



Emerging Models of Quality, Relevance and Standard in Ethiopia's Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

In 2003 the Ethiopian Government introduced a higher education proclamation(Federal Republic Of Ethiopia:2003), establishing wide ranging reforms to the higher education system and setting up key agencies to guide and oversee the sector, including The Ethiopian Education strategy Institute and the quality and relevance assurance Agency. The reforms introduces elements of a quasi-market in higher education: students sharing the costs of higher education and therefore moving into a customer-like relationship with higher education institutions; the expansion of private higher education; the move away from state funding of public higher education institutions through the encouragement of income generation activity. They also enabled a move from extreme centralization towards institutional autonomy. Such autonomy and the creation of quasi-market depends upon 'customers' (and other stakeholders such as the Government) being assured of the quality of the 'product' offered (whether education, consultancy or applied research). Without that assurance, the reforms would not meet the country's development agenda.

This paper reports on the extent that appropriate quality assurance practices are presently in existence in Ethiopia and proposes an emerging model of quality and standards.

The Study

During the early part of 2004, the author (with others) visited all six of the public universities and two of the institutions that are desired to become universities over the next two years. This study reports on the visits to the eight public sector institutions. Five were undertaken on behalf of the newly established Ethiopian higher Education Strategy Institute and Quality and Relevance Assurance Agency and three on behalf of the Higher Education Strategy Overhaul Committee of Inquiry into Governance, Leadership and Management in Ethiopia's Higher Education System of which the author is the chair(Ashcroft:2004). During each of the visits, the author conducted a series of meetings with groups of senior managers, academic staff, and students. In two institutions she also met the VSO Higher Education management Advisor. An agenda was provided for each of these meetings. In all but one of the visits she also met with a group of administrative managers and in six was given a tour to the site that include the Library, It facilities,

student facilities a typical classroom, a typical laboratory and other facilities. Where the institution was a multi- campus operation, these tours generally included visits to more than one site. In six institutions, the author also had individual meetings with the librarian, a science instructor and the IT center manger.

Thus, the study draws on a total of 33 agendered meetings in public sector higher education institutions, observation of facilities in seven institutions and discussion with their mangers in six institutions.

The visits generally lasted between one and three days, two days being typical. During the visits, the author enquired about the management, leadership, strategy and policy priorities of the institutions and the challenges that they face, she enquired particularly about the quality assurance arrangements within the institution.

During every phase of the visits, each of the author and one of her co- workers took detailed notes of what they were and what they were able to observe. At the end of each visit, the author wrote up these notes into an integrated account. This account was checked and amended by her co-worker. This agreed draft version was then sent to the President or Academic vice president of the Institution visited with a request that he correct any errors of fact or interpretation. The account was amended in the light of this feedback and became the record from which this study has drawn.

The Context: Higher Education Reform in Ethiopia

Ethiopia's Education Sector Development Program II(2002) sets out a vision fro education, higher education's role within this and an aim: "The overall strategy is to provide good quality higher education in large numbers, with diminishing dependence on public resources in the longer term(page 33). Thus, in its main aim the reform program links the issues of quality, the context of expansion and greater market awareness.

Ethiopian higher education is indeed expanding rapidly. From 1996-2003 undergraduate enrolments doubled to 18, 000 in public sector higher education institutions and tripled

overall. Graduate programs are well established in two universities, **Addis Ababa, Debub** and **Alemeya**, and developing in others. Despite these achievements, participation remains low at 1% of school leavers and only 62 graduates per 100k Ethiopian people. Enrolments will double again in next 3 years (post graduate intake will triple). The plan is to extend higher education through merging existing colleges in to universities and opening new higher education institutions. Until a few years ago, there were two universities, now there are six, soon there will be nine. Women and those from deprived areas are to be advantaged through affirmative action. Private higher education institutions now enroll 21% of all tertiary students: more will be encouraged. Resources for expansion will come from cost sharing (through a graduate tax) and income generation by higher education institutions (consultancy, contract research, short courses and other income generation activities are planned to generate 20% of costs) and better use of resources(for example, through contracting out services to the private sector). Public money for the universities will be in the form of a block grant using a funding formula.

