

**Review of Ellis, R. and Hogard E. (Eds) (2019).  
*Handbook of Quality Assurance for University  
Teaching*. Abingdon: Society for Research into  
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This textbook is a marathon exploration of the importance, complexity and current status of knowledge of assuring teaching quality in higher education. It is an extensive read of 494 pages, consisting of 4 parts, sub-divided into a total of 36 papers. There are 48 contributors in all, many of whom are well known in the field, all of whom have extensive experience in research, teaching, consultancy, administration or governance in Higher Education. The authors are from a wide range of disciplines and countries, with the vast majority based in the UK.

Part 1 (*Assuring Quality*), which is by far the largest section (at 244 pages), focuses on what quality assurance means and how it might be applied in higher education. In particular, the concept of higher education as a 'product' which can be quality assured is explored. The first chapter covers definitions, concepts and the identification of the key issues to be covered while chapter 2 discusses the proliferation of quality agencies and standards world-wide and how this has led to internationally shared practice resulting in a shift in focus to measurable outcomes with students increasingly at the centre. Chapter 3 covers the history of developments in higher education strategy and standards in the UK since the Deering Report of 1997, including the development of agencies such as the Higher Education Academy (HEA). Over a 20-year period, there has been increasing emphasis on the student voice, technology enhanced learning and professional development of teachers, all of which has been mirrored in other countries, including Ireland.

Chapter 4 is, in my view, a critical turning point in the narrative. Roger Ellis demonstrates the application of a quality management standard designed for the manufacturing industry to higher education (BS EN9001, formerly BS 5750). Ellis proposes that there is sufficient commonality with the service sector, in particular the link between professional behaviour and outcomes, for this standard to be extended to cover the area. In particular, effective delivery of a product or

service requires a specific approach by the organisation (standards, procedures, documents, monitoring, remedial action, review) and this can be applied to higher education. However, the challenge remains that teaching is largely hidden from objective scrutiny. Although Ellis managed to translate all of the elements of the standard to apply to higher education, the 'human factor', i.e. an agreed standard for teaching itself, remains elusive.

In chapter 5, Lewis Elton explores a professional model for quality in higher education. There is some overlap with the previous chapter as he looks at how the concept of TQM can be applied to education. While the main issue is that the behaviour of the 'professionals' is largely hidden from objective scrutiny, he proposes that attempts to make lecturers publicly 'accountable' could result in a deterioration of quality due to a decrease in motivation and engagement. Professionals must be responsible for the quality of their own work but currently university teachers are not, strictly speaking, 'professionals' as there is no regulatory body, no compulsory training or CPD and no agreed competencies. He proposes the same model of quality assurance as by Ellis and others but stresses the importance of funding support to achieve this, as well as recognition and awards. Procedures for quality assurance of teaching need to be negotiated and agreed, requiring a shift in culture, ethos and values for many HEIs.

In chapter 6, Elaine Hogard looks at the role of programme evaluation in higher education quality assurance. She specifically discusses a method (Trident) she developed with Ellis which was applied to a nursing education programme and integrates qualitative and quantitative data to review outcomes, process and multiple stakeholder perspectives. A comprehensive multi-method approach is used providing opportunities for feedback at all levels and it measures both process and outcomes, with recommendations for future practice and policy. In chapter 7, Roger Woodward looks at the role of institutional research in quality assurance, particularly in the development of instruments for objective measurements (such as student satisfaction). Continuing with this important theme, in chapter 8, Jeremy Warren discusses the inherent dangers of using proxies and how it can lead to a performance management culture. He explores the future of performance management in the context of the new UK Teaching Excellence Framework. He questions whether KPIs can be used as proxy measures for estimating teaching quality or student success and he explores the extent that factors related to student admission characteristics are within the control of teachers. Areas likely to be selected as reasonable proxies for teaching quality include student retention, graduate employment and student satisfaction but other institute factors and external factors will also impact on these.

