

Innovative Approaches to External Quality Assurance: A UK Perspective

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Abstract

This paper examines innovative approaches to external quality assurance, taking as its case study, the work of the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The paper discusses the diversity of the four nations of the United Kingdom and how the quality assurance of higher education works across them. Central to this is the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education* (the *Quality Code*), which is used to assure the standards and quality of higher education in the UK. The author examines innovation in the work of QAA, including the policy background to, and development of, more risk-based approaches to the quality assurance of higher education in England and Northern Ireland, which will be introduced during the 2013-14 academic year. The paper also discusses approaches to student engagement in the UK and the challenge of defining a “student” in an increasingly diverse student community. The author examines how QAA has developed its own student engagement over the past decade, and discusses the Agency’s current strategic and operational student engagement activities. The paper looks ahead to possible future areas for innovation in external quality assurance, for instance in the rapidly expanding market for transnational education (or TNE) around the world, which is fast presenting new and complex challenges for maintaining quality and standards. The author argues that quality assurance agencies and governments internationally must increasingly work in partnership in order to cover TNE, so that they can continue to quality assure higher education robustly, and protect the interests and experiences of students studying with providers globally.

Keyword: UK; Quality Assurance; Risk; Student Engagement; Innovation; Transnational Education

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