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Carrot-stick quality culture?: Quality policy in Higher Education in Britain

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Abstract

In examining the extent to which Higher Education (HE) can be regarded as a 'quality' provision, this paper discusses whether policy governing quality of HE provisions in Britain is appropriate, and offers an alternative framework for quality measurement. Firstly, it establishes what is meant by 'quality' and who the 'customers' are. With reference to the work of seminal authors, as well as writers in the field of education, argument is made to establish what the aims of policy for quality should be. Two current British initiatives (the Quality Assurance Agency and the Institute of Learning and Teaching) are examined before conclusions are drawn as to a way forward which aligns more closely with the thoughts stemming from UNESCO ([Delors, 1996](#)) than from the current Governments policy initiatives.

Introduction

Applying Quality Management Models to Education

[Juran's \(1988\)](#) quality trilogy, claimed the attainment of quality in any organisation is secured through quality planning, quality control and quality improvement. Quality planning involves establishing specific goals, establishing plans for reaching the goals, and assigning responsibility for ensuring they are met. These could be stated in terms of target numbers recruited, success rates at every level, publications requirements or lack of complaints, for example, and could largely be covered by an institutions business plan.

On the point of quality control, Juran (ibid) makes two observations; firstly it is about holding the status quo, and secondly it needs to be designed in such a way as to allow for and adapt to variability. Shewart underpinned this argument, as observed by [Neave \(1990\)](#), with two dimensions to variability: controlled variability, due to the process itself, and uncontrolled variability, from sources outside the process. Due to the nature of higher education, both forms of variability would be present. The controlled variability would be concerned with the direction of the academics development (such as specialist research areas), and the uncontrolled variability would be the intervention of government, market forces and other agencies external to the institution, such as the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

The issues of continuous quality improvement should not be an issue for HE, as it should be a pre-requisite to performance of the job. In order to remain an expert in their field, lecturers should remain up to date in their field of expertise and undertake research to inform their teaching and understanding. Otherwise, an academic will not be able to maintain their credibility and role in the university sector. The employing organisations need to ensure that the infrastructure is in place to enable this to continue, such that work loads are realistic and research and personal development are key values embraced by the institution. On the other hand, as the work pattern is changing and numbers are increasing, lecturers need to develop skills in delivering to differing audiences in differing formats. This is an area of personal development that does not appear welcome by many in post, and it is this area that the Institute of Learning and Teaching (ILT) is considering addressing.

[Kells \(1993:1\)](#) made efforts to adapt and adopt TQM (Total Quality Management) as a model in a series of experiments in the HE sector but found little enthusiasm.

The tendency has been for universities, in particular, to ignore the movement at a time when clients, including students in many countries and certainly many governments, are demanding some of the very things which the proponents of TQM say the method will provide: an infrastructure of procedures and attitudes about quality assurance; a strong response to the needs of the client; and, enhanced effectiveness in the processes and outputs of the organisation.

Attitude is brought into the equation. In the conclusion to his study, one of Kells' key points is to question the extent to which there is 'an interest and adequate basic capacity of shared attitudes' to quality in HE in Europe (ibid:14).as opposed to the institutions preferring to operate in a vacuum untouched by market forces. Recognising quality as an issue essentially means recognising the concept of a customer.

[Bergman \(1993:5\)](#) offers five barriers to transformation to the quality process in HE including self sufficiency of academics within their field, fragmentation of research, individualism of academics, isolation of professors and 'new' management principles being alienated by the other four barriers. Bergman calls for strong leadership, but his 'barriers' reinforce Kells' question of whether or not a shared quality attitude is realisable.

Work has been done around adapting the [Deming \(1986\)](#) 14 points to Education (see [Stensaasen, 1993](#); [Bergman & Klefsjo, 1993](#); [Bradburn, 1993](#)) which demonstrated the suitability of Deming's management method in the education sector, not just as a 'prescription for good leadership' but also as 'a philosophy for life' ([Stensaasen, 1993:20](#)).

