

# Dimensions of Quality

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# Context

- Market demands for information about quality for ‘consumers’ – OFT and Which?
- Universities and Colleges need to know what is worth paying attention to
- For both you need valid evidence about what predicts how much students learn
- ‘Dimensions of Quality’

If you study a BSc (Pork Products) at the University of Poppleton, you will experience:

*...lecture classes of 900*

*...taught by Professors you will only see from 30m away*

*...seminar classes of 40*

*...taught by part time teachers who do not have an office and who do not mark your work*

*...computer based assessment*

*...fellow students you don't know, never talk to, and who disappear at the end of the lectures*

**NONE** of these variables in NSS, KIS or Which? rankings  
**ALL** are valid indicators of poor quality

If you study Sports Science at Hamble University you will experience:

- *small classes, with other students you will get to know*
- *...taught by teachers you will get to know*
- *...who will give you copious written and oral feedback on your assignments*
- *... which will often involve working with other students, and which will mainly be for learning, not for marks*
- *...in a well equipped 'learning resource centre'*
- *...on a small friendly campus*
- *...where students without top A-levels are well supported through to graduation.*

**NONE** of these variables feature in NSS KIS or 'Which?'  
**ALL** are valid indicators of good quality

# Variation in quantity of provision between degree programmes

- The number of hours students need to study 2
- Proportion of class contact taught by full time academics 2
- Proportion of student time in classes over 100 2
- Quantity of written feedback students receive 7
- Funding on library and learning resources per student 10
- Quantity of face to face discussion of assignments 200
- Quantity of 'formative only' assignments  $\infty$

# NSS scores not following the 'three Rs': reputation, resources and research

## Law degree programme

NSS Question	Before	After	Increase
Clear criteria	37%	96%	<b>59%</b>
Fair assessment	50%	87%	<b>37%</b>
Prompt feedback	73%	96%	<b>23%</b>
Comments detailed	56%	79%	<b>23%</b>
Feedback helped	42%	79%	<b>37%</b>
Overall Satisfaction	48%	96%	<b>37%</b>

# TESTA Diseases, diagnoses and cures

- 1 Too much summative assessment, too little formative assessment
- 2 Too wide a variety of types of assessment
- 3 Insufficient formal requirements: lack of time on task
- 4 Inconsistent marking standards
- 5 A compartmentalised focus on individual course units at the expense of programme coherence
- 6 Poor feedback: too little and too slow
- 7 Lack of oral feedback and discussion of assessment and the negotiation of meaning of goals and standards
- 8 Orientation of student effort towards reproducing course content in assignments or exams

# Problems with PIs

- Motorcycle crash
- Class contact hours
- Time on task
- David Willetts' visit

# Problems with PIs

- Motorcycle crash
- Class contact hours
- Time on task
- Invalid PIs can drive quality down
- Responding to students' demands can make things worse

# What variables tell us most about quality?

- 'Presage' variables e.g. funding
- 'Process' variables e.g. class size
- 'Product' variables e.g. degree classifications

# 'Presage' variables

- Resources per student predict much less than one might expect
- Selectivity predicts performance, but not learning gains, engagement, or use of effective pedagogies
- Research predicts performance, but not engagement, and negatively predicts satisfaction & measures of learning gains: linking R&T is a process issue
- Who does the teaching predicts performance and gains
- Reputation predicts only selectivity, funding & research
- Peer ratings reflect reputation (US and TQA)

# ‘Process’ variables

- Cohort size, class size, ‘close contact’ with teachers (SSRs) (cohort effects avoidable...)
- Not class contact hours but total study hours
- Quality of teaching: training, student ratings, but not teachers’ research or PhDs
- Quality of research environment: not at u/g level
- Level of intellectual challenge/high and clear expectations, good quick feedback, active and collaborative learning, time on task

Consequence for learning:

- ‘Engagement’ – deep approach

# 'Product' variables

- Degree classifications
- Retention
- Employability

... too many confounding variables to be able to make much sense of 'product' data, and degree classifications and employability data are highly unreliable

# What to change

- Changing students: effort, internalisation of goals and standards, meta cognitive awareness, self-efficacy
- Changing teachers: who, and how sophisticated
- Moving from solitary to social learning
- Focussing course design, review and evaluation around learning hours rather than teaching hours
- Shift from summative to formative assessment
- Making programmes coherent, with comprehensive changes implemented by course teams, not only by individuals

# How to change

- Departments and social mediation of quality
- Student engagement

# Departments and social mediation of quality

- Programmes vary widely in quality within institutions (except where ‘institutional pedagogy’) – so QA weak
  - Difficult to improve where QE focus on teachers, units or the whole institution
  - ‘Communities of practice’ (Havnes)
  - Talking about teaching *at programme level* (TESTA)
  - Employment practices cut across communities (adjunct faculty, pseudo departments, Fordism)
  - Modular structures, no assessment (or even shared understanding) of programme outcomes
- ...implies increased developmental focus on depts. or course teams** (Lund, Oslo, Finland, Utrecht...)

# Nine types of student engagement...

1. ... academic and social integration
2. ... with studying in a way that affects learning gains
3. ...as a PI
4. ...with extra-curricula activities and with the institution
5. ... in academic democracy and the academic community
6. ... with quality assurance
7. ... with educational development and quality enhancement
8. ... with teaching roles and functions
9. ... with research

# Prediction

- .....the higher education hierarchy will be increasingly disrupted by the use of more valid teaching quality process indicators
- ....and by institutional enhancement strategies that work to very varying extents
- ....so that 'presage' variables hold less sway over reputation and student recruitment.