK.

Methodology Drawing on relevant literature, the authors develop a quality audit tool that incorporates all key components of effective quality management programmes and apply it to a single UK case study department.

Findings The findings suggest that the potential for quality enhancement is determined by the manner in which the evaluation is conducted and subsequent change implemented. Perhaps unsurprisingly there is currently an emphasis on internally derived quantitative data and there is potential to enhance the management of the quality of HE programmes.

Research Limitations/Implications This article has concentrated on the development of the quality audit tool and tested this within one UK department. Work is underway to now test the tool on an international basis.

Paper type Research paper

Key Words quality, higher education

EVALUATING QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENTS

Introduction

In many countries and many cultures, the issue of quality management has been firmly on the agenda of higher education institutions for quite some time. Higher education for the masses and a growing climate of increasing accountability (Oldfield and Baron, 1998, Eriksen, 1995) are frequently cited as the rationale for a greater emphasis on quality. Accordingly there has been a good deal of research into the subject of quality in higher education, with well-recognised contributions from all corners of the globe[1]. Within the UK there are particular environmental forces imposing the need for effective quality management within programmes. These include:

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

These forces demand that HE programmes adopt quality assurance procedures that are both rigorous and transparent. In addition, they require quality enhancement initiatives to be firmly embedded into any quality management programme in order to support continual efforts to enhance the quality of provision. However, despite the progress that has been made through research and debate, there is still no universal consensus on how best to manage quality within higher education. Furthermore, these environmental forces have a significant impact on meanings and perceptions of quality and as such, quality can be considered to be a socially constructed phenomenon. This paper therefore seeks to provide a critical evaluation of current approaches used to assess quality within higher education in the UK. The authors adopt an interpretivist and qualitative approach in order to take account of the various forces and perspectives that impact upon quality and how these interrelate when conducting quality audits in higher education.

The review suggests that there are numerous examples of good practice, however, there is little evidence that educators have taken a step back to critically evaluate their quality management practices more holistically in order to ensure that the various meanings and perceptions of quality are being adequately assessed. The authors therefore use the literature to identify six key components of quality management in order to develop a comprehensive framework for a quality audit tool to assess quality management practices in higher education.

The quality audit tool is then tested using a single ‘typical’ UK based case study, where quality management procedures are considered broadly indicative of current practice

within UK higher education. The evaluation highlights evidence of good practice as well as areas for improvement within individual quality assessment procedures. While the findings are limited to a single case, the audit tool is nonetheless considered to be an effective tool for holistic assessment of quality management practice within higher education at departmental level.

Assessing Quality in Higher Education

Defining quality in higher education has proved to be a challenging task. Cheng and Tam (1997) suggest that 'education quality is a rather vague and controversial concept' (p23) and Pounder (1999) argues that quality is a 'notoriously ambiguous term' (p156). As a result of the difficulty in defining quality, the measurement of quality has also proved to be contentious. There have been various attempts to draw on industry models such as the quality dimensions of Gronroos, Garvin and Parasuramman (see for instance Owlia and Aspinwall, 1996), SERVQUAL (Oldfield and Baron, 1998; Aldridge and Rowley, 1998), importance-performance analysis (Ford, Joseph and Joseph, 1999) and the balanced scorecard (Cullen, Joyce, Hassall and Broadbent, 2003) to develop quality assessment models for higher education. Internationally, the tool most frequently drawn upon (see for instance Cruickshank, 2003; Motwani and Kumar, 1997; Eriksen, 1995) however, is that of Total Quality Management (TQM), defined as:

> ' a management approach of an organisation, centred on quality, based on the participation of all its members and aiming at long run success through customer satisfaction and benefits to all members of the organisation and to society.' (ISO 8402 in Wiklund et al, 2003, p99)

The rationale for adoption is that TQM has the potential to encompass the quality perspectives of both external and internal stakeholders in an integrated manner and thereby enable a comprehensive approach to quality management that will assure quality as well as facilitate change and innovation. However, there have been a number of limitations identified in the wholesale adoption of TQM in higher education. Roffe (1998) suggests that while there are a small number of quality indicators in industry, these are more numerous and complex in higher education and are therefore more difficult to assess. Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2002) highlight that the application of TQM is more appropriate to the service rather than the education functions of a university. Similarly Yorke (1994) advises that accountability relationships are more complicated and Roffe (1998) highlights that while the accountability emphasis of TQM in industry is on a team, this tends to lie with individuals in higher education. Harvey (1995) further argues that the emphasis on quality in industry lies predominantly with the customer, whereas in higher education there is a continued debate regarding who the customer actually is. Critics of this approach suggest that a wholesale adoption of TQM without adaptation to reflect the particular characteristics of higher education is unacceptable (see for instance Yorke, 1994). It has even been purported that the practice of TQM in higher education is deteriorating into managerialism because of the disparity between TQM techniques and educational processes, as well as the lack of shared vision within institutions or educational fields (Srikanthan and Dalyrymple, 2003). As a result of this debate, Hewitt and Clayton (1999) recommend that a model of educational quality

that is different from, but capable of being related to commercial models, is beginning to emerge (p838), however, it is not yet complete.

