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Abstract

The review explores 15 years of contributions to Quality in Higher Education. In this first part the review focuses on external processes and factors, both national and international. The developments in a wide range of countries are reported and evaluated. The concept of quality should not be detached from purpose and context and quality has political undertones. A key issue for countries more recently introducing quality systems, especially less developed countries, is the transferability of systems established elsewhere in the world. Also apparent is how conceptions of quality assurance that originated in North West Europe and the USA have been the basis of developments around the world and how little variation there is in the methods adopted by quality-assurance agencies. The proliferation of quality-assurance agencies is being followed by a mushrooming of qualifications frameworks and the growing pressure to accredit everything, even if it is a poor means of assuring quality and encouraging improvement. The overall tenor of the contributions was that external quality evaluations are not particularly good at encouraging improvement, especially when they had a strong accountability brief. An essential element in this failure is the apparent dissolution of trust. Another

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issue is the use of industrial models and TQM in particular, which contributors, on the whole, regarded as of little use in the higher education setting. Although, not surprisingly, some contributions showed that institutional management impacts on quality. However, national performance indicators are viewed with suspicion, especially when they simply measure the easily measurable. Further, ranking systems are critiqued for their validity, methodology and the inadequate information they provide for students. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)