Following the publication of the Education sector Development Program II (2002), the Vice Ministries for Higher Education, Dr Teshome Yizengaw(2003)set out his vision for higher education reform. He describes higher education's role as a central to increasing and diversifying knowledge and competitiveness in global and knowledge-based market, as well as the protection of democratic culture and society, as do others such as World Bank (2004). Teshome characterize Ethiopian higher education before reform as ailing to practice in the development effort, blaming the Derg regime (1974-1991) for undermining higher education institutions' confidence and quality. He argues that this caused a lack of vision, resource constraints and lack of equality of opportunity. He describes Ethiopian higher education in 1994 as characterized by an extreme top- down approach, with Government determining matters such as curriculum and faculty appointments. Eventually, some autonomy over academic matters was given to HEIs, but until recently, little was allowed over financial and administrative matters.

One of the problems with greater autonomy is that it makes it difficult for the Ministry of Education to supervise and monitor the ways that higher education institutions tackle problems of quality and relevance, equity, resource constraints and utilization.

Teshome describes the reform process going through 3 stages:

- Policy and strategy adoption, especially the legal framework;
- Rehabilitation and expansion of facilities;
- Improvement and revitalization of the system.

The last of these depends upon the development of quality assurance systems: Ethiopia's education and training policy stress improvement in the quality of staff: earning process; management and leadership; financial management; quality assurance, autonomy and accountability and the involvement of stakeholders.

The focus on quality also encompasses relevance, so that students have practical problem- solving skills as well as theoretical knowledge. This requires improvements to teaching and research, greater responsiveness to the labor market and careful curricula review in terms of relevance to Ethiopia's needs. Another focus, student and community orientation, also relates to relevance. This encompasses active learning and practical education/training for almost all students and disciplines throughout their courses and more student involvement in matter such as evaluation and governance.

There is a need for better leadership and management to realize the vision: upgrading of skills and gearing towards results orientation and efficiency; revitalizing governance; new staff evaluation methods; and staff career, salary and promotion systems. Strategies include decentralization to departmental level; new Boards with local government and private sector representation; accountability systems, including evaluation conference at least twice a year; short term training of managers; and experience sharing meetings.

These reforms were enshrined in law through the Ethiopian Government's Proclamation number 351/2003; Higher Education Proclamation (2003). This Proclamation set up a system of cost sharing, partial autonomy for Universities over budgets, administration of

personnel, including employment, internal organization and academic freedom. In addition, the proclamation establishes an annual block grant supported by a system of auditing. It set out governance arrangements, including powers, duties of Heads and Vice Heads of higher education institutions and membership and powers and duties of the board and senate. The proclamation establishes the criteria for achieving accreditation as a particular type of higher education institutions and membership and powers and duties of the Board and the Senate. The proclamation establishes the criteria for achieving accreditation as a particular type of higher education institution, including university status that would apply to both private and public higher education institutions. It enshrines in law the expansion of the system, 'problem solving, practice oriented' education and equality of opportunity and set out rights and duties of academic staff and students. It encourages HEIs to select and admit students and engage in affirmative action for women, disabled people and those from disadvantaged regions. It enables and encourages higher education institutions to engage in income generation activity and to keep such income.

In short, apart from the residual power of veto over Board's recommendation as to Head and Vice Head of the higher education institutions by the Ministry of Education, the Proclamation gives the institutions considerable autonomy for their own affairs. It also creates many of the conditions for a market orientation: students who pay for part of their education will see themselves as customers who have rights; income generation also demands a market orientation; students who are selected by the institution must be attracted to it; otherwise, other institutions will also 'select' them; the Government that has granted institutional autonomy will need assurance that its money continue to be well spent; and so on.

The three major thrusts of the reforms: increases in student numbers, more institutional autonomy and greater market-focus on quality. If they are not to be interpreted as license, they imply a system of accountability to ensure the responsible exercise of autonomous decision-making and 'Value-for-money' in relation to public funds. Students, commercial partners and other stakeholders (including Government) will now be investing more in

higher education for example, through cost sharing, consultancy and funded research, and will see quality evidence as important in 'value for money' assessments.