Srikanthan and Dalyrymple (2003) suggest that ‘a fresh view is necessary of quality in higher education’ (p134). A starting point for this process is arguably a comprehensive assessment of current practices to determine the extent to which different meanings of quality and different stakeholder perspectives are taken into account. Drawing on relevant literature from both education and industry, a new framework for a quality audit tool has therefore been developed in order to assess current quality management approaches within higher education.

The following six key elements have been identified as essential components of a comprehensive audit tool to assess the degree to which:

1. different stakeholder perspectives are taken into account
2. inputs, processes and outputs of the educational system are assessed
3. different quality dimensions are considered
4. quantitative or qualitative assessments are used
5. quality assessments are used as snapshots or longitudinally
6. assessments are used for quality assurance and quality enhancement purposes, and the extent to which these processes are interlinked.

The following section explores each of these elements in turn, and evaluates their inclusion within the proposed audit tool.

Internal and External Stakeholders

Cheng and Tam (1997) identify both internal and external stakeholders in the quality management process. Current students and front line staff are internal constituents whereas employers, government funding bodies, institutional management, prospective students or professional bodies are external. These stakeholders are likely to have disparate definitions of quality as well as different preferences for how quality is assessed. While Hughes (1988) suggests that quality indicators may differ for internal and external stakeholders, Cheng and Tam (1997) further argue that expectations of the different constituencies may be not only different, but contradictory (p23). According to Cullen et al (2003) the challenge is to produce a performance evaluation framework that permits the equal expression of legitimate voices, even though they may conflict or compete in some ways.

Traditionally external stakeholders have been associated with quality assurance procedures. Quality assurance refers to the 'planned and systematic actions [deemed] as necessary to provide adequate confidence that a product or service will satisfy given requirements for quality' (Borahan & Aiarati, 2002, p914). For Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) this requires them to demonstrate responsible actions in their professional practices and accountability in the results they achieve with the resources used (Jackson, 1998, p46). Elton (1992) refers to these as the quality As; accountability, audit and assessment, and suggests these are concerned with the control of quality and the people who control quality. Particular mechanisms for assurance, such as accreditation and quality audits, are usually imposed by external bodies (McKay and Kember, 1999).

As a control tool, therefore, the focus of quality for external stakeholders is predominantly on the measurement of procedures and the extent to which they result in appropriate levels of quality (Jackson, 1996b).

As Avdjieva & Wilson (2002) suggest, HEIs are now also required to become learning organisations (p372), where internal stakeholders also interpret and assess the quality of higher education provision. The emphasis for internal stakeholders is not only on quality assurance, but additionally on quality enhancement which aims for an overall increase in the actual quality of teaching and learning, often through more innovative practices (McKay and Kimber, 1999). Elton (1992) suggests that this approach focuses on the quality Es; empowerment, enthusiasm, expertise and excellence. McKay and Kember (1999) report that quality enhancement initiatives tend to be less clearly defined and often more diverse than quality assurance initiatives. In higher education, mechanisms adopted by internal stakeholders are likely to include self-evaluation practices and student feedback. As students are viewed as an integral part of the learning process (Wiklund et al, 2003) this type of evaluation tends to be more formative in nature and arguably therefore more likely to lead to continual quality improvement efforts. The involvement of internal stakeholders is also more likely to result in a culture of quality management being embedded within programmes. However, these measures are representative of a comparatively limited number of stakeholders, and where self-evaluation practices are employed there can be a tendency to paint a ‘rosy picture’ especially when linked to staff appraisal, promotion or tenure decisions.

Education Quality as a System

The discussion so far has focused on who is measuring quality, but it is also important to consider what is actually being assessed. Deming suggested in 1993 that education could be viewed as a system or 'a network of interdependent components that work together to try to accomplish the aim of the system' (p98). The management literature (see for instance Slack, Chambers and Johnston, 2004) identifies three essential components in any system; inputs, process and outputs. Resources are input into the system, and go through a transformation process before becoming outputs. In higher education, at the macro level we input students or customers into the system as well as information and various other learning resources, and put them through an educational transformation process in order to produce graduates.

Sahney, Banweet and Karunes (2004) advise that in education there are human, physical and financial resource inputs that undergo processes including teaching, learning, research, administration and knowledge transformation. The outputs of the education system can be tangible, intangible or value addition through examination results, employment, earnings and satisfaction (p153). Harvey (1995) argues however, that there is no discernable end-product of higher education as the transformative process continues to make an impact after the completion of higher education. Hewitt and Clayton (1999) suggest that if the desired output of higher education is viewed as 'increased capabilities and knowledge as embodied within the transformed student, including an enhanced capability for further learning' (p852), then the system model is still appropriate provided there is recognition of the role of the student within all three system components. The

systems approach can also be effectively applied at a micro level, for example at the level of an individual unit of study (see for instance Slack et al, 2004).