[Morris and Haigh \(1993\)](#) take a broader view of the quality philosophies, claiming that while all philosophies might differ in content they have certain common elements, namely; a challenge to the status quo, a set of values, a vehicle for change and a future desired state.

They refer to Konosuke Matsushita, Executive Director of Matsushita Electric to make the point regarding the need to change to a quality philosophy:

We are going to win and the Industrial West is going to lost out; there's nothing you can do about it because the reasons for your failure are within yourselves ... for you, the essence of management is getting the ideas out of the heads of the bosses into the hands of labour....

... Your socially minded bosses, often full of good intentions, believe their duty is to protect the people in their firms. We, on the other hand, are realists and consider it our duty to get our people to defend their firms which will pay them back a hundredfold for their dedication.

The Japanese view quality as a necessity and the workers adopt it in their attitude for the survival of their firms and livelihoods, while the Industrial West use carrots and sticks, rewards and punishments to achieve quality from their workers. This attitudinal difference is the key element that [Kells \(1993\)](#) identified and [Bergman \(1993\)](#) found to be a barrier to quality in HE. While arguably the policy for quality in HE in Britain fails to address this but presents us with a set of carrots and sticks in the education sector. Two of the most recent initiatives are the QAA and ILT are discussed later.

What is our measure of quality?

The concept of Quality is often associated with standards. With increasing numbers entering HE (as is the current political educational agenda), there is concern that the standards will be diluted. Indeed in the Dearing inquiry into HE (1997: 37), the [Institute of Directors \(IOD\)](#) made the claim that 'the growth in participation seen over the last decade is not compatible with the maintenance of standards,' and the CBI (Confederation of British Industry) concurred with this view. However this is not necessarily the case. In absolute terms, the top 10% should still be achieving the same high standards, and those ranked in the 11th to 35th percentile will be gaining an educational advantage previously not available to them. The increase in student numbers should then be appreciated by those who support notions of equality of opportunity, while it breeds resentment in those who prefer to keep the middle classes as the middle classes.

[Bourdieu \(1986\)](#) establishes the notion of cultural capital taking in three forms

Form of Capital	Sourced From
Institutionalized state	Gained through formal educational processes including schooling.
Objectified state	Gained through availability of intellectual stimulus including books in the household, theatre and travel.
Embodied state	Gained through the disposition of mind and body.

Table 1: Bourdieu's Forms of Cultural Capital. (Adapted from Bourdieu, 1986).

As possession of an undergraduate degree is becoming more commonplace, the cultural capital advantage previously held by the middle classes is being diluted. As the undergraduate degree is not creating sufficient differentiation in the labour market, and an increasing number of graduates are finding it difficult to secure employment, we are witnessing an expansion in the post-graduate degree market as students try to differentiate themselves academically from the 'normal graduate' in the labour market. This suggests that employers are looking at quality in HE in terms of standards and levels of output.

Academics, on the other hand, are concerned about the quality of the experience the students are having, notably mentioning concern around the amount of support they can offer students as the sector expands (see evidence given to [Dearing:1997](#)). As the number of students increases, not only does the workload of the academics increase in terms of delivery and marking, but the available time per student decreases, so the amount of support time on offer is hit from two fronts. If quality is determined by time spent teaching and time spent in pastoral care, then to achieve greater quality, time spent teaching would need to decrease and time spent in pastoral care/tutorial roles would need to increase. This would require more staff with fewer contact hours each.

Adding further to this increased burden of work for lecturers, [Dearing \(1997: 220-221\)](#) raised concerns about the quality of inputs, recommending an Institute of Learning and Teaching (ILT) be established. The ILT would offer professional accreditation for teachers in HE, aiming to ensure continuous professional development in order to attain excellence in teaching. This misses the point regarding time allocation completely.

What we have thus far, is four differing perspectives summarised in Table 2.

Perspective Holder	Key Quality Indicator
1. Employers	concerned with output measures in terms of standards to maintain the market forces arguments in the labour market.
2. Academics	concerned with process measures in terms of the experience that students encounter in Higher Education.
3. Government Agency (see Dearing, 1997)	concerned with input measures in terms of systems and materials involved.
4. 'Quality Guru's' (including Deming, 1989; Juran, 1988)	concerned with meeting the customers requirements with zero defects.

