

VALUING LEARNING AND QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: CONSIDERATIONS OF AN APPROPRIATE ASSURANCE MODEL

Authors:

*Michael Burgess, Ph.D., Deidre Giblin, Ph.D. and
Giang Hoang, MBA*

ABSTRACT

The Higher Education sector currently faces a need, in some sectors/disciplines, to direct its actions toward a Quality Assurance (QA) Model that might be better informed and understood in industrial terms. However, there needs to be recognition that Higher Education is a specific environment that has its own competition, influences and trends.

Educational organisations, such as universities and other education providers, are having to adopt generally accepted QA criteria to improve their operations to ensure they are better understood when subject to external scrutiny and validation. However, in a complex environment such as Higher Education, can QA be ultimately reduced to a formula, statistical interpretation and imposed agendas to achieve necessary outcomes? The effectiveness of organisational controls will be dependent on the ability of management to balance the available mechanics (e.g. competencies by way of behaviour and control mechanisms) while allowing for flexibility in areas where discretion is needed to achieve a quality outcome.

The key question to be asked is ... Can traditional QA Models (generally having an industrial origin) be applied in an educational setting? As a complex and continually evolving network of interaction between stakeholders, consumers and industry, the education environment holistically relies on an inter-disciplined skilled workforce. It seeks to guide cohorts towards academic excellence, relying on traditions and values, while developing a skilled workforce for the future. Consideration of an appropriate model of QA in an educational setting may require a re-think. Perhaps an industry model that incorporates the relationship between organisational culture, structure and systems and management practices (behavioural determinants) coupled with obligation Vs. voluntary initiative might a better formula. Seeking to create quality improvement as an outcome, an appropriate model will need to find traction between both academic and business practice, while ensuring an appropriate balance.

Key words: *education objectives; accreditation; leadership; quality; communication; practice; strategy*