Education quality can also be viewed as a system that 'constitutes the input, process and output of education and provide services that satisfy both the internal and external strategic constituencies by meeting their explicit and implicit expectations' (Cheng and Tam, 1997:23). Other models of quality such as the process model (Cheng and Tam, 1997) and the quality function deployment model (Hwarng and Teo, 2000) also recognise these three essential components of education. If higher education is viewed as a system, then any quality management programme must assess inputs, process and outputs, and an evaluation of quality management should also consider the extent to which these three components are measured.

Quality Dimensions

Despite their support for viewing education as a system, Sahney, et al (2004) suggest that this creates further difficulty in conceptualising quality as the different component parts of the system have different requirements. The authors' review of the literature suggests that there have been a number of different attempts to articulate the dimensions of quality in higher education as Garvin (1987) did for services. One of the most clearly defined set of dimensions of quality for higher education has been identified by Harvey and Knight (1996). They argue that quality can be broken down into five different but related dimensions:

- quality as exceptional (e.g. high standards),
- quality as consistency (e.g. zero defects),
- quality as fitness for purpose (fitting customer specifications),
- quality as value for money, (as efficiency and effectiveness) and
- quality as transformative (an ongoing process that includes empowerment and enhancement of customer satisfaction).

Harvey and Knight (1996) advise that quality as transformative can incorporate the other dimensions to some extent, and the first four dimensions are not necessarily end products themselves. However, Owlia and Aspinwall (1996) argue that different stakeholders are likely to prioritise the importance of these different dimensions of quality according to their particular motivations and interest. Furthermore, some dimensions may be more readily measured. For example quality as high standards might be monitored through marks awarded for different units of study, or degree classifications awarded. Quality as transformative may be somewhat more difficult to measure, so leading to a preference for the monitoring of some quality dimensions at the expense of others. An evaluation of quality management procedures should therefore examine the extent to which these different dimensions of quality are measured and ultimately if there is provision for quality as transformative.

Qualitative Versus Quantitative Data

Whatever quality dimensions are being measured, it is necessary to consider whether a quantitative or qualitative approach is more appropriate given the purpose of a particular

quality assessment. Powell, Hunt and Irving's (1997) review of evaluation methods suggests that there is merit in both quantitative and qualitative approaches. While quantitative ratings facilitate performance comparability both internally or externally, they generally fail to provide any clear explanation as to why certain ratings are given. As such they may be more suitable for quality assurance initiatives. Using numerical ratings would enable assessors to establish that at least a minimum level of quality is attained. Qualitative data, on the other hand, provides richer (Veal, 1997) or more 'illuminating' (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2001) data that can more readily inform decision making for quality enhancement purposes. However, this type of data may prove to be less beneficial when benchmarking performance. A quality management programme that utilises a mixture of both types of data would seem most appropriate for both quality assurance and enhancement purposes (see for instance Brookes, 2003, Richardson, 1998 and Bryman, 1988).

Snapshot and Longitudinal Perspectives

Quality assessments can be used for two different purposes. Initially all quality assessments provide a snapshot of the current offering at any given point in time. However, there is also the potential to use these assessments on a longitudinal basis in order to monitor or benchmark performance over time. In this context, longitudinal studies often consist of cohort studies carried out over a number of years 'in order to take a number of time-spaced sequential snapshots from which more general trends and explanations can be derived' (Dawson, 1994, p186). In other words, different snapshots

of quality are used in conjunction with one another over time to produce a more comprehensive longitudinal picture of quality. Within different education departments or institutions it is the broader quality management objectives that will determine the extent to which quality assessments are used longitudinally. While both approaches can inform change to enhance the quality of provision, a longitudinal approach facilitates the tracking of the effectiveness of change over time. Any quality management programme arguably should therefore include some provision for longitudinal tracking.

Quality Assurance or Quality Enhancement

All of the aforementioned criteria are relevant to the ultimate purpose of quality assessment. Traditionally, the focus within higher education has been to assess quality for assurance purposes often driven by external stakeholders. As discussed earlier, there is a greater emphasis today on assessing quality in order to inform change and enhance provision and there may be greater tendency for this when assessments are driven by internal stakeholders. Colling and Harvey (1995) argue that external scrutiny is still very important to the enhancement process, but to be effective it needs to be linked to internal quality enhancement processes. Mckay and Kember (1999) echo this argument and suggest that quality control measures in isolation may have limited impact if not accompanied by appropriate educational development initiatives (p26). However, Jackson (1997) argues that the demands of trying to fulfill both internal and external expectations for accountability are not always consistent with expectations of development, improvement and innovation. When held to account, there may be a

tendency towards ‘gaming the system’ (Bradach, 1998; Clark, 1997) where what gets measured gets done or fixed in the short term in order to meet assessment targets. As a result, quality may not be embedded into the culture of departments (Roffe, 1998) and therefore true quality enhancement initiatives may be somewhat limited. Jackson (1996a) argues that while audit processes try to fulfill the purpose of assurance for accountability as well as enhancement purposes, the extent to which either of these primary purposes can be realised will be influenced by the approach adopted (p45). As such he argues that audit tools can be viewed on a continuum with quality compliance (or assurance) at one end, and enquiry to inform quality enhancement at the other.