The World Bank (2004) in its sector study envisages a policy framework that encompasses a regulatory framework; stimulating the expansion of private higher education institutions and the establishment of robust quality assurance mechanisms. Recognizing the importance of quality and relevance in this new context, the Government set up the Quality and Relevance Assurance Agency. The thinking within the Agency is that institutions should bear responsibility for the quality, relevance and standards within their academic programs, and the agency should audit or otherwise assess the adequacy of these. Such a model of operation depends upon at least an emerging system of quality and relevance assurance within the sector. This paper explores the extent that such an emerging system exists.

The Relationships between Present Quality Assurance Practice in Ethiopia and Other Modes of Quality and Standards

The following sections look at principles and practices of quality assurance practices commonly found outside of Ethiopia and compares these with practices and beliefs as reported to the author during the visits. The author draws on the record of what she and her co-visitor(s) were told, what they observed but also analyzes what was absent from what they saw and were told. Where some practices developed elsewhere are not commonly found in Ethiopia, they also consider the extent they may have utility for the system.

Purpose of Higher Education

The development of quality assurance processes should relate to the purpose of higher education. In other contexts (see for example, Ashcroft 2002), it has been asserted that higher education relates to a certain higher social and economic purposes, and in particular:

- The freedom to question taken for granted assumptions and through this process the protection of democracy;

- The creation and transfer of knowledge and development of new practices;
- The creation of today's and tomorrow's notion of professionalism.

The first of these, higher education's role in questioning authority and so protecting democracy and minority views is perhaps the most important. Universities sit alongside the judiciary, a free press, and a parliament as one of the pillars of democratic society. This implies that academic freedom is a precious commodity: not as is sometimes stated, because of other more narrowly defined reasons such as the rights of the academic to teach or manage as s/he sees fit. To protect this institutional autonomy Governments must distance themselves from direct interference in funding and quality assessments: for instance, by setting up or allowing 'arms-length' quasi autonomous agencies to manage those processes, such the QRAA in Ethiopia. It is certainly the case that Ethiopia's Government sees higher education having an important role in the creation of the new democratic Ethiopia (see for examples Teshome 2003). Ethiopia's Education Sector Development Program II (2002) also places an emphasis on higher education's role in democratization, but it was not a feature of quality that was focused upon by higher education staff or students in any of the meetings. It is perhaps surprising that this aspect was not mentioned during the visits in terms of either management or academic quality. On the other hand, one of the institutions explicitly includes the establishment and protection of democratic principles amongst its objectives within the strategic plan and conceptualizes this in terms of both curriculum and management actions (Mekele University, 2003).

The second of these purposes, the creation and transfer of new knowledge and practice, enables universities to challenge orthodoxies. Thus universities are not just there to service the economy and society as it exists, but also to shape it into what it could and should be. This purpose requires universities to seek out and disseminate the best and most relevant of international knowledge, and also to interpret and recreate that knowledge in the light of Ethiopia's development needs. This is particularly important in the present context where higher education is seen as an agent for change. Part of the job of those within universities is to envision other ways of achieving economic and social ends and new definitions of and approaches to problems and issues. Many of the

meetings did include consideration of the kinds of knowledge that should be created and transferred and through this develop new practices. Many institutions described curriculum development in terms of moving to a practice-orientation and adopting a problem-solving approach. There was a strong commitment to new interpretations of practice and forms of knowledge that would further the country's development agenda. Many of the staff referred to their strong patriotic attachment to Ethiopia and their desire to contribute to it. This commitment was described in terms of curriculum changes and new pedagogic and assessment practices and therefore suggested a particular interpretation of 'relevance'.