Table 2: Differing Perspectives on Quality in Education.

Difficulties arise regarding the issues of quality in because it is questionable as to who the customer is, never mind what would constitute a defect.

Who exactly are the 'Customers'?

Reflecting the perspectives presented in Table 2, there are arguably three different customers of the HE service: the Government, representing the national interest of the country; the Students, being those individuals actually receiving the educational service;

and finally the Employers, representing the labour market into which the outputs of the educational service become tradable commodities.

Customer 1: representing National Interest - the Government.

In representing the national interest, it could be argued that the Government is the customer of HE. Paradoxically, the Government is also the supplier of HE, as they ultimately hold the purse strings. This is an unsustainable position with regard to delivering policy on quality. As the same party is setting the rules and marking against them, it can manipulate either end of the spectrum to conclude as to the quality of the service being provided.

The current Government's agenda for education embodies the concept of the learning society ([DfEE, 1998](#)), which appears to enjoy widespread support from the agencies involved in Higher Education. In their evidence to the Dearing inquiry, the [CVCP \(Committee for Vice-Chancellors and Principals, 1997\)](#) contended that higher education helped to 'fulfil individual potential, improve economic competitiveness and support social cohesion' hence playing a 'vital role in the social, cultural and economic life of the nation'.

The Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century stresses the extensive role of education in society being from establishing social cohesion to developing democratic participation ([Delors, 1996:ch2](#)). [Talib \(1998\)](#) progresses this argument but highlights the dangers of education policy being misguided, making the point that education can be used oppressively to selectively model the world of the dominant and strong. [Dr Babaseheb Ambedkar \(cited in Valeskar, 1998:210\)](#) focuses more on the importance of HE in the political struggle for liberation:

"...The problem of the lower order is to remove from them that inferiority complex which has stunted their growth and made them slaves to others, to create in them the consciousness of the significance of their lives for themselves and for the country, of which they have been cruelly robbed by the existing social order. Nothing can achieve this except the spread of higher education."

Clearly education has a role in the maintenance of democracy, participation in which, [Delors \(1996\)](#) argues, is 'a matter of good citizenship'.

Education could also have a role redressing imbalance in social class in society and this is a key argument in the drive for increasing numbers entering HE. Taking Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital (1986) the amount of capital that is accumulated by the institutionalised state can be directly appreciated in value by education, and indirectly the embodied and objectified states may also increase their capital worth (see Table 1). Bourdieu further claimed that cultural capital is a privilege of the middle classes, and as such the concept becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy; the more you have, the more you create. [Halsey et al \(1997:15\)](#) supported this by setting as an example the choice of educational establishment being made available to parents under the previous Conservative Government. They argued that the 'equality of opportunity' notion espoused by the Government was outweighed by the middle-class calls for 'choice' over the education of their children. This could be supported by the fact that universities are 'still dominated by those from professional and managerial backgrounds' (ibid:5). Delors (1996:67) maintains that 'education policy must be sufficiently diversified and must be so designed as not to become another contributory cause of social exclusion.'

[Levin and Kelley \(1994\)](#) incite us to be wary of seeing education as the great healer of all ills:

“The fact of the matter is that education is just one fact, albeit an important one, in an overall melange of conditions that determine productivity and economic competitiveness, as well as the levels of crime, public assistance, political participation, health and so on. Education has the potential for powerful impacts in each of these areas if the proper supportive conditions and inputs are present.”
(cited in Halsey et al, 1997:250).

While education has a role in redressing societal imbalances, it cannot alone redress these imbalances.

Another agenda item of this Government for HE should be the development of moral well-being and citizenship. [Durkheim \(1961:45\)](#) argues that through discipline ‘the condition of happiness and moral health’ is developed and this ‘capacity for self-control is itself one of the chief powers that education should develop’. [Usher, Bryant and Johnston \(1997:28\)](#) make the point that education is for citizenship, being concerned with ‘the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary for citizens to participate meaningfully in society’. This is broadly encompassed in the Delors/UNESCO (1996:85-97) ideal of the ‘four pillars of education’ being ‘learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be.’