At the compliance end of the spectrum it is likely that quality audits might focus more on outputs rather than process, although inputs might be taken into consideration. However, in order to develop relevant enhancement initiatives, all three system components including processes should be assessed. While all of Harvey and Knight’s (1996) dimensions of quality are important, it is quality as transformational that is most closely aligned with quality enhancement activities, particularly if qualitative assessments are used to inform change. While both snapshot and longitudinal approaches can be used for quality assurance and enhancement, it is the latter that is more in line with a continuous quality improvement approach.

What is apparent from this discussion is that the concept of quality in higher education is complex and dependent upon different stakeholder perspectives. The six key criteria identified are therefore deemed relevant for a comprehensive evaluation of quality

management practices. These are now tested on a case study in order to assess their relevance.

Case Study

This section reports on the methods used to assess the quality of provision within undergraduate programmes in the Department of Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism Management (HLTM) at Oxford Brookes University. The audit tool is used to assess the extent to which the different meanings and perspectives of quality, as identified through the six key criteria, are monitored within the case study department[2].

Module Evaluation

Module evaluation is the most nominal level of evaluation where students review their experience within each unit of study against a number of specified criteria. In the majority of HEIs, such feedback is sought for each run of the module and results are likely to be disseminated through relevant committee meetings. The extent to which module evaluations are discussed and valued as a quality enhancement tool will depend upon the manner in which they are utilised in programme review and development. The degree to which staff reflection feeds into module evaluation is subject to a number of factors, which may be personally or institutionally driven. In the latter, it may be used for tenure or salary purposes and therefore it would be unlikely that staff perceptions are taken into account. However, if driven by staff members themselves it is likely to be used explicitly for module and personal development purposes.

Within HLTM, student evaluation of individual modules is undertaken every time the module is run using instruments designed by module leaders. Generally students are surveyed on the extent to which they believe they have met the stated learning outcomes for that module, its design, organisation and content, teaching methods employed, learning resources provided and the appropriateness of the assessment tasks and weighting of assessment components. Frequently they are also asked about their attendance in order to provide additional insight to the feedback given. Typically a Likert-type scale is used to assess student opinion of achievement of learning outcomes for benchmarking performance on a longitudinal basis, and a qualitative approach is used to solicit further feedback for the other criteria.

Externally, quality assurance at the module level will involve an external examiner (see below) whose role at Oxford Brookes is to provide feedback at two stages. Firstly, prior to the module running, the external examiner provides feedback on the proposed assessment tasks and criteria in relation to the learning outcomes. At the end of the module, the external examiner provides feedback on student performance generally, and in relation to expected norms, the specific learning outcomes, assessment tasks, grades awarded, tutor feedback and marking consistency.

Both student and external examiner feedback is then used to compile a standard Module Evaluation (MEV) report, completed by the module leader. Student feedback is clearly articulated under the headings identified above in conjunction with evaluative comments

by the module teaching team. The MEV also includes data on student performance. The module leader reflects on the overall module evaluation and proposes actions for its next run. The MEV reports are completed and presented at the first programme committee meeting after the finish of the module and discussed in an open forum that allows for peer consultation and input from student representatives. Following approval of any actions at the committee meetings, the completed MEVs are posted on student notice boards to close the feedback loop to students, and to inform the annual review of the programme. Applying the audit tool to module evaluation reveals that:

- Quality is measured from a predominantly internal stakeholder perspective but does include the voice of one external stakeholder.
- All system components are measured: inputs, process and outputs.
- The process measures dimensions of quality as exceptional, consistency and fitness for purpose. There is also the potential for quality as a transformational process depending upon the actions taken by individual module leaders and the extent to which the feedback loop is closed.
- Both quantitative and qualitative feedback is solicited to benchmark performance and inform change.
- It provides a snapshot of each run of the module with the ability to monitor quality within modules longitudinally.
- The evaluation can therefore be used for quality assurance and enhancement purposes.

While this method of quality assessment appears both comprehensive and rigorous according to the audit tool, the changes that result from this type of evaluation are generally minor given the level of assessment. However, they can lead to the development of innovative approaches to teaching and learning. In HLTM for example, the introduction of formative self-assessment tasks by students has resulted in greater achievement of learning outcomes in one module, and in accounting the introduction of assessed role-plays has diversified assessment methods and enhanced the student learning experience. It should be noted that it is the creation of the MEV that pulls together all three stakeholder assessments to create a holistic review of individual modules that facilitates both quality assurance and enhancement.