The third purpose of higher education is to create today and tomorrow's professionals, leaders and notions of professionalism. In the Ethiopian context, this means that institutions should prepare students for the world of work: again not only the labor market as it presently exists within the country, but also to prepare leaders that will make a new world of work that is more ethically, socially and economically sustainable. This implies that universities should be directly concerned with standards in the economy and society and new forms of knowledge and economic activity. They have a responsibility to act in morally as well as educationally defensible ways and to influence students and other stakeholders towards notions of professional standards, including ethical ones. For this reason they must take a long term view; for instance to equip their graduates as employers as well as employees and to influence workplaces to operate according to principles of entrepreneurial risk taking, openness and professional standards, as well as to think through and make their students consider and learn how to act ethically and appropriately with respect to challenges such as HIV/AIDS that threaten the country's development. The creation of new models of professionalism implies that these new practices and knowledge are set in a moral framework. Indeed the Civil Service Reforms in Ethiopia are concerned with ethical standards and behavior. Many in meetings referred to such reforms, but always in the context of the management and leadership of the institutions, and never in the context of academic programs. One institution also referred to ethical awareness and action as a curriculum objective within its Strategic Plan (**Mekele University**, 2003). None reported a coherent or conniving HIV/ AIDS policy

that embraced curriculum, learning and teaching methods, employment, student regulation, and the social environment. If ethics and social responsibility were to be seen as centrally relevant to academic quality by Ethiopian institutions, one might have expected to have seen mention of such standards and policies resulting in new curricula or systems being put in place to ensure (for example) attention to HIV/AIDS in all subjects, ethical standards and the avoidance of corruption in the marketing of students' work.

The question remains whether these purposes represent an absolute set of principles or whether they should be altered and adapted to fit the development context. Major adaptations of purposes defined as central may represent a real threat to one of the establishment pillars that supports society. On the other hand, unless some context-specific challenges, such as HIV/AIDS are addressed, Ethiopia's development will be inevitably compromised.

The purposes of higher education described above require academics that are highly intelligent, principled and creative. Academics need to think differently from the majority in order to conceive of new ways of doing things and challenges current thinking. This means that many are likely to be non-conformist and unimpressed by the bureaucratic demands of quality processes. In addition, they should be well qualified and knowledgeable. Upgrading qualifications, thus, becomes a quality concern. This was a concern shared by Ethiopia's academic managers and was one of the areas where systematic policies for the improvement of quality exist at institutional level. These are described in more detail below.

Purpose of Quality Assurance

The quality assurance processes in the developed world for teaching and research have been designed to perform various bureaucratic, political and developmental functions.

These include:

- Processes to ensure minimum standards;
- Processes to measure volume;
- Processes to rank excellence;

- Processes to foster improvement.

Processes to Ensure Minimum Standards

Processes to measure standards are the cornerstone of higher education quality systems throughout the world. In most systems such processes are considered essential (though some would consider them insufficient) to ensure the quality of education and educational services provided by higher education institutions.

Institutions can ensure that programs of study meet minimum standards through a variety of internal mechanisms that include checks against benchmarks, validation and review checklists and so on. In the case of research, proposals may be checked, for instance to ensure compliance with ethical standards. In many developed countries, there are also checks at national level to ensure acceptable standards. The assessment of research has tended to be in terms of 'excellence'. This is not the only possible model: for example, Hong Kong developed a system in 1992 to rate cost's centers-not individual researchers-in terms of how many researchers were above a predetermined threshold (see for example, French et al 2001, for more details). Such national differences demonstrate that the principles underlying quality assessments are matter of choice, rather than, as is sometimes presented, in some way 'natural' to the subject matter.

Harvey(1995) suggest that standards may be expressed in various ways: academic standards(for example, students fulfilling the requirements of the course); standards of competence(such as the achievement of key skills); and service standards(for example, student charters). It could be argued that standards (academic, competence, service and so on) can only be defined within the context of an institution's mission. Thus, a university college with a specific mission and niche market might wish to set different standards of competence from a research-focused university: for example stressing practical skills rather than theoretical knowledge. Thus, the concept of setting national standards is, at least, debatable. Ethiopia's QRAA might be better to thinking terms of development of a national framework and guidelines as the starting point. In saying this, the author is not

excusing institutions from having to establish mechanisms to assure themselves that certain standards are achieved in all academic areas.