At a macro level the agenda is clear; it is about developing society, and establishing moral understanding. At a micro level, the agenda is more opaque. Delors (1996) makes the point that the socialisation of individuals must not conflict with personal development.

Customer 2: the Students.

Perhaps the most easily identifiable customer of HE is the student, yet surprisingly little research has been carried out to ascertain what it is that the student’s actually want from HE. Aldridge and Rowley (1998) surveyed students at Edge Hill University College against their Student Charter but the closed nature of the questions asked, and the Likert scale measurement of response, serve to limit the responses of students within certain boundaries.

Given the difficulty in finding secondary data in this area, primary data was obtained from a sample of 209 undergraduate students studying differing options within Derbyshire Business School. Two open questions were asked:

1. Why did you come to University?
2. What criteria will you use to measure the quality of your experience here?

Despite the open nature of the questions, the responses fell largely within 10 categories for each.

Why go to University?	%	Quality Criteria	%
Better employment prospects	62	Classification of degree	45
To get a degree	44	Teaching/lecturers	29
To further education/knowledge	40	Resources/facilities	21

Not yet ready to work	16	Content/knowledge	20
Meet new people	16	Job at the end	11
To leave home	12	League tables/Reputation	10
Personal challenge/goal	9	Environment/culture	8
It was expected/natural thing	8	Enjoyed experience	8
Experience student life	7	Administrative procedures	7
Had poor qualifications	4		

Table 3: Results of student survey (n = 209)

The key driver for embarking in higher education is the prospect of a better job at the end of the course than would have been obtained if the qualifications were not sought. However, when measuring the quality of the experience, the actual job obtained is only fifth in the ranking. The reasons that the students are attracted to HE are stated as outcomes: they want to be better able to get a better job; they want more knowledge and education; they want the piece of paper that says they have achieved a degree; in short, they want to be prepared for what lies ahead. Apart from the classification of the degree itself, the quality criteria are more focused on the inputs they receive: the teaching/lecturers; the content of the course; the resources and facilities; even the administration of the course.

Customer 3: representing the Labour Market - the Employers.

Employers could be regarded as another customer, particularly those who are sponsoring students through their studies by paying for their fees and/or allowing them time out of the workplace. Their requirement (as a result of employer interviews) is for the staff to achieve the specified standard regarding knowledge and skill, be competent in applying the knowledge and skill in the workplace, and gain an appreciation of the personal betterment that education gives them, specifically regarding the personal value to their present job and career prospects. This final element may not work to their advantage, as a straw pole of students on an Institute of Personnel and Development course showed that the majority of them were studying in order to change jobs rather than progress in their own organisations! This links back to the Government objective of lifelong learning and the learning society, and the quality gurus' ideas around continuous improvement (see for example Deming or Juran).

In line with the learning organisation ([Pedlar et al, 1991](#)), employers also desire that a course creates the frame of mind such that the student should appreciate the need to cascade their knowledge throughout the organisation, so that it is used as an enabler and not a disabler in the organisation, i.e. fostering a 'knowledge for sharing' attitude rather than a 'knowledge for power attitude'.

Stated in its crudest form, the 'employer' customer requires that standards are achieved and learning is transferred back into the workplace; the 'student' customer requires a positive learning experience; and the 'Government' customer requires the promotion of liberty and equality, and the development of human capital for the future competitive success of the nation state.

Clearly we have a variety of customers, with a variety of requirements, some of which are conflicting. For example, for a student to reach the standard required by an employer in terms of knowledge and skill they may have to undergo some learning experiences that

they may find less than pleasant, such as practising double entry book-keeping! If we are to accept that quality is meeting the customers' requirements, then given the various customer agendas it is questionable as to how quality can be achieved. Alternative models have been drawn up within the field of education raising key issues for discussion.