Internal Programme Evaluation

There is also support for programme-level evaluation (see for instance Wilson, Lizzo and Ramsden, 1997) in order to facilitate a more comprehensive assessment of students' perceptions of the quality of their experience. This type of feedback generally entails students assessing their overall satisfaction with the perceived quality of various aspects of provision including the design of the curriculum, the quality of the teaching, learning and assessment methods, and the resources available to support these. Softer aspects of their experience that impact upon students' overall satisfaction may also be included. Once again, the degree to which this broader feedback can be used for quality enhancement purposes will depend on the manner in which it is incorporated into a review process and used to determine change.

With increasing student diversity and more competitive markets, HLTM staff recognised the need for a more comprehensive approach to monitoring the quality of provision (see Brookes, 2003). In 1998, the 'student experience' survey was launched which draws on the well-recognised works of Ramsden (1991) in Australia and Harvey et al (1997) in the UK. The student experience survey is conducted across different student cohorts, at various stages of their programme, and seeks both quantitative and qualitative feedback. The survey was designed to facilitate longitudinal benchmarking and provide sufficient data to facilitate change.

Findings from each survey are discussed at programme committee meetings (which include student representatives), and any necessary actions in response to student feedback are identified and agreed. Where further investigation is necessary, this is usually done through focus groups facilitated by an external researcher. A full written report is then produced and made available to students in order to 'close the feedback loop'. Harvey et al. (1997) suggest this is vital to successfully involve students in quality management, and the Department believes that this demonstrates a commitment to taking student feedback seriously. The findings and actions are then reported within the annual programme review. The application of the audit tool reveals that programme-level evaluation:

- Relies solely on students as internal stakeholders
- Measures all system components
- Measures all quality dimensions

- Solicits both quantitative and qualitative feedback
- Provides both a snapshot and a longitudinal measurement
- Enables both quality assurance and enhancement.

At this level, the potential for enhancement is greater than at the modular level as changes are more likely to involve departmental systems and procedures, thereby affecting a greater proportion of the overall student experience. For example, within HLTM, the survey informed change to induction programmes and personal tutor systems to enhance student support. The process also allows for the impact of any recommendations implemented to be monitored and adjusted if necessary in the future in line with continual quality improvement practices. It should also be noted that in this approach, quality as transformational is driven through student feedback at regular intervals throughout their study and the efforts undertaken to close the feedback loop. Because they are surveyed early in their course, students can see the results of their feedback on the quality of their experience. In this way the Department is developing an instructional environment 'that promotes students' perception of quality to result in better learning and development' (Tam, 2002, p212).

External Programme Evaluation

Since 2001 the Department has also participated in an annual Student Experience Survey run by the Higher Education Academy Hospitality, Leisure Sport and Tourism Network (www.hlst.heacademy.ac.uk). This national survey collects views from graduating

students regarding their experience of teaching and learning during their entire course. The majority of the data collected is quantitative in nature, but there is also an opportunity for students to comment qualitatively on their experience.

The results are compiled by the Network and course directors at participating institutions receive a confidential report for each of their programmes of study. They also receive a summary of results for all courses (http://www.hlst.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/sceq.html). In this way current national trends relating to student needs and perceptions are identified on a longitudinal basis and fed back to participating course teams. The survey therefore sets the individual course performance within the context of national provision and identifiable trends. Applying the audit tool to the Network survey indicates that:

- Quality is assessed from an internal stakeholder perspective but monitored by external stakeholders
- All system components are measured
- Quality is assessed through the dimensions of exceptional, consistency and fitness for purpose
- Predominantly quantitative feedback is solicited
- It provides both a snapshot and a longitudinal measurement
- Findings are predominantly used for quality assurance, but there is potential for quality enhancement.

As suggested above, while quality is predominantly measured on three dimensions, there is also potential for the transformative dimension, but this depends upon the way in which the information is utilised within a department. For example, as a result of the feedback received from this survey, a career management module has been developed. Within HLTM, survey results are generally used to benchmark performance against national results over time. As such there is potential for programme teams to enhance the quality of their provision, although the lack of qualitative data may inhibit this. As the survey is conducted externally, there is potentially more objectivity in the results, however, there is unlikely to be equivalent ownership by staff in comparison to internal evaluation activities. A further limitation of this approach is the participation only of graduating students, so the feedback loop is only closed for staff, and not students.

External Examiner Evaluation

In the UK, institutions and programme teams are required to appoint external examiners to review and evaluate higher education provision. The role of the external examiner is guided by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)[3]. It is perceived that 'external examining provides one of the principal means for the maintenance of nationally comparable standards within autonomous higher education institutions' (QAA Code of Practice, p 1). The particular nature of the external examiner role is then further defined by the requirements of individual institutions. As a minimum, this would entail the external examiner providing an annual assessment of provision at a programme level. It is usual for an external examiner to submit an annual written report to the institution (not

the school or department) and for this to be formally responded to by the programme team. The precise nature of institutional engagement with external examiners will determine the degree to which programme teams and individual members of staff actively use feedback from external examiners. In Oxford Brookes, as in some other institutions, external examiners may also give feedback at the module level as described above. Applying the audit tool to external examiner review activities reveals that:

- The process measures quality from an individual external perspective
- The focus of review is predominantly on system outputs
- Quality as exceptional, consistency, and fitness for purpose are considered
- A snapshot of quality is provided with some potential for longitudinal application
- Qualitative feedback is provided
- The findings are predominantly used for quality assurance, with limited enhancement potential.

