

Getting HEIs to take full ownership of assuring quality: Finnish and Icelandic Perspectives

Riitta Pyykkö

Member of the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education

NOQA 2022 Annual Conference, Reykjavik

Context of QA of Higher Education

Iceland

- 7 universities
- Quality Board 2010-
- Enhancement-led approach
- Institution-Wide Review, IWR (2011-), 2nd cycle
- Within each cycle, institutions required to conduct reviews covering their subject areas (Subject-Level Reviews, SLR)
- Decision-making body international
- All review teams international

Finland

- 13 universities (+ National Defence University)
- 22 Universities of Applied Sciences (+ Åland UAS, Police University College)
- FINHEEC/FINEEC 1996-
- Enhancement-led approach
- Audits of HEIs (2005-), 3rd cycle
- Other, e.g. thematic evaluations, evaluations of fields of education (National Education Evaluation Plan, 2020-23)
- Decision-making body national
- Both national and international review teams

Quality is created in everyday work

- In order to get institutions to take full ownership of QA, ESG Part 1 (= ESG 2.1) is the most important
- The external quality assurance system should be meaningful from the point of view of the academic community (ESG 2.1 should support, not only control or check)
- Genuine commitment of the academic leadership absolutely necessary
- Need to avoid 'us and them' thinking

Meaningful external QA system

- Fitness for purpose, usefulness of evaluations (easier to achieve in education, more challenging in evaluation of RDI & societal impact?)
- Balance between enhancement and accountability/compliance, emphasis on enhancement (depends on the national context)
- Institutional or program approach? Which one supports better ownership taking (= is useful)? Or maybe a combination of those?
- Involvement of staff, students and stakeholders in the design and continuous improvement of the QA system

Avoid 'us and them' thinking

- Possible oppositions:
 - QA agency vs. universities
 - (Ministry vs. universities)
 - Quality manager vs. academic community
 - Academic staff vs. administration
 - Staff vs. students
 - Etc., etc.
- Mutual trust: the entire community participates in the continuous development of activities

Commitment of the academic leadership

- Top-down in order to have bottom-up action: value trust, participation and engagement among the staff and students, appreciate everybody's contribution
- Active participation, genuine commitment and engagement of the leadership, live as you teach
- Showing concrete benefits for the academic community in its everyday work
- 'Motivate, motivate, motivate' – at universities arguments are stronger than formal authority 😊

Where are we now?

- Strong enhancement-led approach in both countries
- Main purpose: support the autonomous universities in their continuous development
- Mutual trust between the HEIs – QA agency - Ministry (?)
- In Iceland, the relationship between the QA agency and the universities closer than in Finland.
 - Size of the country? Differences in operational culture?
 - Or differences in the QA system?
 - SLRs, mid-term report, annual conferences & meetings, Quality Council
 - Is there a threat of too close relationship? EQA vs. consultancy?
- Is the idea of full ownership a utopia? EQA is not any more seen as a threat to the autonomy, but not fully owned, either. Does the responsibility lie (too much) with quality managers & committees?
- Both countries are in the process of planning the next cycle of reviews. What to do to avoid review fatigue and/or only formal engagement of the HEIs? Need for continuity and/or change?

Thank you!

riitta.pyykko@utu.fi