Modeling and Measuring Quality in HE?

[Barnett \(1992: 3-4\)](#) offers two approaches to quality in Higher Education (HE). Philosophically he asks the question 'is quality one thing (or set of related things) or is quality justifiably an attribute of different kinds of entity or achievement in higher education?' and sociologically he questions the relevance of social forces (or external influences) in identifying quality, in particular the use of peer review, judgments of the market and performance indicators influencing our perspectives.

In his earlier work, [Barnett \(1990\)](#) makes the argument that the intrinsically developmental element of higher education is being lost as the relationship between higher education and industry becomes stronger. Taking this line of argument, quality of higher education could justifiably be measured by a performance indicator such as the extent to which the intervention improves preparation for or performance in the workplace. Rather than broadening perspectives and abilities, following this line of argument could, in essence, be restrictive. In a capitalist society, [Smith \(1776\)](#) would argue for a division of labour in line with market forces, relying on specialist skills in a field limited by the extent of the market. [Senge \(1990\)](#) talks about 'personal mastery' as being part of the learning organisation. Perhaps then quality in HE is the narrow, specialist focus on a small area of knowledge, skill and understanding?

[Barnett \(1990\)](#) argues the focus is otherwise, setting an agenda for recovering the liberal nature of HE. Perhaps the argument needs to go back further. Before ascertaining the meaning of quality in HE, do we first have to examine what it is we are trying to achieve in order to be able to define and measure quality in HE? Much discussion of this took place during the [National Committee of Inquiry in Higher Education \(NCIHE\) \(1997: 115\)](#) which concluded that learning in higher education can be defined as 'the development of understanding and the ability to apply knowledge in a range of situations.'

The [NCIHE \(1997:115\)](#) went on to state that a 'successful student will be able to engage in an effective discussion or debate with others in that field, relying on a common understanding of terms, assumptions, questions, modes of argument, and the body of evidence.' If this is the performance indicator set, questions arise as to how it will be measured. While 'a common understanding' can be measured, 'an effective discussion or debate' may be a little harder to define criteria for, although theoretically not impossible. Indeed the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning ([Fryer, 1997:81-85](#)) proposes a unit-based, credit framework. While Fryer is limiting his thoughts initially to the Further Education market, his ambitions are clear, and transferable credits between universities was discussed in the Dearing report (NCIHE:1997). In order for a credit to be transferable between courses and/or institutions, performance criteria will need to be defined and agreed so that appropriateness of transfer across the spectrum can be assessed.

[Fitz-Gibbon \(1996\)](#) discusses quality in relation to education. She makes the point that nobody is against quality but asks the question how do we know whether or not we are achieving it? If you take the definition of quality as being 'doing what you said you would do' (ibid: 3) how do you decide what you are going to say you will do, and to what standard,

and for which customer? Do you aim impossibly high so that you can never achieve total success, or do you aim low so that you can have 100 percent success? The conclusion to the argument presented here is that an 'effective educational system needs good information' (ibid: 4) and this involves inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes. While it would be difficult to argue otherwise, the question of what you do with the information and how you use it after its collection are equally important.

Earlier, the point was made that the Government should not be the supplier and the customer when it comes to setting quality policy criterion, and the same argument applies to Fitz-Gibbon here. The essence of quality is that 'you' do not set the standards. It is the customer who sets the standards, and then it is for 'you' to measure your performance against their standards.

[Ellis \(1993:3\)](#) finds 'quality itself is a somewhat ambiguous term since it has connotations of both standards and excellence'. Perhaps it is a reflection of Ellis's view of the HE sector in Britain that he finds 'standards and excellence' ambiguous with regard to quality, and doesn't view the two as synonymous. If we revert to the British Standards Institute definition 'quality is the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs,' we are looking at an alternative view of fitness for purpose. This requires the purpose to be defined in advance, and also draws back to the question of which customer's purpose is the service going to fit?

