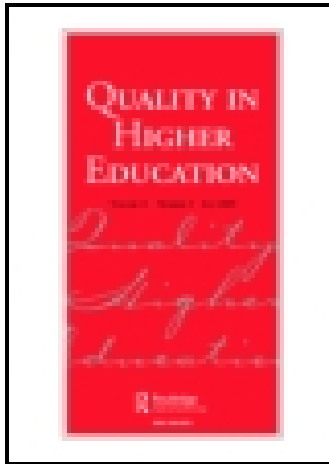


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Editorial

James Williams

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Editorial

The Bologna Process is now 10 years old. Bologna has always been controversial and remains so but with time it has arguably become fully established as the main driver of a pan-European higher education 'system' (Neave & Amaral, 2008). Its impact on quality is equally controversial, as can be seen from two of the papers included in this issue of *Quality in Higher Education*. In the first, Timo Ala-Vähälä and Taina Saarinen chronicle the development of the role played by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in European quality assurance. The article discusses the changes in the role of ENQA in the implementation of the Bologna Process and describes how it has become a central tool in the European Union's policy of supporting co-operation and transparency across Europe. However, the authors argue that ENQA has in fact reached the limit of its power. In the second article, Foteini Asderaki argues that the Bologna process has been vital in encouraging the rather late development of an effective quality culture in European countries of the Mediterranean. In her article, Asderaki discusses the impact of a recent stocktaking exercise in developing a quality culture in Greece. The article argues that quality has become accepted in Greece partly because it has been developed within the European framework, despite popular 'demonisation' of the Bologna Process.

In the Greek case, a supra-national process has had a clear influence in developing notions and processes of quality at a national level. Trans-national influences are also very powerful in helping to develop national quality processes. Kim Nguyen, Diane Oliver and Lynn Priddy analyse the development of accreditation standards and processes in Vietnam and offer recommendations for the further progress of Vietnam's accreditation model. The authors argue that although higher education in Vietnam has borrowed much from Western models, it is vital for it to adapt to local needs and experiences. Consequently, there is a continual need for explorations of the needs and experiences of stakeholders within their own contexts. Benon Basheka explores the impact of imported quality processes in Ugandan higher education. Basheka argues that the key to improving quality is to improve academic freedom. Melpo Iacovidou, Paul Gibbs and Anastasios Zopiatis attempt to define and assess quality in a Cypriot university using dimensions of quality as identified by students and teachers. The article identifies a stakeholder-defined conceptual framework of quality dimensions and differences in student and teaching staff perceptions of what is important in a quality higher education provision. The authors argue that students consider the course of study and teaching and learning as the most important dimensions whereas teaching staff consider student support services, teaching and learning facilities and examination and assessment as the most important.

In a separate article, Paul Gibbs argues that good quality is subsumed into the practices of skilful participants and that institutions should act upon their consciences. This is particularly important in the complex blending of the workplace and the academy, where 'codified quality' may disrupt learning rather than support a flourishing environment for all stakeholders. Gibbs argues, following Heidegger's notion of referential totalities, that what should be sought is concealment of quality and for its discovery only in times of genuine

concern. Ultimately, he argues, the expertise of those involved should be given greater weight than the precepts of control activities.

One of the issues confronting commentators on quality in higher education is student retention (Yorke & Longden, 2004). Elisabeth Hovdhaugen and Per Olaf Aamodt analyse the reasons why students leave higher education in a Norwegian setting and the impact of the institutions themselves on preventing students' decisions to leave. They argue that the institutions' influence is limited but that the learning environment is influential in the decision to leave. Therefore, improving the learning environment through closer contact between students and teachers will probably also enhance retention.

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