This is followed by a series of articles on quality assurance in education for specific disciplines and in particular, the role of regulatory agencies. In Chapter 9, Hogard *et al.* review three case studies of quality assurance in medical education in Australia, the UK and North America. In particular, this serves to highlight the complexity of integrating higher education quality assurance with regulatory body requirements and the importance of cooperation between all of the agencies involved. In chapter 10, Carol Hall looks at quality assurance and enhancement in nursing education and the complexity of a learning environment which must integrate academic studies with clinical placement experience. She highlights the differences world-wide as to how this is achieved - in some countries there are standardised national curricula while in others each individual qualification is accredited. In some areas (e.g. China) there is a terminal examination to ensure competence to practice (licence exam) in addition to the academic credits, while in others there is on-going assessment of professional competencies included in the programme credits (UK and many EU countries). In chapter 11, Chris Wilkins explores quality assurance in teacher education and its evolution over 40 years, the way in which performance outcomes are linked to funding and whether this 'politicised control' weakens the capacity of providers to be innovative or creative. Also here, is the issue of dual accountability, where both academic and professional body standards must be met. Leading on nicely from that, chapter 12 is an exploration of higher education quality assurance from the perspective of PSRBs (Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies). In the UK there are 14,133 courses accredited by 149 professional bodies. Tensions can result from the conflicting perspectives and priorities of HEIs and PSRBs and relationships could be more productive if not entirely focused on the accreditation aspects. In chapter 13, on a similar theme, Damian Day looks at the use of national assessments by PSRBs to gauge levels of uniformity of standards and outcomes from HE programmes. The case study presented is that of the General Pharmaceutical Council Registration Assessment.

In chapter 14, Karin Crawford *et al.* look at the important role of students in quality assurance of university teaching and explore ways in which students can be partners in quality assurance. This challenges the traditional relationships, power balances and cultures of higher education. Student involvement can go beyond feedback and representation on committees to true partnership scenarios where students have a role as 'experts' in quality assurance processes. Continuing this theme in chapter 15, Stringer *et al.* review the different approaches to attaining student feedback and the increasingly important role of technology in this. They propose a new system which is more formative and responsive, based on the use of technology-based

approaches (such as clickers) which provide opportunities for immediate response. Chapter 16 also explores the role of students in quality assurance. Current methods are reviewed and recommendations proposed with a variety of levels of involvement, from simple feedback opportunities to students as partners and agents of change. Organisations can select to have a culture of reactivity (by collecting and analysing learner analytics), responsiveness, collaboration or progressiveness, the last scenario involving openness to students initiating, defining and monitoring change.

Chapter 17 describes the history of the development of quality assurance in healthcare, how it compares with the higher education sector and opportunities to apply healthcare approaches. There has been very little collaboration thus far and one of the major differences is that lecturers have never achieved 'professional status', unlike their health sector colleagues. There are many common themes between the sectors including the challenge of identifying measurable outputs. Chapter 18 presents a case study of assuring teaching quality in Hungary in the context of history, politics, culture, traditions and financial constraints.

In Part 2 (*Identifying Quality*), there are seven papers which explore the current state of knowledge regarding quality in higher education and identify gaps in this knowledge. In chapter 19, Brown and Edwards review what 'effective' learning, teaching and assessment means from the prospective of different stakeholders. The considerable volume of research into the effectiveness of methods and structures are used in HE are reviewed here. The authors emphasise the challenge in comparing their relative effectiveness without including the individual styles and skills (e.g. preparation, interactive skills, reflection) of the teachers themselves. Student learning depends not only on teaching but on their learning environment, background, motivation, style of learning and many other factors. To that add course design, management and other organisational variables. The authors propose that measuring 'effectiveness' is not a stable concept and research can only inform and illuminate the issues of effectiveness and quality. Chapter 20 explores the teaching styles of award-winning professors through a case study of Kent State University in Ohio. The most important qualities of award-winning teachers were enthusiasm, goal setting, preparation, humour and performance. The awards system was found to motivate faculty members and encourage sharing of practice and expertise.