The procedure to measure standards should probably reflect the inputs into the education provided the educational processes: and the outcome standards. These are described in more detail below.

Input Standards

Among the inputs to the educational process are the staff, the curriculum design and learning resources. Most higher education institutions in Ethiopia have minimum standards that they aspire to with respect to the qualifications of instructional staff. This is usually expressed in the form of a desirable proportion of staff possessing masters and PhD qualifications. Furthermore, they generally have a system of supported study leave to enable staff to acquire the necessary qualifications and so meet the standards.

It is also common for Ethiopian higher education institutions to have developed a relatively systematic process of curriculum design. This often involves workshops with colleagues from other universities, employers and an internal system of approval involving the relevant academic committee. It is not clear, however, that many have designed standard checklists or criteria for the assessment of the adequacy of the curriculum design. For example, in European countries is common for there to be published criteria (such as: whether there are sufficient library and other learning resources to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes; whether the assessments and teaching/learning process match the intended learning outcomes; whether key skills reflected in the curriculum) to guide the work of validation panels. With respect to learning and other resources, it is not clear that any Ethiopian institution has set minimum standards for the adequacy of these before a new program is approved. Indeed, staff and students sometimes reported that no new books, journals or computer resources had been purchased to support a new program or subject area.

Standards of Educational Processes

When it comes to educational processes, the practice in Ethiopia appears inconsistent. There are a number of examples of good practice to be found within individual subjects, but these are seldom systematized in University-wide expectations. Some subject departments have a system of student consultation that involve a clearly defined feedback loop, from the student representative, through the Dean, to a departmental committee and , if appropriate, to an individual staff members. Other departments have a system of student evaluation involving a meeting of students with the dean. These student feedback processes provide useful information on the quality of instruction, but do not seem to be directed at the on-going monitoring and development of the curriculum. There appears to be a requirement that students fill in an evaluation questionnaire provided by the Ministry of Education, but this does not always routinely occur, sometimes the questionnaire may be given in circumstances, such as immediately before an examination that discourage completion and honesty, nor does there seem to be a consistent practice of analyzing the pattern of responses to see what specific changes to curriculum or delivery may be indicated.

In countries such as the UK there is a system of annual course reporting that generally includes: analyzed results from confidential evaluation questionnaires given to students; student completion rates and patterns of grades; the instructors own insights of what went well and what needs to be changed; and external examiner reports. Such annual course reports may then be considered by departmental committee and aspects referred to the institutional Academic Standards Committee as appropriate. Ethiopian higher education seems to lack a system of regular, holistic assessment by a course team of the strengths and weakness of the course involving the collection and analysis of a variety of data.

Outcome Standards

Outcome standards refer particularly to the standards that students achieve and the extent that these are comparable across subjects and with higher education institutions in other countries. The achievement of appropriate outcomes is the point of higher education, and therefore the measurement and monitoring systems are most important.

In this respect, the practice in Ethiopia is decidedly patchy. The author did not come across any institution that had a systematic way of assuring such standards. However, there were isolated examples of good practice, especially in medical schools and postgraduate departments. Such examples included the use of external examiners to verify internal assessments of students' work, the scrutiny by a departmental panel of examination papers to ensure that they are sufficiently clear and appropriately rigorous and modernization panels looking at assessment of student work overall to ensure that markers are using the same standards. What is missing is systematization of such practices across the institution. In European countries it is common for at least a selection of examination scripts and course work to be double marked by internal examiners. It is also common for a sample to be sent to an external examiner who can then provide a report assuring the institution that the standards reached by the students, the marks awarded to them and the feedback of their work provided by internal markers are appropriate. Many international higher education institutions also have a system of published criteria at institutional level that is then finessed at course or departmental level that describe the characteristics of an A grade piece of work, a B grade and so on.

Output standards are the backbone of any quality system. It seems to author that the most urgent job for Ethiopian universities is to develop a system to assure standards at institutional level and a process whereby compliance at departmental and program level can be monitored. Such a system might include requirements for double marking; moderation meetings; published marking criteria; external examination; an automatic right for all students to have their marked work returned to them and to request their work to be double marked by an external examiner.

