Quality Assurance of Online Learning: Setting the scene – global and local

Gregor Kennedy
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What is/are the Quality Assurance Issue(s)?

What is Quality?

For Whom?

What is the “right” framework or approach?
Hands up … if you think online learning in post-secondary education has grown in the last 10 years?
Students Taking Distance Courses by Level - 2012-2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Graduate</th>
<th>Undergraduate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>865,912</td>
<td>4,559,494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>905,274</td>
<td>4,706,277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>961,741</td>
<td>4,833,989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>1,022,993</td>
<td>4,999,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1,105,124</td>
<td>5,253,997</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Concentration of Distance Enrollments Among the Top 5 Percent of Institutions

45% enrolments are in 5% of institutions
(I expect) You were right!

But also …

- More undergraduate than graduate
- Relatively institutionally circumscribed
- Market share being lost by private-for-profits
- Distance is becoming (somewhat) mainstream

Is Australia the same?
Part of the issue is that, in the context of more institutions, teachers and students “going online” – whether fully, partially – there is perhaps less clarity about what constitutes “high quality” online education.

While we are comfortable we “know quality” when it comes to “traditional” forms of education and modes of delivery, “we” are unsettled by this when it comes to online.
Quality models in online and open education around the globe: State of the art and recommendations

Authors: Ebba Ossiannilsson, Keith Williams, Anthony F. Camilleri, and Mark Brown, coordinated by EADTU

May 2015

GRADE INCREASE
Tracking Distance Education in the United States

Julia E. Seaman, J. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman
A desktop study of the world …

“… establish an overview and analysis of the global situation with regard to existing relevant standards and guidelines for open, distance, flexible and online education including e-learning …” [p.6]
There are a lot of frameworks

You don't have to reinvent the wheel.
There are a lot of frameworks
Quality Dimensions … “elusive and complex”

- Executive commitment
- Technology infrastructure
- Students services
- Instructional design and course development
- Instruction and instructor services
- Financial health
- Program delivery
- Legal and regulatory requirements
- Program evaluation

(Frydenberg 2002; Ossiannilsson, 2012)
Quality Dimensions … “elusive and complex”

- Services
  - Staff support
  - Student support

- Products
  - Curriculum design
  - Course design
  - Course delivery

- Management
  - Strategic planning and development

(Ossiannilsson, 2012)
Quality Dimensions … “elusive and complex”

- Students
- Staff
- Management
- Government
- Society
Level of Analysis
Unbundling & Disaggregation

What does quality assurance look like when different players do different parts?
Unbundling & Disaggregation
Face-to-face setting the quality standard for online

Because we know what quality face-to-face looks like …
Accreditation or Enhancement

What is the purpose of the Quality Assurance System?

**Accreditation**

A mandatory accreditation process that determines an institution’s capacity to meet national standards.

**Enhancement**

A review to evaluate current performance against broadly interpreted standards to benchmark, spot gaps, and improve institutional performance and culture.
Core Characteristics of Quality Systems

- **Multifaceted:** many measures of quality are used
- **Dynamic:** flexible and not constrained by tech du jour
- **Mainstreamed:** aim at trickle down improvements
- **Representative:** seek to address multiple stakeholders
- **Multifunctional:** 3 functions – quality culture, roadmap for future improvement, quality marker for external view
Recommendations .... 4 of 11

R1. Mainstream e-learning quality into traditional institutional quality assurance.


R4. Communicate and promote general principles.

R6. Address unbundling and the emergence of non-traditional educational providers.
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Why Are We here?

Why do you suppose we're here?
Because we walked here.
No, no... I mean here on Earth.
Because Earth can support life.
No, I mean why are we anywhere? Why do we exist?
Because we were born.
Forget it!
“In an increasingly complex and changing environment for transnational education provision all legitimate stakeholders have a responsibility to work collaboratively to protect students from degree mills and bogus accreditation and credential systems”

[ICDE p. 36]
“In several countries, there is evidence of Quality Assurance Agencies seeking to add guidance and informal standards relating to distance and online education to their existing systems of institutional quality assurance”

[ICDE p. 40]
Is This Why We Are Here?

Thinking about higher education institutions and study areas? Wish you could ask someone about their experience?

With QILT, you can do side by side comparisons of the quality of the higher education institutions and the study areas that you’re interested in.

You can trust QILT results, because they are based on thousands of surveys completed by students across Australia. The results are up to date, because the surveys are completed every year.

Where does this data come from?

- Student Experience
- Graduate Employment
- Graduate Satisfaction
- Employer Satisfaction
Concerns about online attrition?
Questions

What is/are the Quality Assurance Issue(s)

What is Quality?

For Whom?

What is the “right” framework or approach?
1. We have a surfeit of frameworks and criteria to choose from – with some excellent local examples – the adoption of which needs to be localised and contextualised.

2. There are a number of key considerations in this:
   • Macro – Meso – Micro
   • Unbundling and disaggregation
   • Historical hegemony of face-to-face mode of delivery
   • Questions of institutional accreditation or cultural change
But our response to what we might do –
individually, institutionally, “sectorially”, collectively
– will depend on our response to the
“why are we here” question,
as much as to our reactions and responses to
the various frameworks and key considerations
I have outlined today.
Thank you ...