Ellis makes that point that the needs of students may be stated by them, or might be implied on their behalf by the teacher. Indeed, they may be implied on their behalf by the school/university, Government or society if the macro issues are to be taken into account. This takes the responsibility of defining 'the needs' against which quality will be measured out of any one group's hands. The argument starts to become circular. With differing customers with differing requirements, and some claiming they can represent others as well, it is hardly surprising that there is no definitive set of quality criteria for education.

To reiterate, the NCIHE (1997: 115) concluded that learning in higher education can be defined as 'the development of understanding and the ability to apply knowledge in a range of situations.' Barnett's (1990) work questioned the use of performance indicators, while Fitz-Gibbon (1996) raised the question as to who sets the standards, the answer to which must be the customer. In pulling together the issues raised by the various authors discussed in this paper, a measurable framework can be developed against which quality in HE can be ascertained. The key areas for measurement are PREPARATION, APPLICATION and MASTERY

LEVEL PERFORMANCE INDICATOR
1. PREPARATORY PREPARATION of the student for the purpose intended, including preparing students in the art of continuing self development.
2. APPLICATORY APPLICATION of the knowledge and/or skill for the purpose intended, including application of developmental cognitive skills.
3. MASTERY: MASTERY of the knowledge and/or skill through on-going development which in itself will provide evidence of attainment of levels one and two of the framework.

Table 4: A framework for measuring quality in HE.

The assumption underlying the framework is that the intended purpose of the educational intervention is known, and the standards to be achieved have been externally set and moderated. Given these assumptions are met, any customers intentions should be able to be defined in terms of preparation for, application of and mastery in.

Let me illustrate with an example of a 'professional' qualification, recognised as carrying over 100CAT points at Masters level, the Institute of Personnel and Developments' Diploma course (IPD). The whole course could be measured for quality against the framework, or each individual element could be in itself. For example, there is an element of finance in the IPD course, much to the dismay of the majority of IPD students! The teaching of this finance element will be of quality if it prepares the students to be able to understand the financial implications of their actions as personnel specialists in the workplace ... and ... they can apply their financial knowledge to make decisions back in their workplaces ... and ... they complete the element knowing enough about how financial managers operate to be able to go away and master the use of financial data in their organisations, applying their new skills in a way they had not previously done. In reality, the final element relies on inspiration and therefore to limit judgement of quality to achieving all three levels may appear a little harsh to some, and unrealistic to many. In achieving the first two levels of the framework, preparation and application, an HE intervention will be good, but to inspire is the essence of quality here.

For the various customer foci within higher education (be they inputs, processes, outputs or outcomes), a working definition of quality can be taken as 'the ability to satisfy the needs intended'. Given the rapid pace of change in society ([Dalin & Rust, 1996](#)), and the changes occurring in the HE marketplace (NCIHE, Ch. 3-4) the 'needs' to be satisfied will be continually changing, so there is an in-built element of continuous improvement implied in the working 'definition' of quality, which can also be represented by the Mastery level of the measurement framework.

Quality Carrot/Stick - the work of the QAA

The QAA has developed out of the conclusions of a Joint Planning Group that there should be a 'single quality assurance framework capable of rationalising existing activities and of enabling an integrated approach to be taken to all continuing activities' ([Randall, 1997](#)). As such it encompasses the operations of the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) and the Higher Education Funding Councils for England and Wales (HEFCE/W), as well as being responsible for quality audits and subject assessments.

In their new bulletin, Higher Quality, the QAA (1997) set out the four principles which would underpin its approach to agenda laid down by the Dearing inquiry:

1. **Accountability.** Quality assurance mechanisms must produce public information to satisfy the legitimate expectation that there will be accountability and value for the money spent on HE. Indeed one of its first actions was to circulate a specimen proforma for course details to allow a prospective student to make a like for like comparison because the same data would be provided ([QAA, 1998](#)). While directly comparable data may be useful, the choice of style of data presentation afforded by an organisation can tell you a lot about that college. It is akin to the difference between using a CV or an application form for recruiting new members of staff. Essentially a CV tells you more as it gives you an insight as to how the person chooses to present themselves.