In chapter 21, Hogard returns to present a case study from Nursing in which a form of teaching known as 'clinical facilitation' was piloted and evaluated. In chapter 22, Howson explores the

engagement of students with quality and standards through a survey of 150 students in 16 HEIs across the UK. Students' expectations were explored regarding value for money, learning environment, employability following graduation, feedback and the qualities of good lecturers. The ability of higher education to meet the expectations of the students was very individual to each student. Lecturers were expected to be passionate, knowledgeable, approachable and supportive. Students particularly valued being part of a community and having a sense of belonging. Interestingly, students generally didn't indicate an interest in a high-level partnership and were more interested in interacting with faculty locally. In chapter 23, David Morris looks at how to manage the feedback from student satisfaction surveys and in particular how to develop a balance between responding to students' genuine interest in improvements against 'pandering' to their wishes (possibly resulting in 'dumbing down'). The importance of including *qualitative* feedback, e.g. through class representatives, was emphasised as it contributes significantly to understanding. In chapter 24, Berk reviews a controversial subject - the value of student ratings to assess teaching quality. This is the subject of more literature than any other in higher education and has been widely criticised for its lack of integrity, reliability and validity, although it is still widely used in some countries including the US. The author reviews a number of other techniques which can be used in conjunction with student ratings, such as quality control circles, small group interviews, peer observations, teaching scholarships, self-ratings, five-minute feedback papers, among others. He emphasises with importance of triangulating across multiple sources of evidence in decision making. In chapter 25, Lindsay Heywood overviews the development of the Australian Higher Education Standards framework starting with setting up of the Australian Universities Quality Agency in 2000 and leading to the setting up of TEQSA (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency) as the national regulator. The framework places the student experience at the centre and has led to improvements in recognition of prior learning (RPL), assessment, orientation, course design, staff quality, academic integrity, monitoring, governance and communication.

Part 3 (*Developing Quality*) and consists of five individual contributions on the topic of staff development and appraisal. Chapter 26 focuses on the important topic of staff development and how this links to quality assurance in higher education. It has been found to improve student experience and achievement as well as supporting staff confidence, ambition and career progression, allowing all members to thrive in a changing environment. Ideally staff development should be accredited and include options for CPD, research and publication. Chapter 27 contains reflections from a Centre for Academic Development in the UK. The

authors monitored the development and promotion of a Learning and Teaching Strategy (UU Centre for Higher Education Research and Practice) which was initiated in 2009. By 2016, 72% of academic staff had a teaching qualification which had increased to 80% by the time of submission of the article. In Chapter 28, Saranne McGennis reflects on the use of teaching appraisal schemes in the enhancement of teaching in the context of the changes to the Higher Education environment over the past 25 years. Continuing with this theme, in chapter 29, Matthews and Pinkington evaluate the effectiveness of a professional development framework for academic faculty, in this case the UK National Professional Standards Framework. It is difficult to identify a direct relationship between good teaching and student learning but the evidence is mounting for a direct causal relationship. Informed, critical and skilled teachers can support engaged, interactive, deeper approaches to learning. In chapter 30, Georgina Kirk explores the increasing use private coaching for university lecturers. She cautions that HEIs need to distinguish between quality assurance and quality control - lecturers need to be encouraged rather than pressurised to improve teaching standards.

The final part (*Case Studies of Quality Assurance in a Selection of Subjects*) consists of UK - based case studies of quality assurance in a selection of six specific discipline areas - Medicine, Nursing, Teaching, Art Design and Media, Music and Psychology.

The book has a strong UK focus with numerous references to legislation, regulatory and training bodies, agencies and quality standards based in the UK. However, many of the agencies, structures and strategies have parallels in most other countries, including Ireland, so the general principles apply and are of practical value.

Whether the book is a 'practical handbook' as proposed is debatable. It is highly academic in nature, very long and not so much a 'handbook' as a compilation of research papers covering a very extensive topic. The organisation of the chapters only works to a degree and it would benefit from some re-structuring, with a view to making it easier to locate information on specific subject areas. The discipline specific chapters, although strategically placed (to mixed success) to illustrate specific concepts in general higher education quality assurance, might have worked better if they had all been included in Part 4 (e.g. chapters 9 to 13, 17 and 18). The book would also benefit from a capstone chapter to summarise the vast quantities of information and options presented. I hope that this paper will act as a guide in that respect.