External examiner contributions provide an informed and generally objective external view on performance within both modules and an entire programme of study, and also against experience from other institutions, albeit from an individual perspective. It is likely that the external examiner will be more concerned with the outputs rather than the inputs of the education process, although this will largely depend on the nature of the relationship between the department and the individual. In HLTM, the external examiner does review and provide feedback prior to assessment taking place, so there is some consideration of inputs and process. As external examiners are usually appointed for a

three-year period there are limitations in using their input on a longitudinal basis. In HLTM programme directors are expected to indicate how they have responded to external examiner reports in the annual review process, so there is some potential for quality enhancement in addition to quality assurance activities. However, this potential for enhancement initiatives is likely to be variable across different departments or institutions.

Annual Programme Review

As in many HEIs, the main purpose of this review is to provide opportunities for staff and students to appraise actions taken in the light of the evidence provided by a variety of performance indicators and in relation to the University's objectives (Quality & Standards Handbook, p2). Performance indicators include feedback from students and staff on the quality of provision, drawing on all forms of internal assessment as well as internal data on aspects such as student recruitment and progression. These are used in conjunction with external assessments.

In HLTM an annual review is conducted immediately following the close of an academic year. These reviews incorporate the MEVs, the internal student experience and the Network survey results, external examiner reports, internal data on recruitment, progression and achievement, and first destination statistics of graduates. Programme managers are responsible for using these assessments and data to provide a qualitative self-assessment on changes made to the programmes, the quality of learning opportunities

provided and the adequacy of learning resources. This review is presented to staff and student representatives at the start of the next academic year. Any actions to be undertaken as a result of the review are agreed, so the feedback loop is once again closed. Hospitality and tourism reviews are then combined with other programme reviews to create a School-wide review that is presented to the Senior Management Team. Application of the audit tool reveals that the annual review:

- Is a compilation of internal and external quality evaluations undertaken by internal stakeholders
- Is predominantly focused on outputs and then inputs in relation to these
- Measures all quality dimensions, but quality as transformational is limited
- Uses quantitative data to support a qualitative assessment
- Predominantly takes a snapshot, but information can be used longitudinally
- Predominantly concentrates on quality assurance.

While information from both internal and external stakeholders is used within this process, there is a greater reliance on internal assessment and data. Depending on the professionalism of those involved, there might be an inclination to use the data to support a positive self-evaluation. All quality dimensions are present in this process, but quality as transformation does not necessarily relate to empowerment and customer satisfaction as per Harvey and Knight's (1996) definition. It is more usual to consider actions to be taken in response to outputs, such as the external examiner report. The emphasis on the inputs and outputs suggests that there is more reliance on quantitative data to support

evaluations, and as such this evaluation tool leans towards quality assurance more than enhancement. When this review is incorporated into the School-wide review however, there is even less likelihood that it can support enhancement initiatives in a meaningful way.

Subject Level

In the mid 1990s, the general public in the UK started to demand greater accountability within higher education and this created a demand for valid, reliable and comparable performance data on teaching quality (Wilson, Lizzo and Ramsden, 1997). In the UK, the QAA has responsibility for reviewing and assuring the quality of higher education provision. Prior to 2004, the QAA review process required quality assessment within HEIs at subject level by peer review using six criteria: curriculum design, content and organisation; teaching, learning and assessment; student progression and achievement; student support and guidance, learning resources and quality management and enhancement (QAA, 1997). Assessments were undertaken according to QAA subject categories and results were published providing both quantitative and qualitative evaluation of subject provision within institutions.

Within HLTM this review encompassed hospitality and tourism programmes and as with other subject providers across the country, a great deal of time, effort and financial resources were required to support the review. Each of the six QAA criteria was evaluated using both quantitative and qualitative data, and awarded a numerical score. Applying the audit tool to this quality mechanism reveals that:

- Both internal and external stakeholder perspectives are considered, but the overall assessment is by external agents and by externally defined criteria
- All systems components are considered
- All quality dimensions are considered, but there is limited potential for quality as transformational
- Assessment is qualitative, with quantitative aggregation of scores
- A snapshot of quality only is provided
- Quality assurance is predominant, with only limited enhancement potential.