Processes to Measure Volume

Some of the indicators used in quality assessments in developed countries are measures of volume. Example of these are numbers of students recruited relative to those completing each year of a program and graduating; numbers obtaining employment on graduation; and numbers completing programs successfully from certain underrepresented groups. These measures do not look at quality itself, but may have some validity as indicators of

quality (see the section of performance indicators below). During the authors visits, she did not encounter systematic approaches to the analysis of such data within institutions. As the funding formula is introduced, it is likely that higher education institutions will take more account of such statistics, since their funding may be affected by the number of students retained, especially those from disadvantaged groups.

Such data must be interpreted carefully and within context: for instance, subjects that attract high achieving students in Ethiopia (such as business studies) might be expected to have a higher pass rate than those that are relatively unattractive (such as teacher education). It is also not the case that higher pass rates are necessarily "better". Such rates may be the result of slack marketing, rather than actual achievement. Some subjects will relate more immediately to the labor market, so it would be reasonable for them to be expected to have higher employment rates than others, which may be relevant to others of Ethiopia's needs, such as the furthering of the democratic agenda. This does not imply that such data are suspect as quality indicators: provided that they are interpreted intelligently they provide very useful evidence for reflection and help to direct remedial action. Those within the institution are in the best position to do this and therefore such data are not appropriately used for precise-appearing quality assessments at national level.

Processes to Rank Excellence

Research assessment exercises often have the intention of ranking of excellence in order to enable differential funding for activity that might be seen as equally effortful. In the UK, teaching quality reviews conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency (roughly equivalent to the QRAA in Ethiopia) were not originally planned in this way, but during the late 190s' scores for different aspects of provision were added together to create quality ranking. More recently, these scores have been combined with other sorts of performance data to create ranking of institutions themselves that have been published by newspapers in the form of league tables. These have a profound influence on academic and institutional behaviors and many researchers have questioned their validity nad

utility: for example, Berry (1999) notes the large discrepancies in the ranking by different newspapers derived from the same data, leading to outcomes that are unlikely to be reliable or valid. Bowden(2000) found that these discrepancies mean that the tables do not provide suitable information for uses, such as potential students, to make informed choices.

Ethiopia has not developed such ranking systems. It may be well advised to avoid systems of quality reporting that enable such simplistic rankings, since the effects can be too seriously jeopardize cooperation between HEIs, and lead to falsely-based complacency on the part of some HEIs and unjustified demoralization of others. Claims to nay unitary measure of quality generally have no statistical validity and are therefore highly misleading.

Process to Foster Improvement

Quality activity may be directed towards quality enhancement, either as its primary motivation or as a side effect of the reflection on data compiled for compliance or other purposes. The QRAA may wish to encourage institutions to develop systems for quality enhancement to operate alongside those for quality control and assurance. A number of researchers have found that the attention that institutions have devoted to external accountability has been at the expense of quality enhancement. For example, Hamp-Lyones et al. (2001) contrast quality processes related to the professional development of staff with a commercial model. This latter is described as having a narrow focus on observable, measurable features. Brown (2001) goes further to suggest that the time has now come to abandon accountability as the main driver and substitute improving quality. This implies a move from compliance with standards and rules. Such a view has some validity in systems where it can be certain that instances of poor quality provision are rare. At some stage it may be possible as Brown suggest for the QRAA focus to move from questions of “Is it good enough?” to those “ How might it be made better?” However, given the dearth of quality information collected and analyzed by institutions themselves, it would be difficult to argue this in the case in Ethiopia at this time.

Methods of Quality Assessment

Another way to assess the emerging model of quality in Ethiopian higher education institutions is to look at methods used to assess quality. Possible approaches to quality assessment include benchmarking; performance indicators; audit; and external assessment.