2. **Ownership.** Quality of provision cannot be 'inspected in' retrospectively. It must be designed into programmes from the start. This relates to the earlier arguments of [Kells \(1993\)](#) and [Bergman \(1993\)](#) relating to attitude and the need to a quality mindset which appears to be a barrier to quality management in HE in Britain.

3. **Enhancement.** The agency will gain considerable amounts of information about good and innovative practice throughout the sector to draw lessons from this and to promulgate to the sector. In the textbooks aimed at the management sector, this would be referred to as 'Benchmarking', either to set standards or to be used a proactive development tool ([Cox, 1997](#)).

4. **External Scrutiny.** The agency will reduce the perceived burden of external scrutiny. While this would probably be welcomed by the majority of people involved in HE, it appears unattainable. [Baty \(1998\)](#) reports that employers are "moving to bypass the QAA plans to benchmark HE courses with their own set of industry 'kitemarks' and league tables." The engineering industry spokesman indicated that they appreciated that academics were concerned that the QAA was too interventionist, but the employers are concerned that their plans do not go far enough. As long as this external pressure from one customer group/stakeholder persists, the QAA's work will be undermined as their auditing process will not be considered credible. Indeed some universities are already refusing to take part in the auditing process ([Tysome, 1998](#)).

In essence, the work of the QAA is being sabotaged by lack of co-operation by the sector that it is supposedly endeavouring to help. [Thorne's \(1998\)](#) stance is typical of many articles in the HE sector press, critically undermining the credibility of the QAA (see also Baty, 1998 and Tysome, 1988). Thorne highlights the QAA as an agency that is trying to pull the sector into a uniform which is bland and boring, claiming they are confused as to the differences between "branding, standing and standards".

Despite the fact that the QAA is supposedly the single framework for quality in HE, the Government has also proposed an Institute of Learning and Teaching (ILT) discussed below. This makes two institutions which puts into doubt the 'single framework' rationale. Added to this is the £30million 'prize' for centres of teaching expertise organised by the HEFCE. According to [Utleay \(1998\)](#) the initiative will be conducted separately from 'parallel work under way by the new ILT'. Now we see two institutions and a separate 'cash fund' held by the HEFCE trying to achieve similar ends. This may be the QAA's attempt at 'Enhancement' (principle 3 above), but it makes a shambles of messages of a single quality framework. Further more, Cliff Allan (policy principal at HEFCE) is quoted as saying that the selection process for the cash prizes would not be linked to the QAA's monitoring of quality and standards (ibid). This means that while there is no reward to be gained from a successful quality audit by the QAA, there is £30m to be gained from being an expert teacher in your field according to the HEFCE. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that universities are declining QAA audits ([Tysome, 1998](#)) as the policy initiatives on the table are undermining each other. The HEFCE holds all the carrots, while the QAA holds the sticks. Where, then, does that leave the ILT?

Quality Carrot/Stick - Institute of Teaching and Learning

In the government's response to the Dearing inquiry, David Blunkett seeks a 'better balance ... between teaching, research and scholarship' ([DfEE, 1998](#)). By making four recommendations (No's 8 & 13-15) the government sets the agenda for improving and assuring the quality of teaching and learning strategies in HE, to be overseen and 'kite-

marked' by the proposed Institute for Learning and Teaching in HE (ILT). It is intended that a professional development programme be developed by the institute, completion of which would be necessary before membership becomes available. Various ranks of membership will be available according to attainment level. Quite how this will be managed is yet to be decided, and a consultative document is currently in circulation from the CVCP.

Despite the fact that the development of the criteria are yet to be confirmed, some education establishments are already offering courses that will be accredited by the Institute, prior to its existence (see advert from the Institute of Education, [THES, 1998](#)).

[Sizer \(1989\)](#) asserts that performance indicators developed thus far in HE, are insufficiently refined to be of any use as a satisfactory measure of teaching quality. [Barnett \(1992\)](#) argues that this insufficiency is not easily overcome. While the hunt for a measure of teaching quality should not be abandoned, 'strategies for assessing teaching quality should be sensitive to the nuances of the activity of teaching' (ibid: 135).