In summary, the book explores the shift in higher education as a response to increasing student diversity – socially, culturally, and academically – resulting in a more consumer-orientated,

competitive, market-driven environment in higher education, with a focus on teaching standards as a core part of quality assurance. Higher education sectors worldwide are working on raising standards and on making those standards more explicit for all stakeholders. There are hints by some authors of nostalgia for the traditional values of university education but an overall acceptance of the contemporary reality and the need to evolve to meet the new challenges.

The core question is that if we are to view higher education as a 'product' with multiple stakeholders and purposes, then who is the customer or consumer? Is it students, employers, society, or all of these? If we accept that students are the primary 'customer', are they not also the product? This presents challenges in applying quality concepts which were originally derived from the manufacturing industry and more recently, the service sector. According to Ellis, the product is 'the actions of qualified professionals' and as with any 'product' it is important to specify a standard which meets 'customer' requirements consistently. Effective delivery of any product or service requires a specific approach by the organisation in terms of policies, procedures and structures. However, there is no agreed product or service standard for university teaching, which is largely hidden from external scrutiny and depends on the professionalism of its members, leading to ambiguity between quality standards and excellence. Lecturers are not professionals in the traditional sense in that they have no regulatory body, training and CPD requirement, agreed standard or required competencies.

This leads to difficulties in assessing quality *directly* so instead we need to look at factors affected by it (results, employment, externs, feedback). The dangers of a 'performance management' approach are discussed - actions to achieve KPIs may result in decisions which are not always in the best interest of students. Coupled with this is the challenge of selecting meaningful proxies and combining this data with qualitative information. The book emphasises the complexity of the teaching and learning processes and the high level of variability introduced through the individualism of both teachers and students. I personally liked chapter 19 which challenges the concept of measuring the 'effectiveness' of higher-level teaching. In my view, we must accept that teaching and learning are 'organic' processes and that failure to recognise the complexity of these activities can lead to quality assurance strategies which provide comfort at governance level but are largely meaningless and do not lead to improvements in the student experience.

There is no doubt that staff development has dominated much of the discourse in quality assurance of higher education and is the key to moving from a milieu of quality assurance to

one of quality enhancement. It is difficult to find a direct cause-effect relationship between good teaching and student learning but the evidence of this is mounting. There is no doubt that it supports diversity and inclusivity and the institutional ability to respond effectively and efficiently to new demands (including distance learning and most recently the Covid-19 pandemic). Many countries have recently developed professional standards frameworks or are in the process of doing so, including Ireland. There is a strong view that attempts at teacher appraisal must be both consultative and developmental and that a 'carrot' rather than a stick approach is more effective in reaching successful outcomes.

Many authors stress the importance of recognition and rewards for excellence in teaching. This requires a shift in culture, ethos and values, particularly in the University sector which traditionally rewards achievement in research. Building communities of shared practice and expertise is important and has been shown to be effective. The book also deals comprehensively with the complex role of accreditation bodies and the requirement for dual accountability for many disciplines.

The book explores the importance of students as partners in quality assurance in higher education and the opportunities for taking this beyond feedback (and tokenism!) to a model of real partnership. This requires a shift in organisational culture and an openness to recognise students as agents for change. Student feedback can be a catalyst for evaluation and reflection resulting in improvements which incentivise student effort and learning. Often what students seek aligns well with what research has shown leads to effective teaching and engagement.

It is difficult to summarise the core messages from this extensive text. My own interpretation is that the rudiments to assuring quality in higher education teaching are:

- Recognised benchmarks for quality, in consultation with teachers, communicated to all stakeholders and taking into account the complexity of the teaching/learning process and the importance of selecting suitable proxies and combining this data with qualitative information.
- Professional development frameworks for teaching staff which encompass opportunities for individual reflection in addition to encouraging communities of practice.
- Changes to institutional culture to include:
  - Recognition of teaching as a valued activity with awards and rewards for teaching excellence.



- Positioning of students at the centre and recognising the value of their contributions to the QA process.

Overall, this book is an authoritative repository of a very large volume of research and case studies carried out over an extensive time period. It explores not only the current knowledge and practices in higher education QA but how we got here and why. It is an essential reference for colleagues working in both academic and administrative roles in quality assurance, registry and learning and teaching support in higher education institutions.