One potential limitation of this audit is that as the criteria for quality and the measurement process are defined externally, there is less likelihood of the process resulting in a culture of quality being developed within departments. Furthermore as the criteria were known in advance of the audit, there is every likelihood that the system would have been gamed (Bradach, 1998), as what gets measured will be fixed, at least in the short term. Peer review by a team of subject experts however, is likely to reduce any potential subjective bias in a review by a single assessor. While all systems components are measured, more weight is arguably given over to outputs. For instance, in HLTM, many international students opt to undertake ordinary, rather than honours degrees for financial reasons. While the processes in place for students allow for this flexibility, the Department was negatively judged on its outputs (i.e. the percentage of students with ordinary degrees) within student progression and achievement.

The dimension of quality as transformative is considered to be limited because results are disseminated to those involved in programme delivery so long after the event. Therefore there is less scope for quality as transformational to empower and enhance. As the QAA system for reviewing HE provision has now been changed, there is also no scope for benchmarking performance longitudinally.

QAA Overview Report

The most recent evaluation of subject provision for hospitality and tourism was completed in 2001 by the QAA. Following a review of individual departments, the QAA produced a Subject Overview Report covering the same six criteria as those for individual programmes (http://www.qaa.ac.uk/revreps/subjrev/All/qo3_2001.pdf). The summary states that:

> "The individual reviews confirm overall that the subjects are achieving their main aims and objectives, although with a need to address a number of important sector-wide issues… Across all of the provision, the highest grades are in student support and guidance, followed by learning resources. The lowest average grades are in teaching, learning and assessment and in quality management and enhancement…" (QAA, 2001, p1). An application of the audit tool suggests that:

- It is a compilation of external stakeholder perspectives
- All system components are considered, but the main focus is on outputs
- Quality dimensions of value for money and fitness for purpose are considered

- Assessment is qualitative with quantitative aggregation of scores
- Only a snapshot of quality is provided
- It provides for quality assurance with limited enhancement potential.

The potential value of this assessment is the confidence that it provides to relevant HE stakeholders as a result of the review by external agencies. Although both the departmental and overview reports are publicly available via the QAA website, this information is most likely to be of interest to government funding bodies and accreditation organisations, rather than prospective parents as external stakeholders. Its key function is to provide assurance of quality at subject level, and an indication of quality enhancement priorities for the subjects. As such the quality dimensions are primarily assuring value for money, fitness for purpose and to some extent exceptional aspects and consistency. There is potential for subjects at a national level collectively through associations to use the information to identify aspects for enhancement, but at programme level there is very limited enhancement potential.

Evaluating Current Approaches

The table below provides an overview of the contribution of the various evaluation methods used to assess quality within the case study department according to the audit tool. It appears that by utilising the range of quality management activities identified a comprehensive perspective of the quality of provision and student satisfaction is obtained. The audit undertaken here is considered to identify the potential strengths and

weaknesses of the different evaluation methods adopted in the case study department as depicted in Table 1 below.

Table 1: ***A Comprehensive View to be inserted about here***

Who Measures Quality?

Table 1 indicates that there is a concentration on information derived from internal sources. It is argued that this approach is helpful to engender a culture of quality enhancement. The external contribution predominantly relies on the individual voice of the external examiner. Research is currently being undertaken to more comprehensively define the role of the external examiner in the UK and to identify training needs (www.heacademy.ac.uk). The findings from this analysis support the need for this research in order to ensure that the voice of this external stakeholder is used effectively for both quality assurance and enhancement.

Beyond the external examiner, this research suggests that there is limited provision for the contribution of external stakeholders. While it is common for many programmes within hospitality and tourism to draw on industry expertise at programme development and delivery stages, there is further opportunity to involve others such as employers, and recent graduates in the quality assurance process.

What is Measured?

In terms of system components, it appears that the majority of methods consider inputs, process and outputs to some extent. By nature the outputs are the most obvious and quantifiable aspects to measure. Likewise, each of the quality dimensions are measured. However, findings reveal there is limited emphasis on quality as transformative within

the overall quality assessment methods. This analysis does suggest that there is a good deal of potential to focus on the dimension of quality as transformational if appropriate systems are adopted to trigger this within institutions and departments. Within the case study, this dimension is most transparent in the student experience survey. There are possible limitations therefore in quality management practices of programmes that do not currently employ this type of assessment. In addition, where the dimension of quality as transformative is measured, the process is not always transparent to students. Given the importance of closing 'feedback loops' to facilitate quality enhancement, it is a vital aspect to pursue, particularly if programmes or institutions are seriously attempting to move towards a TQM approach.

How Is Quality Measured?

While Table 1 indicates that both quantitative and qualitative data are used for evaluation purposes, there is greater reliance on quantitative data. There is a need therefore for educators to identify potential qualitative sources of feedback in order to inform change to enhance provision. In the case study qualitative feedback is provided by external examiners and students at module level, and at the broader level of the student experience survey. However the majority of information used to support quality enhancement is obtained from the latter source. There is a potential shortcoming for those programmes that do not undertake such an evaluation, so for these programmes it is extremely important that careful consideration is given to the nature and extent of the qualitative data collected at the module level.