Bench Marking

Benchmarking is a quality tool derived from industry. It implies reference against measurable aspects of performance or criteria so that comparisons can be made and improvements indicated. Jackson and Lind (2002) describe a range of possible features of benchmark models; they may be collaboratively or independently generated; internally or externally generated; focused on the whole or parts of an organization; or related to inputs, outputs or processes. Benchmarks may be qualitative or quantitative. They may be established through processes such as action research, collaborative one-to-one partnerships, brokered models or specification or criterion referencing and used for a variety of purposes, such as facilitating improvements, accountability purposes or to set standards and expectations (see Jackson, 2001, for more detail).

In the Ethiopian context, benchmarking can be a very limited answer to national quality processes, because it creates a partial picture that needs contextual interpretation. For example, the Higher Education Funding Council for England produced a range of relatively sophisticated benchmark data of institutional performance in areas such as student access, retention and employability that take into a number of institutional variables. Nevertheless, Yorke (2001) found that these leave out a number of significant parameters that influence performance.

Quantitative benchmarks can have validity only if they are based on sound and substantial comparative data. Little reliable data are available in Ethiopia as yet. The author contends that even when data become available, the system is too small for meaningful quality comparisons to be made at national level. For example there are too few medical schools to establish a benchmark for employment or retention that compares

institutional outcomes in similar contexts: each medical school in that sense is a one-off. On the other hand, it may be reasonable for the QRAA to expect institutions and departments within them to begin to look for softer, qualitative information about other higher education institutions and to make their own judgments about aspects of quality in their own institutions. This is easier to achieve now that the private and public universities have each set up associations that can facilitate such sharing of information and practice.

Performance Indicators

Performance indicators tend to be quantitative and are designed to enable comparisons and rankings. For example, they may include the numbers of students recruited, qualifying and finding employment. They are related to, but not the same as benchmarks. For instance, a benchmark could take such data and produce a “target” based on what might reasonably be expected from an HEI at that distance from Addis, with that mix of subject, levels and achievements of students on entry. A performance indicator would look at institutional performance in a cruder way, not taking account of context, and might, for instance, require an institution or system to improve on its past best ‘score’ for an aspect such as employment rates of graduates by a certain percentage. Drennan(2001) points out that performance indicators must be focused on outcomes, and the link between these and quality must be assumed. Most performance indicators fail to take account of the full range of contextual information that would be necessary to make a sound quality assessment. For this reason, they should be used as indicators as their name suggests. However, Government and fund providers have found them to be a useful tool to influence behavior in line with policy direction. For example, Barnetson and Cutright(2000) found that performance indicators influence academic thinking by creating normative assumptions. The problem is that they need reliable data to operate appropriately, and so in the Ethiopian context they have some of the drawbacks to benchmarking.

Quality Audit

Quality audit is another approach to quality processes that has become more popular in the UK in recently; for instance the QAA institutional audit now largely replaces subject review. It may provide a useful starting point for an Ethiopian system. Audit depends upon the institution having developed its own quality processes that can be tested by audit trails to determine their robustness. This implies the QRAA should give HEIs early indications of the minimum quality assurance systems and processes that they would expect to find. Audit is directed at external accountability purposes and any enhancement is a by- product, not a central feature. When compared with more direct scrutiny of the processes and products of higher education, it has the advantage of creating a relatively light accountability burden. This has led some researchers such as Brown (2001) to advocate audit as the answer to quality assessment of all higher education processes.

Ethiopia may need to develop a system of institutional audit to support accreditation and to ensure quality and relevance at subject level. If so, it is recommended that such systems are based on peer review against institutional and departmental objectives and outcomes, rather than 'inspection' against an externally imposed standard (see below).

Eternal Assessment

The QRAA may wish to encourage an extension of the variety of external involvement within HEIs' internal quality processes that presently exists in isolated patches within Ethiopia's universities. Institutions might be expected to introduce an external examination system, external membership on program review and validation panels and external membership of institutional quality committees.