[Sedam \(1989\)](#) raises concerns around quality measurement systems. Firstly, he points out that a measurement system sensitive enough to reflect every important factor, element and nuance would be so complex it would go beyond the understanding of the average person implementing it. Secondly, he points out that there has never yet been designed a measurement system that cannot be manipulated or falsified by an averagely intelligent person should they so desire.

The consultative document circulated by the [CVCP \(1998\)](#) asks the question as to whether successful completion of an accredited programme will become a 'license to practice' as operated by many professional bodies. Development and implementation of such a 'license' needs to be carefully thought through with regard to the role of research in HE. It would be easy to foresee a Catch 22 arising whereby research 'to inform and enhance teaching' ([Dearing, 1997: 165](#)) is stifled by a modus operandi set forth by the ILT.

The danger of the ILT becoming a bureaucratic body issuing codes of conduct, codes of practice and disciplinary guidelines needs to be examined. [Ellis \(1993: ch2\)](#) proffers a British Standard for University Teaching based on the BS5750 tradition as a move towards quality assurance, and talks about ownership of quality assurance by the teachers. He warns of the consequences of using quality assurance as another stick with which to beat the professional back resulting in the further alienation of teachers.

How the ILT is actually going to impact on quality is questionable. If teaching in HE is an area of customer dissatisfaction, that may not be due to the actual teachers themselves. There are limits to what anyone can do with a class/lecture of, say, 120 people. A group size of 12 lends itself to a lot more teaching possibilities. This may not actually be an issue for the teacher, but more of a funding, organisation structure, or government issue. As such, the ILT may be treating the symptoms rather than addressing the cause, in which case its impact on quality will be negligible.

Conclusion: Towards a Model of Quality for Higher Education in Britain

If quality is achieving what is intended at the standard intended, then a clearly defined intention needs to be agreed. Given the differing perspectives (inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes) and the differing customers (students, employers, Government, academics), it is easy to conclude that the task of achieving all the defined intentions becomes unrealistic. I

would argue otherwise; while the various perspectives may be at odds with each other they do not have to be mutually exclusive, as the concatenation in Table 5 demonstrates.

Customer Perspective Quality Measure

Students Inputs	PREPARATORY MEASURE	the extent to which the input prepares the individual for the purpose intended.
Employers Outputs	APPLICATORY MEASURE	the extent to which the application of the skill/knowledge improves the individual's performance/output.
Government Outcomes	MASTERY MEASURE	the extent to which the individual can continually develop within society for the expansion of gross national human capital and global competitiveness.
Academics Process	MASTERY MEASURE	the extent to which the individual has developed the cognitive processes at the level intended.

Table 5: A Concatenation of Quality in HE.

However, this in itself is not enough. The works of [Kells \(1993\)](#) and [Bergman \(1993\)](#) brought attitudinal elements into question, and it is this area where I believe in-roads can be made. There is a cultural element to the TQM philosophy. There is a quality spirit to be found in the works of Juran and Deming.

There is a need for the various customer groups to appreciate that each is a customer (internal or external) of the other groups (i.e., the students are the academics customers, the employers are the Governments customers, and so on) and therefore have to meet the needs and requirements of each other. The circularity of the situation could be the strength to the model of quality policy for HE in Britain. At present, however, it is its weakness, as each customer group is competing rather than working together. What is needed is a change in culture, a change in attitude and a customer focus. What is needed is a change in policy.

Matsushita was right when he said that 'the Industrial West will lose'. We are still trying to get the essence of quality on to the agendas of the governors of education, never mind into the heads of the academics. As long as we run initiatives such as the QAA audits and the ILT framework, we will be focusing merely on quality control. In Juran's trilogy quality control was one of three elements, quality planning and quality improvement were also presented. Unless we see the essence of quality being embraced from the planning, through improvement, to the control stage, (or the preparation, application, mastery stages) Britain will be stuck with its carrot and stick policies, addressing the rhetoric but never meeting it in reality.

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