The Purpose of Quality Audits

All methods of evaluation provide a snapshot of provision at any given time and at variable times throughout a programme of study. While this provides a one-off quality assurance assessment, far more value can be gained through longitudinal application of this data to enable benchmarking to identify potential areas for enhancement. There is potential for a longitudinal approach for all of the evaluation mechanisms examined, with the exception of the QAA audit that will not be repeated in this format. As Table 1 indicates, there is also potential to improve quality enhancement initiatives within individual assessment mechanisms and across programmes of study. However this is dependent on individual members of staff and programme teams taking ownership of findings and acting appropriately to enhance provision.

Concluding Thoughts

Given the importance of quality management to higher education, this paper set out to critically evaluate current quality management practices. In order to undertake a comprehensive evaluation an audit tool encompassing six key quality management dimensions has been developed. This audit tool reflects the different meanings and perspectives of quality relevant to higher education and its different stakeholders. The potential value of this audit tool to educators has been demonstrated through its application to a case study within a UK HEI.

The findings generated through its application suggest that while there is evidence of good practices in quality management within hospitality and tourism education, there is also potential for further improvement at subject level. In particular, it appears that we are some way off from implementing a total quality management approach within HE. While these findings are limited to one case study and therefore not generalisable, this paper still contributes to the higher education quality management debate. It is argued that there is also potential for the audit tool developed within this paper to be applied across a broader sample of HEIs, both within the UK and internationally. The authors are currently engaged in an international application of the audit tool.

1. [International researchers have investigated quality management in higher education from a wide range of perspectives for a number of years (see for instance Cullen, Joyce, Hassall & Broadbent (2003) from the UK; Wiklund et al (2003) from Sweden; Avdjieva & Wilson (2002) from New Zealand, Borahan & Ziarati (2002) from Turkey; Lawrence & McCollough (2001) from the USA; Pounder (1999) from Hong Kong; Martens & Prosser (1998) from Australia; Colling & Harvey (1995) from the UK)].

2. [It should be noted that national HE league tables have been omitted from this evaluation. There is no doubt that the tables are widely referred to by students, parents and within universities and departments. However, close inspection of the data and the way it is used to compile the rankings leaves its validity as a reliable source of information open to question (Ramsden, 2003)].

3. [The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was established in 1997 to 'provide an integrated quality assurance service for UK higher education' (http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutqaa/qaaintro/contents.htm). The QAA is an independent body whose 'mission is to promote public confidence that quality of provision and standards of awards in higher education are being safeguarded and enhanced' (http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutqaa/aboutQAA.htm)].

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	WHO MEASURES?	*WHAT MEASURED?*	*WHAT MEASURED?*	*HOW MEASURED?*	*PURPOSE?*	*PURPOSE?*
	STAKEHOLDER	**SYSTEM COMPONENTS**	**DIMENSIONS OF QUALITY**	**QUANTITATIVE OR QUALITATIVE**	**SNAPSHOT OR LONGITUDINAL**	**ASSURANCE OR ENHANCEMENT**
MODULE EVALUATION	predominantly internal, multiple perspectives	inputs, process & outputs	exceptional, consistency & fitness for purpose possibility for transformational	quantitative & qualitative	snapshot & longitudinal	assurance & enhancement
STUDENT PROGRAMME EVALUATION	internal student perspective only (driven by internal stakeholders)	inputs, process & outputs	all quality dimensions measured	quantitative & qualitative	snapshot & longitudinal	assurance & enhancement
LTSN PROGRAMME EVALUATION	internal student perspective only (driven by external stakeholders)	inputs, process & outputs	exceptional, consistency & fitness for purpose possibility for transformational	predominantly quantitative	snapshot & longitudinal	assurance with limited enhancement potential
EXTERNAL EXAMINER PROGRAMME EVALUATION	external perspective, single stakeholder normally	focus mainly on outputs	Exceptional, consistency & fitness for purpose	qualitative	predominantly snapshot	assurance with limited enhancement potential
ANNUAL PROGRAMME REVIEW	compilation of internal & external perspectives by internal stakeholders; greater reliance on internal	focus mainly on outputs but inputs measured in relation to outputs	exceptional, consistency, fitness for purpose & value for money; limited transformational	qualitative assessment that draws on quantitative data	predominantly snapshot	predominantly assurance
QAA SUBJECT LEVEL EVALUATION	compilation of internal & external perspectives by external stakeholders	inputs, process & outputs, more weight given to outputs	exceptional, consistency, fitness for purpose & value for money; limited transformational	quantitative assessment that draws on qualitative data	snapshot	assurance with limited enhancement potential
QAA OVERVIEW EVALUATION	compilation of external stakeholders perspectives at dept level	inputs, process & outputs, more weight given to outputs	predominantly value for money & fitness for purpose	qualitative with quantitative aggregation of scores	snapshot	assurance with limited enhancement potential

Table I A Comprehensive View