Ethiopia will need to consider whether to introduce more formal systems of external assessments. For example, HEIs may also be subject to a Research Assessment Exercise, accreditation visits and /or subject review involving visits to subject department by panels of external experts. Various researchers, such as Knight and Trowler(2000) have found evidence that external assessment brings pressure that can result in an erosion of trust

within HEIs as the institution becomes more 'managerial' and paperwork and other bureaucracy increases without commensurate educational benefits. On the other hand, where such assessments have been introduced, there has been a steady improvement in the resulting scores, observed quality processes and in measure such as student retention and graduation.

It is important to carefully consider the costs as well as the benefits of any system of external assessment. Even in Northern contexts they are not unproblematic. For example PA consulting (2002) has pointed to the high accountability burden and the associated costs carried by higher education institutions in the UK. Jackson (1998) has argued that what is needed instead is a partnership of trust between higher education and its stakeholders. Berhan and Shah (2000) have noted inequalities in power distort the balance between national, institutional and individual responsibility for quality systems and the values that they embody. If such systems are introduced to Ethiopia, it is important that:

- They are seen as partnership with the sector;
- Academics and academic managers design the criteria;
- Institutions have freedom to demonstrate different but effective ways of assuring their own quality (rather than the QRAA determining a one-size-fits-all model);
- Ethiopian academics review Ethiopian subject departments or institutions;
- Assessments start with the department's or institution's own self evaluation.

The author contends that 'inspection' systems should be avoided at all costs. An inspection system implies outsiders (for example, Ministry officials) visit a department or institution; look for particular procedures, practices and/or systems; and penalizing institutions that do not exhibit them, even where their own systems provide sufficient quality information. 'Inspection' would erode the main purposes of universities as outlined in the first section of this paper. It implies that the 'Center' is only source of knowledge about good practice, and so it prevents new approaches being developed locally and inhibits creativity. UK universities experienced OFSTED inspection of

teacher education within universities by people who were not teacher educators and who used a set of imposed criteria unrelated to departmental mission. It was found that it encouraged conformity, discouraged risk taking and initiative and damaged academic autonomy. The result was that new knowledge and practices were not developed and a technocratic model of learning was not challenged (Ashcroft, 1998).

Conclusion

Ethiopian higher education does not yet have the quality assurance systems that would stand up to international scrutiny nor that could assure its stakeholders that the education provided is relevant and appropriate. Universities have no mechanisms to assure themselves or their Boards in a systematic way that their students, teaching, learning and assessment processes, or facilitates meet institutional, national or international standards. Curriculum development, validation and review processes exist but are not generally standardized at institutional level. There is no systematic process of externality in the assessment of quality, relevance or standards. It will be noted that the lack here is of systems not practices. In each of these cases, institutions or subject departments in Ethiopia have established good practice that would stand up to international scrutiny. The challenge is to develop this practice in to a system wide set of expectations that are monitored and evaluated. Unless this happens, it may be the case that quality exists (and in this context, quality includes relevance), but it cannot be assured.

Institutions will be need to grasp the new autonomy that they have been granted: it means that they should now be responsible for assuring themselves and others of the quality, relevance and standards of their students' achievements, the curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment processes, students' facilities for learning and so on. The author does not recommend that the QRAA takes over this responsibility and indeed the institutions should resist such a move as inimical to the central purposes of higher education. This implies that the universities themselves will become proactive in the development of criteria, expectation, processes and practice in relation to quality and standards and that the QRAA audits their actions and policies to ensure they are adequate. Unless universities grasp this opportunity, other stakeholders may determine

the quality agenda. After all, Government, students, employers and other stakeholders have the right to be assured that their investment in higher education is yielding the benefits they expect.

The Model we are suggesting allows Ethiopia's higher education institutions to develop their own systems of quality and standards assurance. It also implies that the QRAA respects institutional autonomy and diversity, restrict itself to the assessment of the adequacy of the processes institutions develop for themselves, and advises on good practice, rather than determining what those processes should be. For this to happen, QRAA must allow the institutions time and provide them with guidance and a forum for discussion. The author suggests that the QRAA should act in the first instance as a facilitator that provides the context for institutions to share practice amongst themselves, learn about international practice and expectation and together decide on the model for the assurance of quality and standard applicable to the Ethiopian context.

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